

DIGITAL GUIDE + PRINTABLE TOOLKIT

Two Homes. One Childhood.

A Co-Parenting Toolkit for Calmer Communication, Smoother Transitions, and Keeping Kids Out of the Middle.

**You don't have
to like your
child's other
parent to raise a
healthy, happy
child together.**

16 READY-TO-USE MESSAGES • CHECKLISTS • 7-DAY RESET

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Start here

Separation changes the family structure, but your child still needs steadiness, love, and permission to care about both parents. This guide will not make every interaction easy. It will help you respond with purpose when emotions are high.

Use this kit in the moment

Open to the page that matches the problem in front of you. Copy a message, complete a checklist, or choose one routine. You do not have to fix everything today.

Aim for workable, not perfect

Two homes do not have to operate identically. Focus on safety, reliable information, and the routines that help your child know what to expect.

Keep the child at the center

Before sending a message or making a decision, ask: Does this protect my child from adult conflict? Does it solve a child-related problem?

Write one change you hope this guide helps you make:

Safety comes first

This guide is not for every situation

Ordinary co-parenting advice may be unsafe when there is domestic violence, coercive control, stalking, threats, child abuse, substance-related danger, or fear about an exchange. In those situations, safety planning and professional support come before cooperation.

Pause and seek support if any of these are true:

- ☐ You or your child feels afraid of the other parent.
- ☐ Contact is being used to threaten, monitor, punish, or control you.
- ☐ A court order, protection order, or safety plan limits communication.
- ☐ You are unsure whether a proposed exchange is safe.
- ☐ Your child reports harm or a serious safety concern.

IF YOU NEED HELP

In the United States, contact the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 800-799-SAFE (7233), text START to 88788, or visit thehotline.org. If someone is in immediate danger, call 911. A local advocate can help you consider safer communication and exchange options.

Choose the approach that fits

The goal is not forced closeness. The goal is a structure that limits conflict and keeps reliable information moving.

COOPERATIVE CO-PARENTING

May fit when:

- Communication is usually respectful.
- Joint decisions can be made without intimidation.
- Flexibility does not create repeated conflict.

Often includes:

- Direct communication
- Shared planning
- Some flexibility
- Similar expectations when useful

PARALLEL PARENTING

May fit when:

- Direct contact often escalates.
- Clear limits reduce conflict.
- Each parent needs greater independence.

Often includes:

- Written logistics
- Fewer exchanges
- Defined response windows
- Separate household decisions unless joint consent is required

MY CURRENT APPROACH

- ☐ Cooperative co-parenting is workable right now.
- ☐ A parallel structure may reduce conflict.
- ☐ I need professional help deciding what is safe and appropriate.

The right structure may change over time. Any court order takes priority over this guide.

Use the CALM message method



Child-focused

Address the child's schedule, health, school, belongings, or needs.



Accurate

Use dates, times, facts, and the exact decision that is needed.



Limited

Keep one topic in one message. Remove old arguments and personal attacks.



Measured

Use a neutral tone. Read it once before sending.

BEFORE

"You never communicate. You always change everything at the last minute."

CALM VERSION

"I received the schedule change for Friday. I can agree to a 6:00 p.m. pickup. Please confirm by Thursday at noon."

Before you press send

For a nonurgent message, pause long enough to check your purpose and tone. A fixed 48-hour wait is not always practical. Choose a cooling-off period that still allows a timely response.

- ☐ Is this message about the child?
- ☐ Did I include the date, time, or decision needed?
- ☐ Can I remove blame, sarcasm, or a character judgment?
- ☐ Am I discussing only one issue?
- ☐ Does the other parent know what response I need?
- ☐ Did I give a reasonable deadline when one is needed?
- ☐ Would I be comfortable with a mediator reading this?
- ☐ Is written contact safe and allowed in my situation?

DRAFT IT HERE FIRST

Schedule and pickup messages

Change the names, dates, and details. Keep the structure brief and factual.

1

CONFIRMING THE SCHEDULE

Use when you want one clear record.

"Confirming that pickup is Friday, September 11 at 5:30 p.m. at the library. Please reply yes or send a correction by Thursday at noon."

