

Ten Rules of Good Ex Etiquette

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Divorced parents often ask us for a list, something they can refer to, possibly hang on the refrigerator, that will help them deal with their ex in a positive manner--especially if they are really angry and their kids are around. When we wrote the list initially, there were 21 points, but after reviewing them some of the points were redundant, so we deleted until we ended up with what we have now. Ironically, we ended up with ten rules, and as we read the final list, we realized the rules we had come up with were very much like the Ten Commandments--only in the Ten Rules of Good Ex-etiquette the welfare of our children is the basis on which we make decisions.

The Ten Rules of Good Ex-Etiquette

1. Put the children first.
2. Ask for help when you need it.
3. No badmouthing.
4. Biological parents make the rules; bonusparents uphold them.
5. Don't be spiteful.
6. Don't hold grudges.
7. Use empathy when problem solving.
8. Be honest and straightforward.
9. Respect each other's turf.
10. Compromise whenever possible.

The cornerstone to the list is rule number #1, Put the children first. It makes it very easy to make the right decision if you remove your own personal interests, hurt, or anger and use the child's welfare as the criteria for your decisions. All of a sudden that ex who drove you so crazy seems quite small compared to the welfare of your child. You find yourself thinking, "Well, maybe it is OK if he takes Johnny to a football game on my week..."

Rule #2 reminds divorced or separated parents (and their parnters) to ask each other for help. So many times we have heard parents refer to themselves as "single parents" as they explain that now that they are now divorced, they are raising their kids all by themselves. At times we all feel like that, but more times than not, it's really not the case. Even though your ex may frustrate the heck out of you, if he or she sees their child on a regular basis, helps with expenses, and shows up at games and recitals, you're not a "single parent." You are a **divorced parent** and you probably do have help if you ask for it.

I remember the first time Sharyl asked me for help. Her son, Steven, was waiting for her after school and she was caught in traffic. My husband (her ex) and I lived around the corner--but it wasn't our week with Steven, so it was not my responsibility to pick him up. As the minutes ticked by, Sharyl broke down and finally called me. I could hear in her voice it wasn't her first choice, but her explanation was the right one--"I knew you wouldn't want him sitting alone after school, either." It was my pleasure to help her. We both loved the same child, and it set the precedent for eventually working together for the sake of the children in our care.

#3 No badmouthing.

Divorced parents often forget that their children have dual loyalties. Even something as small as "Your father is so forgetful!" if he's not on time can start a child personalizing your bad feelings. Remember the old adage, "If you can't say something nice, don't say it at all." Sounds sappy, but it's the right approach for this one.

#4 Biological parents make the rules; bonusparents uphold them.

This is the only rule that carries a post script. If the bonusparent is the primary caregiver of the children or if he or she has children of his or her own and is trying to coordinate rules in the home, then he or she should be consulted. Also, to ensure a child's safety, if bonusparents are caregivers, it is helpful when they are empowered to make decisions--but, for the most part, parents make the rules for their children. Bonusparents support the rules made by the parents.

#5 Don't be spiteful. #6 Don't hold grudges.

Perhaps the hardest rules to follow--especially if you want revenge and feel betrayed, but those feelings won't help you be a better person or parent. Spite, revenge, grudges...they clog your brain and your heart and prevent you from moving on with your life.

[The First Step Toward Independence-Forgiveness](#) may be helpful in overcoming these emotions. You may also find help when reading. [Overcoming Jealousy, Anger, and Revenge.](#)

#7 Use empathy when problem solving.

Putting yourself in someone else's place gives you insight into their world and may be the key to a more positive response during a conflict.

#8 Be honest and straightforward.

If you don't respect yourself and what you are doing enough to be honest and straightforward about it, its time to take a look at who you are and what you represent. Your children are watching.

#9 Respect each other's turf.

You can't control an ex. You can't control their lifestyle. You can't control what goes on at their home or make them do what you want. Although it would be nice to keep things consistent from home to home for the sake of the child, your child's other parent is not required to live their life at your direction. Divorced or separated parents must learn to accept each other's choices in their own homes. Bottom line, we can only control our own four walls and offering respect to your child's other parent lays the groundwork for positive coparenting. If it appears that your child's mother or father has not offered you respect, again, you cannot control that. But, *you* have set the correct example for your children. Ask yourself this question: "Do I want my child to be a success because of me or in spite of me?"

#10 Compromise whenever possible.

Give and take is the key to solving conflict.

You can also find these rules on page 7 of our book, [Ex-etiquette for Parents: Good Behavior After Divorce or Separation.](#)