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How My Ex and I Show Our Kids What Healthy Co-Parenting Looks Like

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We weren't able to show them what a healthy marriage looked like, but we're doing great at this co-parenting thing.



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When my children were 9 and 11, they received the news that no child wants to hear: Mom and dad were getting divorced.

I won't sugar coat it. The conversation was brutal. They cried, asked why, and begged for us to reconsider. They were devastated. I was devastated. We were all devastated.

Three years later, my children are thriving -- due in large part to the solid relationship their father and I have been able to establish and maintain.

Anyone who's divorced will agree, that kind of undertaking is not easy. The marriage ended for a reason. If you were able to communicate and get along so well, you'd probably still be married. The trick is finding a way to let go of the baggage of the past to arrive at a place of civility with your former spouse for the sake of the children.

It took me some time to get here. The early days of the separation were filled with anger, blame, and resentment. Even the simplest conversations were difficult and felt forced. But eventually I accepted it for what it was -- and more importantly, I forgave.

I forgave my ex-husband for the role he played in ending our marriage. It wasn't easy to do, but I was already in so much pain that anger and hatred would surely do me in. Forgiveness was my only path forward.

Then, something interesting happened. When I removed blame from the situation, I was able to see that I, too, played a role in the demise of our marriage. Forgiveness and accountability opened my eyes and set the stage for healing. Without the red-hot inflammation of that emotional anchor weighing me down, I felt at peace.

My stance began to soften, and my demeanor toward him took on a more cordial tone. With that, his demeanor toward me also took on a more cordial tone. What could have been a firing zone of verbal assaults instead became place of calm and civility.

When we were in the same room together, we were able to say more than just a simple, "hi" and "goodbye." Conversations were becoming peppered with pleasantries and small talk.

For our children, who were dealing with their own feelings of hurt and betrayal, this was one less burden they'd have to shoulder. They were able to see that although their father and I weren't together anymore, we didn't "hate" each other, and they wouldn't be forced to take sides.

The civility has now given way to friendly, even light-hearted conversations. After all the ugliness had passed, I was able see this man as friend, not foe. Our children know we won't be getting back together, but we've been friends for years and have two great kids together, so it's easy to like one another.

I witnessed the change in my children. The fear I had initially seen in them started to ease. It was almost as if they realized this wouldn't be as bad as they'd envisioned after all. The synergy we had developed as co-parents created an environment of safety for our children. At some point along the way, my ex and I both realized (although it was never said out loud) that working together, getting along, and communicating openly and regularly had a profoundly positive impact on the two people we loved most in this world.

My ex-husband and I now have a very healthy relationship. It's not the type of relationship I envisioned it would be when I walked down the aisle, but I'm grateful for what we have despite the unexpected turn our marriage took. We were unable to show our kids what a healthy marriage looked like -- but today we are able to be role models for a healthy co-parenting relationship. We have set the example for them that despite disagreements and past hurts, we can find common ground and treat each other with kindness and respect.

Divorce isn't easy, particularly when children are involved, but there are ways to soften the blow. Our children have adjusted beautifully -- and I credit this success to the co-parenting relationship they've witnessed in their parents.

We comfortably sit together at baseball and basketball games, we celebrate birthdays and holidays together, and we willingly consult each other on key decisions.

Sure, we have disagreements. I'm not trying to paint a rosy picture of divorce perfection. But we have become skilled at managing those disagreements in a way that serves a greater purpose: the two amazing people we made together.

On the day my divorce became final, the judge left us with these parting words: "Divorce is the end of a marriage, but it's not the end of a family."

My children know this to be true in their lives. They're seeing that although circumstances were difficult and the situation was not ideal, their father and I were able to forge a healthy relationship. That is a silver lining I'll gladly take.

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