2

REQUESTING A CHANGE

Use when you need a schedule adjustment.

"I am requesting a change for Saturday. Could pickup move from 10:00 a.m. to noon? Please let me know by Wednesday at 6:00 p.m. If not, we will keep the current plan."

3

RESPONDING TO LATENESS

Use when the other parent is late.

"Pickup was scheduled for 5:00 p.m. Please send your estimated arrival time. I can wait until 5:30 p.m., then I will follow our usual backup plan."

4

DECLINING A CHANGE

Use when the request does not work.

"I cannot agree to that change. I will follow the current schedule. I am available to discuss a different date next week."

Expenses and belongings

Change the names, dates, and details. Keep the structure brief and factual.

5

SHARING AN EXPENSE

Use for an agreed child-related cost.

"The school fee is \$40 and is due September 15. I attached the receipt. Your agreed share is \$20. Please send it by September 14."

6

QUESTIONING AN EXPENSE

Use when you need information before agreeing.

"I received the request for \$85. Please send the receipt and explain what the expense covers. I will respond after I review it."

7

RETURNING AN ITEM

Use for clothing, equipment, or school materials.

"Jamie needs the blue band folder for school Monday. Please send it at Sunday's exchange."

8

MISSING MEDICATION

Use when an essential item did not arrive.

"The prescribed medication was not in the bag at pickup. Please let me know how it can be delivered today. I will also contact the pharmacy or medical provider if needed."

School and health messages

Change the names, dates, and details. Keep the structure brief and factual.

9

SCHOOL UPDATE

Use to share information without starting an argument.

"The teacher reported that Alex has a reading assessment on Tuesday. The review sheet is attached. Please confirm you received it."

10

MEDICAL APPOINTMENT

Use when sharing appointment information.

"Maya's dental appointment is October 3 at 2:00 p.m. at Northside Dental. Please send any questions you want me to ask by October 1."

11

REQUESTING A DECISION

Use when joint input is required.

"The school needs our decision about the support plan by Friday. Option A is _____. Option B is _____. Please send your choice and reason by Thursday at noon."

12

SHARING A HEALTH CONCERN

Use facts and explain the next action.

"Sam developed a fever of 101.2 at 4:00 p.m. I contacted the pediatrician and am following their instructions. I will update you after the call."

Boundaries and conflict

Change the names, dates, and details. Keep the structure brief and factual.

13

RETURNING TO THE CHILD

Use when the message becomes personal.

"I will respond to messages about the children's schedule, health, school, and activities. I will not discuss our past relationship."

14

ENDING ESCALATION

Use when the exchange is no longer productive.

"This conversation is no longer solving the issue. I am pausing now. I will respond to the scheduling question tomorrow by 10:00 a.m."

15

CHOOSING ONE CHANNEL

Use to reduce scattered communication.

"Please send nonurgent child-related information through email so we both have one record. Use a phone call only for an emergency."

16

HOLDING A BOUNDARY

Use when the same issue is repeated.

"I have answered this question and my response has not changed. I will follow the current plan unless we both agree in writing to a change."

Make transitions predictable

A handoff is a child transition, not a meeting for adults to settle unfinished business. Keep it brief, calm, and predictable whenever safety permits.

1

Prepare

Pack needed items and review the plan before it is time to leave.

2

Signal

Use a familiar phrase such as, 'It is almost time to go to Dad's house.'

3

Transfer

Keep the goodbye warm and brief. Save adult topics for another channel.

4

Settle

Allow quiet time, a snack, movement, or another familiar ritual after arrival.

A child-centered goodbye

"I love you. You are safe. I hope you have a good time. I will see you on Sunday."

Avoid asking your child to report on the other home or carry an adult message during the transition.

Handoff checklist

ESSENTIALS

- ☐ Medication and instructions
- ☐ School materials
- ☐ Comfort item
- ☐ Weather-ready clothing
- ☐ Activity equipment

INFORMATION

- ☐ Pickup time and place
- ☐ Schedule changes
- ☐ Health update
- ☐ School deadline
- ☐ Emergency contact update

CHILD SUPPORT

- ☐ A calm goodbye
- ☐ No adult argument
- ☐ No loyalty questions
- ☐ Time to settle in
- ☐ Permission to enjoy both homes

OUR HANDOFF ROUTINE

Place: _____

Time: _____

Who handles transportation: _____

Child's settling-in ritual: _____

Consistency without sameness

Children can adapt to different household styles. Focus first on areas where coordination protects health, safety, school participation, and emotional security.

