



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Administration for Children and Families  
Office of Family Assistance

# Co-Parenting: Helping Fathers and Mothers Work Together in the Best Interests of Their Children

July 22, 2008

2pm – 3:30pm EST

## **Moderator:**

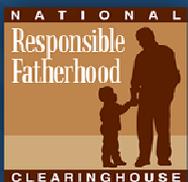
Nigel Vann: NRFC Director of Training & Technical Assistance

## **Presenters:**

Marie Townsend: Georgia Dept. of Human Resources

Sherri Howard: Georgia Dept. of Human Resources

Afra Vance-White: Center for Urban Families





# Co-Parenting 101

**Presented by:  
Afra Vance White  
Center for Urban Families**

# What is Co-Parenting

The concept of co-parenting is based on the premise that mothers and fathers need to work together in the best interest of their children, regardless of their romantic relationship.

# Who is my target audience?

- Never Married Parents
- Newly Married Parents with children from previous relationships
- Fathers/Mothers attempting to connect or re-connect with children
- Fathers/Mothers in need of mediation as it relates to visitation

# Partnerships and Recruitment

- **Street Outreach**
- **Department of Social Services**
- **Head Start Centers**
- **Community and Family Health Centers**
- **Family Court**
- **Child Support Agencies**
- **High Schools (with childcare facilities on sight)**

**The 50-50 Parenting Program and curriculum utilizes a team approach to character and parent education. Fathers and mothers receive support and encouragement to equitably share decision making responsibilities, effectively resolve conflicts and collectively meet the financial and emotional needs of their children and families.**

## The Intake :

Parents are assessed utilizing an open ended questionnaire that includes questions on:

- Family Structure
- Current Relationship Status and Attitudes
- Experiences of Parenting
- Parental Roles
- View/Expectations of Other Parent
- Hopes and Dreams
- Program Information and Expectations

## The Curriculum :

The parenting skill building workshops are facilitated by trained professionals. The cohorts are ten weeks in length and parents meet once a week for two hours.

The ten workshops are comprised of 6 gender specific sessions and 4 joint sessions.

## Topics

1. Introduction to 50/50 Parenting
2. Best interest of our Child
3. Becoming a 50/50 Parent
4. Sharing Dreams for our Child's Future (joint session)

## The Curriculum :

### Topics Continue

- 5.Re-framing/Enhancing your Relationship w/ your Child's Mother/Father
- 6.Communicating as 50/50 Parents (joint session)
- 7.Resolving Conflict in Relationships
- 8.Solving Problems as 50/50 Parents (joint session)
- 9.Keeping Conflict Under Control
- 10.Creating Our Parenting Agreement (joint session)

# Elements of a Parenting Agreement

The development of the parenting plan provides parents the opportunity to work as a collective in addressing and resolving parenting issues. The plan consist of behavior guidelines and agreements that will support parent interaction and dialogue.

Parents make decisions concerning the following:

- physical and legal custody
- weekend and holiday visitation schedule
- child support
- major decisions
- child/parent relocation
- sharing of information
- mutual respect

# The Pros and Cons of Co-Parenting Programs

## Pros

- Co-Parenting curriculums can be used in conjunction with Healthy Relationships and Marriage curriculums.
- Co- Parenting Programs reach a larger audience (i.e. couples, individuals, married, non-married).
- Co-Parenting curriculums support data as it relates to family formation research.

## Cons

- Co-Parenting is not for those who are currently in or experienced domestic violence.
- Father/Mother whereabouts unknown.

# What the Researcher are saying

- A recent study published in the *Journal of Marriage and Family* (Sobolewski & King, 2005) looked at co-parenting relationships between mothers and fathers living apart from their biological children. Using data collected from a national sample of children and custodial mothers, the researchers found that cooperative co-parenting is fairly uncommon: 66% of mothers say that the father has no influence over childrearing and 58% say that they get no help from the father in childrearing.
- Numerous studies have linked coparenting indicators to children's socioemotional and academic adjustment. *Supportive and harmonious* coparenting relationships are tied to preschoolers' social (McHale, Johnson, and Sinclair 1999; McHale, Kuersten, and Lauretti 1996; Schoppe, Mangelsdorf, and Frosch 2001) and academic competence (McHale, Rao, and Krasnow 2000a). Among older children, supportive coparenting has also been linked to well-developed self-regulatory abilities (Abidin and Brunner 1995; Brody, Flor, and Neubaum 1998).

# Questions

If you have questions or would like to know more about the  Program, please contact me at [awhite@cfuf.org](mailto:awhite@cfuf.org)



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# Co-Parenting: Helping Fathers and Mothers Work Together in the Best Interests of Their Children

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A Division of TLC CASA  
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# How to Co-Parent

- ◆ Set up realistic relationship
- ◆ Communicate in a “business – like” manner



# Communication

- ◆ Set up a realistic relationship
- ◆ Define clear boundaries
- ◆ Decide when and how communication will occur
- ◆ Determine best way for joint decisions to be made



# Communicate in a “business –like” manner

- ◆ Listen without interrupting
- ◆ Be polite
- ◆ Set emotions aside and avoid things that “trigger” ex-spouse
- ◆ Don’t “kitchen sink” ... keep it one issue at a time
- ◆ Agree on the right to call a time-out
- ◆ Take responsibility...learn how to apologize



# A Child's viewpoint

- ◆ Grief & Loss:
- ◆ The Facts
- ◆ Children will go through different “stages of grief”
- ◆ Each stage includes different feelings.
- ◆ Children express feelings through their behavior.
- ◆ Parents also go through stages of grief
- ◆ Difficulties can occur when parents and children are at different grief stages



