

## **When Your Ex Parents Differently**

### **ASK FOR THE OTHER ADULT'S COOPERATION**

The first thing you should do if your children go to another parent's home part-time is to ask that other parent for his or her cooperation in establishing similar rules to yours. The fact is that if a child consistently sees familiar rules and boundaries in multiple environments, they are more likely to become more cooperative, more often. In some family situations, that "other parent" may be a grandparent or an after-school caregiver and the same applies; ask them to join you in using similar discipline, rules, and parenting practices. But there is a risk that the other caregiver may not choose to support you in this manner, especially if your relationship with him or her is not healthy. If this is the case and their "parenting" is not posing a danger to your child, there may not be anything you can do about their poor choices while your child is in their care.

### **ESTABLISH FIRM RULES AND BOUNDARIES**

We cannot control what someone else does in their environment but we do have the power to control our own. That means taking the time and making the effort to set up firm and clear boundaries with our children and doing it without anger or emotion. This is where frequent family meetings come in to play. I suggest that parents take time to think of all the important boundaries they want to have for their children and then establish a set of rules that should be addressed in a meeting. If any of the parent's rules include devices that must remain in the home, such as handheld video games and cell phones, the parent may have to verify that those items are not leaving the house with the child. Likewise, the parent may have to verify that unacceptable items, such as video games and cell phones, are not coming into the house when the child returns. I frequently hear from parents who do not allow their child to have a cell phone, that the other parent provides one for the child against the other parent's wishes. Remember that you have the right to keep your child safe from things that may endanger him and have the right to take that item away.

### **YOUR BEHAVIOR WILL HELP YOUR CHILD ADAPT**

One of the characteristics of society that creates a challenge for parents today is that discipline and parenting are done differently in different households or environments. When we were children, adults seemed to treat us the same. This motivated us to comply and cooperate with little resistance. Parenting is different today and children use the differences in the treatment they get from their caregivers to their advantage. This means that your child will most likely challenge you when he returns to your home of rules and boundaries, after spending a weekend at the other parent's house with unlimited television, video games or his favorite junk foods. Your behavior during the transition period of your child returning to your home is crucial to the child adapting successfully back into your home structure. Know that he or she will attempt to get you to change your boundaries to match the ones in the other home.

### **DO NOT GET ANGRY**

I know, easier said than done, right? Especially so when your child is getting angry and throwing the insults because you run a tighter ship than the other parent. But I encourage you to not lose sight of the fact that it isn't the child's fault. If you examine why you may be getting angry, it might help you calm down. One reason is because your parents would never have allowed you to speak up and act out the way you're allowing your child to speak up. Another reason is that it hurts so much when you hear your child defend the other parent when that adult may have behaved badly toward you in the previous relationship. A third may be that you are feeling resentful for all the things you've done for your child and here he or she is, throwing insults at you. One more might be that fear is rising up inside of

you, making you fearful of one day hearing the words from your child, "I want to go live with Dad (or Mom) because it's more fun at their house; or worse, "They love me more!"

#### REMAIN STEADFAST IN YOUR PARENTING

You may find yourself quick to loosen up your discipline at home, hoping to ease the stress associated when your child returns from the other parents home. Don't do it! If your child makes statements that the other parent lets her do the things you won't, just agree with her by saying, "I know he (she) does." Reinforce your agreement with something like, "But in this house we do it differently," and then just walk away. Your child may attempt to argue with you to get you to change your boundaries. And one very important point; avoid criticizing what the other parent or caregiver is doing in their home. Say nothing about what appears to be going on because doing so will only provide more ammunition for your child to dislike you and want to fight more.

#### THE CHILD WILL ADAPT

It is a fact that you may have to re-establish rules with a child whenever he comes back to you from a different home where things aren't being done as you would want them done. If the child throws a fit because he isn't adapting to your house rules every time he comes back to you, relax and let him have the meltdown. Believe it or not, children crave "sameness" and routine. When routine is changed frequently from household to household, they don't like it and it can trigger anger and tantrums. Be patient with your child and take comfort in knowing that what you are doing is right. Your peacefulness, calmness, and consistency will help him adapt gradually.

*Bill Corbett is the author of the award winning book series, "Love, Limits, & Lessons: A Parent's Guide to Raising Cooperative Kids" in English and in Spanish, and the founder and president of Cooperative Kids. He has three grown children, three step children, two grandchildren, and lives with his wife Elizabeth and stepdaughter Olivia near Hartford, CT. You can visit his Web site [www.CooperativeKids.com](http://www.CooperativeKids.com) for further information and parenting advice.*