



# Building Stepfamilies That Work<sup>®</sup>

## *Tips on Communicating with your Prior Spouse*

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***The high road is always a good choice.***

- Stop calling him/her “the Ex”; and do your best to think only neutral or positive thoughts about him/her.
- The goal is to have a functional relationship – like you have with a 7-11 store clerk – pleasant, effective and direct.
- Being too helpful or too friendly with your prior spouse may engender suspicions of ‘infidelity’ in your current spouse.
- Recognize that if anger and conflict are in abundance, that at least one of you may not have acknowledged the death of the family as you knew it; and that it is easier to be angry than sad.
- Resist trying to be the head of two households.
- Be clear about your willingness to implement sanctions your prior spouse has imposed.
- Recognize that your prior spouse loves your children and they love him/her. Don’t bad mouth him/her because it harms the children—and it will come back to haunt you.
- Supply your Ex with the booklet, ***Because Life Goes On: Helping Children Live With Separation and Divorce*** (available from: <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/mh-sm/divorce/>) and the article, ***Mediating Agreement on Parenting Issues*** by Kathleen O’Connell Corcoran (available at [www.stepfamily.ca](http://www.stepfamily.ca)).
- Recognize that the children may be providing your prior spouse with misinformation in an effort to align with him/her.
- Don’t “put your kids in the middle” of your communication with your prior spouse.
- Encourage your kids to be respectful of the prior spouse’s house rules when they are staying with him/her.
- If (additional) support payments are at issue (say \$50 per month) ask yourself if you would willingly take on feeling as you do 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, 365 days per year for the sum of \$50 per month? If you would decline a job such as that, maybe the additional payment is well worth it.
- Keep the topic of conversation on the business items or the children.
- Don’t feel you must immediately respond to demands by your prior spouse. If you feel pressured say: “If you need to have an answer right now, it will have to be ‘No’; but, if I have some time to think about it, it might be ‘Yes’ ”.

- If you absolutely cannot talk to your ex-spouse, find a neutral third party to exchange information. **Children are not a neutral third party.** Do not relay messages to your prior spouse through your children.
- Use "I" statements, not "you" statements.
- If communication through verbal means is too emotionally charged, try written or electronic communication.
- Keep to commitments about visiting and support payments as closely as possible.
- Share information about your child(ren) with your prior spouse if communication is open, so both of you can appreciate and enjoy their unique characteristics.

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Tips on Communicating with the Prior Spouse.rtf Feb 2008