



Your Exercise Responses, Ben

Exercise A - Benjy's perspective

Benjy:

I suppose everybody says this about their kids, but Benjy is the most amazing soul. He's only 7, but he has the most tender heart and wish to be a love to everyone he meets. Linda and I (for all the things we disagree about) both adore him. He's kind to us, his grandparents, his cousins, his teachers and classmates, and his friends. He's interested in reptiles and medicine. Whenever he sees or hears a story about a sick person, he says he wants to study hard to become a doctor and help that person. We're all truly in awe of what a gift Benjy is.

Benjy's losses:

Everyone sees how deeply hurt Benjy is when he has to leave one of us to be with the other. He wants to know that the parent he's leaving will be okay, will call him soon, and return to him soon. I know he misses the life of a "whole home," a term we sometimes use because a couple of times he's used it ("I wish I was like other kids who have a whole home").

Benjy's reactions and problems from parent conflict:

When we have messed up (and UpToParents is really driving this home for me), Benjy has been devastated. He's begged us to be nice. He's cried. He's had stomach aches and nightmares.

Changes you think Benjy would like to see in his parents' interaction:

Benjy would like us to be together. But if we can't, he just wants us to be nice to each other. He wants us not to explode over nothing. He wants us to be happy so he can be happy again.

Exercise B - Ten good memories and compliments to share with Benjy

- 1. Mom is the kindest and most caring person you will ever meet. Do you remember how she took care of Buffy when she was hit by that car? How she's always taken of you?*
- 2. Mom is so smart and organized. Dad could never have finished college without Mom's encouragement.*
- 3. I'll never forget how Mom made you and me get up on stage at your school and do that funny dance. You and I were so scared, but Mom knew we would like it and be proud afterwards. And weren't we! Mom and I will always be your encouragement.*
- 4. You get those amazing eyes from Mom.*
- 5. When no one else in the neighborhood could get along with Mr. Stanier, Mom started talking to him, bringing him some of our leftovers, and made friends with him. She found out that Mr. Stanier had problems from being in the Army in Iraq. Today, everyone in the neighborhood loves and support Mr. Stanier. And it's all because of how kind and caring Mom is.*
- 6. When I see how your friends like to be with you and want to be your friend, I know it's because you learned friendship and caring from Mom.*
- 7. Mom makes a place at our picnics for everybody. I love how no one is left out.*
- 8. Who can make funnier--or scarier--Halloween costumes than Mom!*
- 9. I have never heard Mom swear or say a bad word about anyone. I'm so much better with people because of what I've learned from Mom.*
- 10. If there was a store I could go to and order the best mother in the world for you, I would describe Mom. I would describe her exactly as she is.*

Exercise C - Ways we make times together as good as possible

To complete this 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 Benjy has seen lately when he sees his parents together.

I hate to say it, but there have been a few horrible mistakes in the middle of mostly decent interaction between Linda and me. For the most part, we're courteous and thinking of Benjy, even if it's forced. On (I think) 3 occasions, we had awful blowups. They tore Benjy to pieces.

What suggestions do you have for any useful improvements in what Benjy sees and hears in your interaction?

I think Linda and I (especially after just starting this work on UpToParents and already talking about how we want to do well for Benjy ALL the time) can come to some good agreements about this. We can agree to save all difficult discussions for when Benjy isn't around. We can agree to be kind. We can talk and decide the details of how we will show Benjy (like this site wisely says) are a team for him ALWAYS. I will accept whatever Linda says (inviting each other into the home on days of pickups and drop-offs, agreeing on what we'll talk about, etc.). We can do this. No question about it. I know we both want to, and are even excited about this better way.

Exercise D - Mapping our future

1 Putting Benjy's Needs First

a. We will remember: (Choose all that you think can help)

- that Benjy's needs are especially great at this time,
- that most of those needs are ones only we, his parents, can meet,
- that he deserves for us to make a priority of meeting those needs, and
- that pursuing Benjy's needs will likely benefit us as well.

b. For all these reasons, we will pay the closest attention to all of the following needs of Benjy. Choose all that you think can help—and use the last box to mention any additional needs you think Benjy has.

- His need for a good relationship with each of us (meaning a relationship that is regular, joyful, and admiring).
- His need for us to support his good relationship with—and good opinion of—each of us.
- His need for our good relationship with each other as his parents (meaning a relationship that is as safe, respectful, and cooperative as possible).
- His need to see his parents happy and healthy.
- His need for our help with his feelings of deep loss, grief, and fear.
- His need to know that children do not cause problems between their parents.
- His need to know that children cannot control their parents' decision whether to be together or apart.
- His need for our support of his other important relationships (with grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and others important to him).
- His need for our mature handling of our adult responsibilities (including peacefully solving all our separation and co-parenting tasks).
- His need [feel free to add any additional needs you believe he has at this time]:
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not to have inconsistency in our civility. I think we hurt Benjy by being responsible most of the time and then blowing up in front of him on (I think) 3 times. we need to do this right ALL the time.

