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Healthy Communication Practices for Separating & Separated Parents

It is strongly recommended that parents review and observe the following practices for facilitating healthy, respectful, effective communication during their separation/divorce process and thereafter:

1. ***Primary Means of Communication.*** The primary means of communication between the parents on parenting issues should be via e-mail, US mail or through their attorneys. Unless the parents have had a mutually successful history of texting and telephone communication, these means are discouraged except for emergency or urgent matters, as they do not afford the recipient the same opportunity to understand and explore the issues, develop and evaluate alternative solutions or give fair consideration to the requests being made or the primary needs of the child. Children's issues should NOT, under any circumstances, be discussed in the presence of the child.
2. ***Respond to Requests.*** E-mails should be responded to within 48 hours, unless there is a *bona fide* emergency in which case information should be relayed sooner via text or telephone and not e-mail. In responding to an e-mail request, either parent may suggest that the request be deferred for discussion until the next parenting or mediation session, or that the parents utilize the Dispute Resolution clause of the Parenting Plan, if any, as may then be in effect.
3. ***Always Be Respectful.*** The parents should always use a respectful tone in their communication with the other in whatever means they utilize. They should limit the content of their communications to actual, ***present*** issues pertaining to the child only; and all communications relating to the child should occur be outside the presence of the child, the child's siblings, friends or neighbors.
4. ***Share Current Contact Information.*** The parents should exchange and immediately update their contact information for each other (residence address, home and cell phone numbers, and a personal email address, which is checked at least daily).
5. ***Parents Need to Be Careful Base Their Actions and Responses on Facts, Not Assumptions or Rumors.*** Neither parent should assume or act upon assumptions drawn from incomplete communications, rumors or even (especially!) statements of the children. Rather, a parent should seek further information, clarification and confirmation; and then direct their concerns to the appropriate person or forum. Inappropriate or inaccurate communications of the other parent should be documented and retained.
6. ***Recognize the Integrity and Autonomy of the Others.*** Parents should always, (particularly during negotiating or mediation sessions), recognize that each person present may have a different

agenda, perspective, and concerns to be addressed. Neither is likely to see the same events in just the same way. Meetings together should include time for each person to fully address each of their own concerns. Others involved should cooperate in responding to the agenda concerns of all persons, to ensure that all of these are heard, understood, acknowledged and dealt with.

7. ***Suggestions for Communication & Conduct When Specifically Resolving Issues or Conflicts.***

- a. Address the problem and concerns at hand; do not attack each other or dredge up history.
- b. Avoid being positional. Instead, work to identify and communicate one's needs, interests and the outcomes they would like to attain (giving a sound basis for each).
- c. Focus on and work to achieve what is believed to be the most constructive and acceptable agreement for both sides, and most of all for the entire family: ***especially the children.***
- d. In speaking, be courteous and respectful of and to all persons present.
- e. Address others by their names, avoiding "he" or "she." Speak for yourself only by using positive "I" statements, not accusatory "you" statements.
- f. Do not interrupt when another person is speaking -- know and trust that each person will have a full opportunity to speak on each issue presented for discussion.
- g. Do not use language that blames or finds fault -- avoid inflammatory words and the use of conclusory terms such as "fair" and "unfair." Instead, use words such as "acceptable," "workable," "agreeable," or their converses, "unacceptable, unworkable, not agreeable." These are preferred because they acknowledge that reasonable people may differ in view.
- h. Practice active listening. Listen fully while the other person speaks and avoid planning a reply until the speaker has finished. Try to understand what the other is saying without being judgmental about the person or the message. Ask for more information on any points that aren't completely clear to you. Check out how accurately you understand what the speaker has said by restating your understanding in different words. Remember, you can say, "I understand" without meaning "I agree."
- i. If you have a complaint, raise it as your concern and follow it up with a constructive suggestion as to how it might be resolved.
- j. If something is not working with you, be open and state this to those present.
- k. Talk with your lawyer or another resource about anything you don't understand. Seek as much clarification as you need, to avoid being surprised or having misunderstandings later.

Most of All, Be patient with others and the process –the above practices have proven to work in thousands of other cases. By following them, each person will maintain a high standard for communication and thereby increase the quality and effect of it, and its understanding and acceptance by all others! Hearing > knowledge > understanding > acceptance > resolution > peace.