

[Everyday] **HEROES**

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Elizabeth Bader, founder of Positive Co-Parenting, with her son, Nathan.

Co-parent without anger

OK, so your divorce or breakup was bitter and you hate your ex. But remember, you have children together, and they're watching and learning from your interactions. "Conflictual co-parenting distresses children and undermines their well-being," notes psychologist E. Mavis Heatherington. Because divorce is usually adversarial, she says, a cooperative co-parenting arrangement is often difficult to develop. Yet it's critical to a child's emotional health for parents to co-parent without hostility, regardless of the history between you.

As one psychologist nails it, "When you criticize your ex in front of your children, it's like attacking their DNA." Many children take criticism personally and internalize it. They make the connection: "If you're criticizing dad, and dad's part of me, then you're criticizing me."

Elizabeth Bader, founder of Positive Co-Parenting, couldn't

agree more. "Conflict is the No. 1 thing that sets up children for long-term, psychological damage." Bader, a single mom herself, feels so strongly about conflict-free co-parenting that she left her job at Washington Mutual in organizational leadership to launch her unique, one-day workshops aimed at teaching divorced parents how to handle day-to-day parenting together without anger and defensiveness.

"It is possible to have a good divorce. It's a choice people have to make and it's difficult," acknowledges Bader, who raises 8-year-old Nathan cooperatively with her ex-husband. "My workbook, class and coaching provide parents with tools to make those choices and raise healthy children."

Bader, a certified life coach from the Hudson Institute of Santa Barbara, believes her program is more effective than court-ordered, co-parenting workshops, which she says don't create sustainable change. "Adults learn best by hearing, seeing and doing simultaneously. The cornerstone of my workshop, after we move through communication, conflict and remembering the good about the other parent, is that you actually develop a parenting plan."

Through Bader's workshops, parents are reminded to take the high road. "You can hate your ex all day long – they wounded you, lied to you, betrayed you. Yes, they're gum on your shoe. But you have to raise kids together, and somehow, you must make the choice that your children's well-being comes first, and you must model the best behavior possible."

To attend the next Positive Co-Parenting workshop, call 949.631.6121 or visit www.positivecoparenting.com. ○

REDUCE CO-PARENTING CONFLICT

- Use "I" messages: They express feelings without anger and won't put people on the defensive. Example: "I need to know when to pick up the boys so I can be available."
- Turn complaints into requests: Instead of, "I'm sick of you bringing Bobby home late for dinner," try, "Could you please make sure Bobby is back by 6?"
- Attack the problem, not the person: Instead of, "You're difficult to work with," try, "I realize this is challenging. How can we resolve this?"
- Offer suggestions, not solutions: Instead of, "Have Jenny home by 9 because she never gets to bed on time when you have her," try, "Could you have Jenny home by 9 so she can shower before bedtime?"

Excerpt from the "Positive Co-Parenting" workbook created by founder Elizabeth Bader. ○