

Top Ten (Plus) Suggestions for Parents

1. Remember being a child. Remember how things looked and felt. Remember what was important. What do you appreciate now looking back? Use your positive and negative experiences as a guide.
2. Keep in mind the values of warmth and encouragement.
3. Believe it is all right for a child to have two different parents.
4. Believe in the adaptability of children.
5. Remember that conflict between parents hurts children.
6. Remember that children learn more (and judge more) based on parents' behavior than on their statements.
7. Wish the other parent well in life.
8. When a child's report seems odd or extreme, give the other parent the benefit of the doubt—and check it out directly.
9. Work on your own happiness and contentment.
10. Be involved at the child's school and with the child's counselor.
11. Be skeptical about attributing a child's attitude to the other parent's influence.
12. Do not depend on the other parent to give you information about the child.
13. Freely give the other parent information about the child.
14. Remember the importance of being civil together with the other parent in the child's presence. Do not avoid being with the other parent.
15. Do not get caught up in trying to compensate for your "failure" to keep the family together.
16. Talk to parents in well-adjusted divorced families.
17. Try not to communicate through the children.
18. Be realistic about the Court option.
 - A. Court is conflict (adversarial), and conflict is inherently harmful.
 - B. The parent must decide whether the damage possibly done by the other parent's behavior is more harmful than engaging in more conflict in Court.
 - C. The children will know conflict is happening.
 - D. The Judge will not be able to absorb much information.
 - E. Courts generally support the status quo if the children seem to be doing well.
 - F. Courts generally do not consider non-parenting information relevant to custody (finances, religion, occupation, hobbies, lawful sexual behavior, past transgressions, historical mental health issues, hurtful interspouse behaviors).
 - G. The Court option focuses on basic fairness of process; healthy families focus on principles that go (rightly) beyond fairness and equalness – sacrifice, trust, yielding, kindness, charity, individual uniqueness, problem-solving, etc. The differences between these processes create very different parenting environments for children. Fairness is necessary but not enough – children deserve more.
 - H. Couples who craft their own arrangements are known to be happier and more likely to adjust the arrangement appropriately when necessary.
 - I. Courts try to consider the children's best interests; but often those engaged in the courtroom are the parents and their attorneys.
 - J. Children need both their parents unscathed, unresentful, and fully focused on the process of parenting.