# The Stages

- ◆ Denial
- ◆ Anger
- ◆ Bargaining
- ◆ Depression
- ◆ Acceptance



# Child's Identity

- ◆ “ I Love You”
- ◆ You are still part of a family. This includes relationships with extended family
- ◆ You did not cause the changes
- ◆ You did not cause the non-custodial parent to be “gone” for a while
- ◆ You may a lot of different feelings and I will be here to listen



# Avoid putting child in difficult roles

- ◆ For example...
  - © Messenger
  - © Judge
  - © Reporter
  - © Confidant



# Active Listening

- ◆ Get Ready to Listen
- ◆ Hear
- ◆ Understand
- ◆ Respond



# Helping Children Adjust

- ◆ There are things that both parents can do to make this an easier process for children
- ◆ Keep pick up and drop off time pleasant
- ◆ Consider your child's perspective
- ◆ Communicate about special needs
- ◆ Be courteous and on time
- ◆ Have a routine schedule
- ◆ Both households should be "HOME" for the child



# Discipline

- ◆ Setting Limits
- ◆ Discipline and limit setting differ based on the age of the child
- ◆ How to use “Time – Out”
- ◆ Guidelines for Time-Out



# Recognizing Problems

- ◆ Warnings signs to look for
  - General Guidelines...*
  - Specific Behaviors...*
- ◆ Conclusion



# A Child's Family

- ◆ What is a family?  
*Parents and children answer this question differently.*
- ◆ Children need to know that they are part of a family
- ◆ Ideally, the child's family will consist of two involved parents and extended family



# Stepparents

- ◆ Who should be in charge?
- ◆ Loyalty conflicts
- ◆ Stepparent's role



# Special Considerations

- ◆ Focus on **YOUR** parent/child relationship
- ◆ Accept your child's family
- ◆ Be patient



# Perspective: Future Co-Parenting

- ◆ Co-Parenting is
- ◆ Co-Parenting Might Be...
- ◆ Co-Parenting is NOT



# Co-Parenting Differences

## Custodial

- ◆ 24-hour responsibility
- ◆ Being both nurturer and Disciplinarian
- ◆ No time for self
- ◆ Burnout
- ◆ Resentment over the lifestyle of the other parent
- ◆ Extra effort to help child maintain contact with the other parent is “long distance”
- ◆ Responsibility to inform co-parent of behavior changes and situations that have come up (school, friends, etc.)

## Non-Custodial

- ◆ Having repeated grief reaction when dropping off the child after a “visit”
- ◆ Struggling to find a meaningful role in the child’s life
- ◆ Afraid of not having an impact on the child’s life because of lost contact
- ◆ Reluctance to discipline during the short time with the child
- ◆ Tendency to entertain the child and make visits “fun” so the child will be more willing to come back next time.
- ◆ Thoughts of giving up – “throwing in the towel”
- ◆ Guilt about enjoying life without children



# Co- Parenting Goals

- ◆ Allows children to still have a family
- ◆ Gives children stability when their lives are coming apart
- ◆ Gives children something to count on
- ◆ Models cooperation; parents' ability to function together contributes to children's adjustment.



# A Co- Parenting Metaphor

- ♦ Think of co-parenting in this way...

*You are in a rowboat with your child and the other parent. Suddenly the child falls into the water without a lifejacket on and begins to drown.*

**What do you do?**



# RESOURCES

## **P.A.V.E**

### ***Parental Access & Visitation Education***

**Families First, Inc.**

**1105 West Peachtree Street, N.E.**

**P.O. Box 7848 Station C**

**Atlanta, Georgia 30357-0948**

**404-853-2800**

**[www.familiesfirst.org](http://www.familiesfirst.org)**



# Co-Parenting Resources for Parents and Practitioners

The following books provide information, guidance and supportive ideas for fathers and mothers dealing with co-parenting situations.

- ◆ Steven Ashley. Fathers are Forever: A Co-Parenting Guide for the 21st Century. Santa Clara, CA, Divorced Fathers Network, 2001. ([www.divorcedfathers.com](http://www.divorcedfathers.com))
- ◆ William C. Klatte. Live-Away Dads: Staying a part of your children's lives when they aren't a part of your home. New York, Penguin Books, 1999.
- ◆ Isolina Ricci. Mom's House, Dad's House: A Complete Guide for Parents Who Are Separated, Divorced, or Remarried. New York, Simon and Schuster, 2nd edition, 1997.
- ◆ Karen and Nick Woodall. Putting Children First: A Handbook for Separated Parents, London, UK, Piatkus (ISBN 0-7499-2804-2), 2007.



# ACF Conference for Healthy Marriage and Promoting Responsible Fatherhood Grantees

Monday, August 11, 2008 8:30 AM -  
Wednesday, August 13, 2008 12:00 PM

Marriott Wardman Park  
2660 Woodley Rd., NW, Washington, DC

General questions or concerns:

Michelle Clune of ACF at (202)401-5467; [michelle.clune@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:michelle.clune@acf.hhs.gov)

Hotel reservations or other logistical matters:

Chu Chu Fisseha of the Dixon Group at (202)281-2803;  
[ccfisseha@dixongroup.com](mailto:ccfisseha@dixongroup.com)



Visit us online: [www.fatherhood.gov](http://www.fatherhood.gov)

**If you have questions that were not addressed during this Webinar, please submit them to your Federal Project Officer.**

***Thank you and have a great afternoon!***