



UpToParents.org

Your Exercise Responses, Bonita

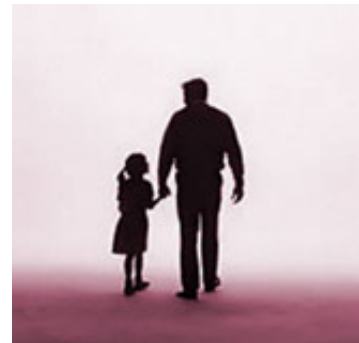
English



EXERCISE A: KODY'S PERSPECTIVE

Even parents who care deeply about their children often can fail to view divorce through the eyes of their children. And, children of divorce rarely give complete accounts of their deepest fears and confusions. Seeing things through their eyes, however, is obviously critical to helping them and the entire family.

I just felt bad all the time. I used to cry a lot, and when I wasn't crying I would feel like crying. . . . [I]t was just a terrible time in my life. My older sister seemed to deal with it better than I did, and my younger sister didn't deal with it at all until just last year, when she started getting stomach aches all the time.
—Meredith, age 14



Don't ask Kody. Instead, spend time seeing things through his eyes, and write what you know from your good heart.

Every time my mother came to fetch me, she and my father would get into some terrible argument, and forget it, goodbye, everyone would just go crazy.
—Jimmy, age 10

1. Describe (1) the three most positive things Kody has seen lately in your interaction with his other parent and (2) how you think you can build on that positive interaction.

The three most reassuring things he has seen or heard in your interaction with his other parent:

1. ***Kody saw his dad and me speak nicely at his last couple of pickups (since his dad did this website work and recommended it to me).***
2. ***David and I took Kody together to the hospital when he was having an asthma attack. That day we were on the same page.***
3. ***I wish I could say more, but things have not been that good until very recently. We have made many mistakes.***

Three specific suggestions for building on your positive interaction for his sake:

1. ***If we could just stay away from difficult topics when Kody is around, it would help. We don't need to be fighting then about money or who was late or what we can't afford. We need to be about Kody.***
2. ***We could ask our parents not to be jumping in to criticize each other.***
3. ***I will stop bringing up the past.***

But the worst thing by far about my parents' divorce is that it's still going on. I mean, my parents don't talk. If they have to talk, it's like screaming. I thought that once the divorce was over, my Mom and Dad could just get on with their lives, but it hasn't worked out that way. I think that the fighting will never stop.
—Tracy, age 16

2. Describe Kody. Write all you wish to about his strengths, interests, and goals, along with anything else you'd like to share. Include any worries and losses in his life as part of your description.

Kody:

Kody is the smartest and sweetest 4-year-old ever. He wants to study to be what he calls a "Doctor Paleontologist." When he talks to his grandpa, he asks him, "Poppy, do you even know what a Doctor Paleontologist is?" Kody loves everyone. He is very sensitive to other people's feelings. When he's seen fights, he cries and begs us to stop. He tells both of us to be happy and nice. In the last year he has lost the chance to be with both parents at the same time, and two of his pets died. He hasn't seen a happy family. He has had to worry too much.

It would be nice if there could be a special house for divorced families. It would be like two houses, side by side, with a place in the middle where the kids could live. Then when parents had arguments, they could each go to their own place and get away from the other and think things out by themselves. That way, they could realize how dumb they were behaving.
—Heather, age 11

3. What have his reactions and problems been from any conflict and tension between you (his parents)--and what changes do you think he would want in the way his parents relate?

Kody's reactions and problems from parent conflict:

Kody cries and yells, "Be nice!" or, "Why won't you be nice?" It breaks my heart--and David's too, I'm sure. Kody is afraid of our anger--you can see it in his face. He cries and runs to his room, then back to see if we have stopped. After fights and sometimes at bedtime, he will try to tell us that the other parent was not being bad, just not listening. It's like he's trying to be the adult and fix us.

Changes you think Kody would like to see in the parents' interaction:

Kody just wants us to be happy and nice and to get along. He even says so. He doesn't want to worry that his parents hate each other and will fight next time we are together.



EXERCISE B: WAYS WE MAKE TIMES TOGETHER AS GOOD AS POSSIBLE

To complete this **Exercise**, we encourage you (if you haven't done so already) to make a copy now of the **Child Safety Zone Pledge**.

- For parents with more than one child, click [HERE](#).
- For parents with a daughter, click [HERE](#).
- For parents with a son, click [HERE](#).

Few things are as important to children of divorce as what they see of their parents' interaction. Again, without faultfinding, describe here what Kody has seen lately when he sees his parents together.

Kody has seen terrible fights in the past. Since David did this website (he did it first) and asked me to do it, we have had two good pickups. It was like a new day for Kody. David and I spoke nicely for just a minute and then said something like, "Well, thanks, have a good day." Afterwards in the car, Kody had tears coming down his cheeks and said, "You and Daddy were talking."

Would it be helpful to think of any times when Kody sees his parents together—as *belonging to him*?

These little scraps of time will say so much to him about how safe his world is.

And given all his other losses, doesn't he deserve for these times to be 100 percent peaceful?



I hurt so bad; it just seems like I'm always leaving something.
—Kylea, age 5



Write in the space below your ideas for making as pleasant as possible any times your child sees you, his parents, together or hears you speaking. Here are some things other parents regularly use, even if their encounters are less than a minute.

- A smile for our son and one for each other.
- At least a couple of friendly sentences between the parents.
- Some words of consideration or thanks (for example, "I'm sorry we're a little late"; "No problem, it just means I'm happier yet to see them"; "Thanks for the great looking haircuts").
- Having the parent who is getting Kody come to pick him up, rather than having the parent giving up Kody take him on a sad trip to the other parent.
- Sharing a brief account of something positive that happened since the last exchange.
- Leaving all difficult discussions for another time.

