

How to Gracefully Attend an Event as Co-Parents

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Divorce or separation is always painful and stressful, but research suggests that children affected by the process can expect significantly better life outcomes if they are co-parented rather than placed in the sole care of one parent.

Co-parenting arrangements should of course cover such essentials as formal custody, schooling and healthcare arrangements. But a child's life will also include a wide variety of events such as parent/teacher meetings, sports matches, family occasions, birthday parties and other social gatherings which one or both parents are traditionally expected to attend.

Like all aspects of separation, arrangements for these kind of events are best discussed and settled by negotiation and, if necessary, mediation, in as amicable a way as possible. Ideally, they should be decided in advance and form part of a comprehensive parenting plan agreed as part of the separation process.

But where this is not possible, or ***when unexpected events crop up, it's important to take such steps as you can to minimize the risk of any conflict which may upset the child or children involved.***

1. Stay Focused on the Needs of Your Child

You can't control the behavior or attitude of your former spouse or partner, but you can control your own. So the most important thing to remember when attending any event as a co-parent, but perhaps particularly if it is one for which you haven't planned, or if you weren't sure whether your co-parent would be attending, is that ***your primary focus should always be on the child.***

While you may quickly forget a school soccer match or choir performance, these events will live long in the mind of your child. So consider how you want them to remember them as adults, and try to cultivate a long-term view.

Although you and your ex are no longer together as a couple, it may be helpful to think of yourselves as now being new partners in the “business” of co-raising your child. **As partners, you’re not in competition, so try to keep emotion out of your discussions, as you would exclude it from a business meeting.** At events such as teacher evenings, in particular, try to avoid blaming the other parent for any problems with academic performance or behavior.

2. At All Costs Avoid Open Conflict

But whatever type of event you’re attending, nothing is more embarrassing and distressing for children than to witness their parents in public conflict with each other. So try to **talk with your ex and agree some ground rules in** advance of the event. **If possible, arrange to sit with your co-parent, as this is great for kids to see** and gives you the chance to applaud your child’s achievements together. But if your relationship is still so turbulent that this is risky, it’s better to sit separately from the beginning, and at a distance which gives your co-parent the space they need to feel comfortable.

If an event is scheduled while you are the designated custody parent, you may have the opportunity to encourage your child to involve the other parent at appropriate times during the occasion. Conversely, if you are attending while your co-parent is “on duty”, it’s best to respect this situation and allow them the lead role.

3. Dealing With the New Partner Issue

All the stresses of attending events as co-parents may of course be significantly exacerbated if one or both of you decide to take along a new partner. In an ideal world you and your ex will have discussed your intentions and/or objections in advance of the event. But if you should find yourself unexpectedly confronted with an unavoidable situation, the key is to revert to the principle of **“child first” and avoid any open conflict.**

However difficult it is, you may have no choice but to try as best you can **to put aside any pain or awkwardness you may feel, and behave with as much politeness and courtesy as you can.** Again, imagining that you and your ex are now simply keeping a business appointment may help take some of the emotion out of the situation.

How Salt Lake City, Utah Wall & Wall Attorneys at Law Can Help

Many couples find that talking with an experienced and impartial third party can be a helpful way of anticipating and resolving many of the co-parenting issues which can arise during the inevitably painful process of divorce or separation.

At Wall & Wall Attorneys at Law, we have more than **190 years' combined experience** of helping people in the Salt Lake City area achieve positive outcomes and minimize conflict. Give us a call at **801-758-8204** to schedule a **free, no-obligation, consultation** with one of our experts