ALIGN WHEN POSSIBLE

- Medication and allergies
- Car seats and transportation
- School attendance
- Internet safety
- Emergency contacts
- Court-ordered requirements

DIFFERENCES CAN BE OKAY

- Meal preferences
- Household chores
- Weekend routines
- Clothing choices
- Recreation
- Celebrations

ASK THREE QUESTIONS

- ☐ Is the difference unsafe or simply different?
- ☐ Does it interfere with health, school, or the parenting plan?
- ☐ Would addressing it help the child, or restart an adult power struggle?

One issue we truly need to align on:

Shared health and safety plan

Child's full name and date of birth

Primary doctor and phone

Dentist and phone

Allergies

Medication, dose, and schedule

Insurance information location

School and main contact

Approved emergency contacts

Transportation or car-seat needs

Other safety information

Store sensitive information securely. Share it only with people who need it to care for your child.

Keep children out of the middle

AVOID

"Tell your mom she owes me money."

TRY

"I will contact your mom about the expense."

AVOID

"Ask your dad whether you can stay Friday."

TRY

"I will ask your dad about Friday."

AVOID

"What did your mom do all weekend?"

TRY

"I hope you had a good weekend."

AVOID

"You know why your father left us."

TRY

"The separation is an adult matter. It is not your fault."

Words children may need to hear

- "This is not your fault."
- "You did not cause this, and you cannot fix it."
- "Both of your parents love you."
- "It is okay to love and miss your other parent."
- "You do not have to choose sides."
- "You can ask questions. I may not have every answer yet."
- "Adult problems will be handled by adults."
- "Your routines may change, but you will be cared for."

What does my child seem to need reassurance about right now?

Weekly co-parent plan

Week of: _____

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN

EXCHANGES

SCHOOL AND ACTIVITIES

HEALTH OR MEDICATION

ITEMS MOVING BETWEEN HOMES

ONE DECISION NEEDED THIS WEEK

The seven-day reset

DAY 1

Choose your goal

Write one child-related problem you want to make calmer.

DAY 2

Select your structure

Decide whether cooperative or parallel communication fits right now.

DAY 3

Set one boundary

Choose the channel and response window for nonurgent messages.

DAY 4

Use one script

Send one CALM message about a current issue.

DAY 5

Fix one transition

Create a repeatable handoff or settling-in ritual.

DAY 6

Protect the child

Replace one phrase that could put your child in the middle.

DAY 7

Review

Notice what felt calmer. Keep one practice for next week.

The practice I will continue:

When outside support may help

Consider professional support when conflict stays stuck, your child is struggling, or important decisions cannot be made safely.

Pediatrician or family doctor

For changes in sleep, eating, mood, behavior, or physical symptoms.

Child or family therapist

For emotional support and help adjusting to family changes.

Mediator

For structured help discussing parenting arrangements when mediation is safe and appropriate.

Family-law attorney

For legal rights, court orders, custody, relocation, or enforcement questions.

School counselor

For school changes, peer concerns, attendance, or classroom support.

Domestic violence advocate

For safety planning when there is fear, abuse, stalking, threats, or control.

If you believe a child is being abused or neglected, contact the appropriate child protection agency or emergency service in your area.

References and next steps

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS

How to Support Children After Their Parents Separate or Divorce

[Visit source](#)

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS

Divorce and Separation: How to Help Your Child Adjust

[Visit source](#)

CAFCASS

Communicating With Your Child's Other Parent After Separation

[Visit source](#)

NATIONAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOTLINE

Safety Planning With Children

[Visit source](#)

ABOUT DR. LIBBY

Dr. Libby White is a retired educator and school principal with four decades of experience supporting children, families, and schools. She creates practical resources that help adults approach hard situations with clarity and compassion.

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