2 Special Help

When it comes to needing special help to succeed as co-parents: (choose one of the two choices below)

- a. ~~We don't require any special outside help.~~
- b. We could use outside help, including the following (check all that you think can help).
 - ~~Court assistance (please describe this possible help if you wish)~~
 - ~~Domestic abuse or violence (please describe this possible help if you wish)~~
 - Counseling for us or Benjy (please describe this possible help if you wish)

I'm not sure we NEED it, but Benjy's happiness is important enough that if it would help at all, I would be willing to go to counseling with Linda to make sure we're doing this right. I have deep hurt over losing our marriage and Linda starting a new relationship so quickly. If counseling can help us (or me), i think Benjy deserves to have us get it.

- ~~Mediation (please describe this possible help if you wish)~~
- ~~Other (please describe this possible help if you wish)~~

3 Specific Steps We'll Take

(Click on the ones you think can help.)

We'll take the following specific steps toward our co-parenting success.

- We will copy and review our website work to see that we're observing all the Commitments we chose as important to Benjy.
- We will merge our Commitments and pay special attention to the ones we both selected as important to Benjy.
- If we have trouble carrying through with the Commitments we chose, we will reach out for whatever counseling, child-focused mediation, or other help we need to succeed in our co-parenting.

To succeed as soon and as well as possible, we'll avoid the following from the "Nix 6" list.

- We don't argue with each other.
- We don't hold on to old resentments.
- We don't look to each other as opponents in anything.
- We don't look to our legal rights to solve what could be solved by common sense and our love for Benjy.
- We don't do anything that creates unnecessary insecurity or suspicion in each other.
- ~~We don't forget our good integrity, sense of humor, or love for Benjy.~~

To succeed as soon and as well as possible, we'll do the following from the "Fix 6" list.

- We enjoy and admire Benjy.
- We live by the Child Safety Zone—making all times Benjy sees us together or hears us speaking entirely positive.
- We regularly share with Benjy good things about his other parent.
- We celebrate with Benjy what he gets to do with his other parent.
- We regularly and cheerfully encourage Benjy to call his other parent.
- We promptly share all child-related information with each other.

Any other ideas we have for succeeding in raising and supporting Benjy from our separate homes.

4 Our Decision-Making on Major Child Matters

We will choose the decision-making model that is best for us. (Choose one of the following—and feel free to fill in any additional ideas you think will help you succeed in good decision-making for Benjy.)

- A. We are mature and safe enough in our interaction—and focused well on Benjy’s needs—that we choose to use joint decision-making. This means that we will:
1. Treat each other as partners rather than competitors—and treat our differing opinions as assets rather than problems,
 2. Promptly share all the child-related information with each other and make the major decisions in Benjy's life together in the same respectful way we would use if we were happily together,
 3. Respect that there will always be some differences in the way our separate households run, and
 4. Lead all new partners and other family members to understand that we are a team for Benjy—a team we expect them to respect and support.
 5. Other features of our joint decision-making:
- B. ~~There are reasons that joint decision-making would not be best in our circumstances, so one of us, will be making the major decisions in Benjy's life. The amount of communication between us on these decisions will depend on the degree of safety and cooperativeness between us. Other features of our decision-making:~~
- C. ~~We will use a different decision-making arrangement. (Describe here.)~~

5 Parenting Time

We will choose the parenting time model that is best for our circumstances. (Choose one of the following—and feel free to fill in any additional ideas you think will help you succeed in giving Benjy the gift of both parents’ support of his good relationship with both of his parents.)

- Because of the excellent way we relate and the physical closeness of our homes, we will make our own parenting time arrangements as we go along.

This has never been a problem. Linda and I have always agreed Benjy needs both fo us.

- ~~We relate well and will make adjustments whenever needed. However, as a help to our scheduling, we will start with the following schedule (including for school weeks, vacation weeks, birthdays, holidays, and other special occasions):~~
- ~~We will use the following parenting time schedule (including for school weeks, vacation weeks, birthdays, holidays, and other special occasions) and, except for true emergencies, will live by that schedule.~~
- ~~We will use another arrangement. (Please describe.)~~

6 Other Arrangements for Us to Make.

If we have additional arrangements to make or issues to resolve (financial, personal, or parenting), we’ll do so maturely and in ways that help Benjy feels proud of his family.

At this time, our respectful attention is required on the following.

We do need to figure out the hard financial questions. I promise to face these tough tasks with Benjy's need for peace and resolution in mind.

My other concerns (and my ideas for addressing them) are these.

7 What We’ll Be Telling Benjy.

In the days and years ahead, it may help Benjy to hear how you’ll be making things better. Write here your idea on what you’ll be telling him. Here are some possibilities—but feel free to add of your own.

Write some ideas about what you can tell them. 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 did not cause any part of the 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.
- We're sorry for the times we were mad in front of you. That was our fault, and nothing has been your fault. We will show you that we are getting better and happier all the time.

8 How Benjy Will Be Better Off

As you use your chosen Commitments and other ideas on this website and draft a Co-Parenting Plan (a) what will Benjy first notice and (b) what difference will this make to him?

I think this will be life-changing for Benjy. We could have gone in such a different (and much worse) direction. He'll be helped in every way.

9 How We Will Be Better Off

How do you think you yourself will be better off?

I loved what the Judge said in one of the videos on this UpToParents program: when we make Benjy and peace in his life the priority, we will be among the parents who are doing what's best for ourselves as well. WHAT A BETTER WAY OF LOOKING AT THINGS!!!