All of these are good suggestions, and I am hoping we will eventually do all of them. Right now, being restrained and nice is so new that maybe we just need to be brief with exchanging Kody. So, eventually I'd like: A smile for our son and one for each other. At least a couple of friendly sentences between the parents. Some words of consideration or thanks (for example, "I'm sorry we're a little late"; "No problem, it just means I'm happier yet to see them"; "Thanks for the great looking haircuts"). Having the parent who is getting Kody come to pick him up, rather than having the parent giving up Kody take him on a sad trip to the other parent. Sharing a brief account of something positive that happened since the last exchange. Leaving all

difficult discussions for another time.



EXERCISE C: TEN GOOD MEMORIES AND COMPLIMENTS TO SHARE WITH KODY

For the sake of Kody, make a list here of ten good memories and compliments that you can share with him about his other parent. These can be recent things or even things from long before he was born.

Quick hints:

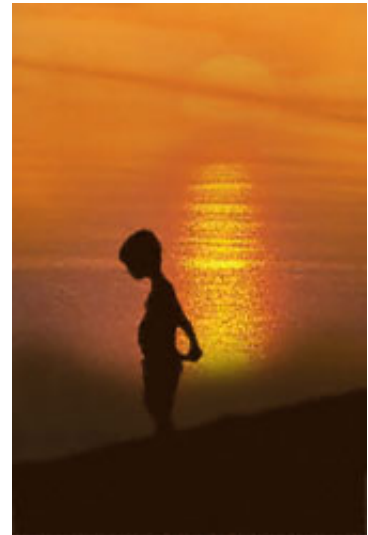
- a. Make these specific. "Daddy is nice" is not nearly as effective as, "I'll never forget the time when Daddy was in high school and helped a family that was in an accident; Daddy ran to the car to make sure everyone was okay, and he stayed with them until the police and the ambulance came—he was so brave."
- b. Also, would it help not to say, "your"? "Mommy has always been the strength in our family—remember how she helped everyone when Grandpa Bill was so sick?" may mean more than, "Your mom is a strong person."

If you need help getting started, click [HERE](#) to read some of the best things we've seen.

The other thing Dad will do that will hurt my feelings is he'll say something like, "You're just like your mother," when he's being negative. That hurts a lot.

—Tracy, age 16, from

How It Feels When Parents Divorce



1. ***Daddy was so happy when he heard I was having a baby. He said he didn't care if it was a boy or a girl, but I knew he wanted a boy for his first child. He broke down in tears when he heard that you were the boy he wanted and that you were on the way to us.***
2. ***Daddy is brave. Before you were born, he once saved a drowning girl and won the Mayor's Quiet Hero Award. You get your bravery from Daddy.***

3. ***When Poppy was sick, Daddy went to the hospital twice every day to see him, even though it meant he had to leave important work for later at night.***
4. ***You are so handsome, just like Daddy. You always looked like Daddy. I'll always remember when Mr. Jenson named you two "Pete and Repeat"--and you said, "Hey, I'm not Pete!"***
5. ***Daddy is an important man in his work. I think he is the reason you want to be a Dr. Paleontologist.***
6. ***Daddy can fix anything. No one can believe he fixed the old TV I had when I first met him and that it still works today.***
7. ***There is no one in the world as important to Daddy as you.***
8. ***Whenever you were hurt, you always wanted to know that Daddy was there for you. "I want Daddy!" you would say over and over. I know Daddy will always make sure you are safe.***
9. ***Daddy used to call home all day long from work when you were sick. His loves his Kody Man with all his heart.***
10. ***If I could pick someone to be your Daddy, I'd pick exactly the one you have. He's the best father.***



EXERCISE D: MAPPING OUR FUTURE

Please complete all four boxes below!

We congratulate you on what you are doing in focusing on Kody's needs. One additional step is for you to picture how you hope you as parents will be getting along two years from now. Please write that description here.

In two years, if we aren't able to be married, I want us to be friends. I want Kody to know that any times we're together will be good. I want to be able to work together for our son. I want to be able to laugh again with David. And enjoy together Kody's successes. I hope we'll be able to forgive each other and look back with pride on what we did for our son when this was so hard.

As you move toward that way of relating, what will Kody first notice?

Kody has already started to notice that things are better between me and his dad. He sees us being nice, and he loves it.

How will you yourself be better off when these changes occur?

I feel so hurt right now, it's been hard for me to imagine being better off. But if this can be about making Kody safer and happier, then I will be better off in every way.

Ideally Kody should hear about how you are going to make things better.

Write some ideas about what you can tell him. Here are some possibilities. Write below any that fit for you--and feel free to add ones of your own as well.

- Both of us will always love you, and we want you to love both of us.
- No one is breaking any connections with you. No one ever will.
- You caused nothing about any breakup or conflict.
- You could not have prevented the divorce.
- You cannot get Mom and Dad back together, but we can all share and talk about your feelings about everything.
- We want you to tell us what you're feeling and what you need.
- Everybody will be okay, and things will be better in the future.
- You will have plenty of regular contact with both of us.
- Kody, we're sorry about what you've been put through. It's very important to us that you know this had nothing to do with you, and it was unfair for you to be affected by this in any way.
- We will be the parents and make sure things are good.
- Above all, your only responsibility is to get back to the great job you do of being a great kid.



I think these are all good ideas. Both of us will always love you, and we want you to love both of us. No one is breaking any connections with you. No one ever will. You caused nothing about any breakup or conflict. You could not have prevented the divorce. You cannot get Mom and Dad back together, but we can all share and talk about your feelings about everything. We want you to tell us what you're feeling and

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