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Household Rules

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When a separation occurs, soon after children find themselves divided into two homes: mom's and dad's. Whatever amount of time the children may spend in each household, an important aspect to consider is that the rules in the two places will likely be different.

The ideal solution is to maintain a certain continuity and to avoid great contradictions between the two households. Still, you may feel like you are finally free of your ex's restrictions, or that you can make your own rules at last. The desire to create a household where you feel comfortable is only natural, yet there are some aspects to be considered, in order to make it easier for your child to adjust.

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Easier Said than Done

If you're not on best terms with your ex, there may be some friction, regarding the best way to raise your children. Actually, money problems and parenting, alongside household chores, are a great source of conflict and stress in a marriage/cohabitation. When two different people, with different backgrounds and ideals, get together, it's not uncommon to have different perspectives on several subjects. The key to success is compromise and understanding. "But that's why we got a separated in the first place", you might be tempted to say.

Keeping the Household Rules You Want

Naturally, it would be best that you and your ex have similar household rules, so that your children don't get confused. However, since that is not always possible, there are other approaches that can also help you.

Don't Give In

"Mom/dad lets me do this and that. He/ she is much cooler than you", you know better than to fall for tricks like that. Children will always test your limits and boundaries, to see how far they can go. If you pass the test, you'll earn your children's respect and your house will be much more peaceful.

Don't Overcompensate out of Guilt

You might not even realize it or do it on purpose, but it's possible you're being soft due to thinking that your children have suffered too much because of the divorce. That may be true, but letting them get away with anything and everything is not the solution. In fact, the best long-term strategy, which will help your children not only in this situation, but throughout their lives, is teaching them how to handle negative emotions.

Rules Are Love

Love is something that can't be bought, whether it is with material things or with the lack of rules. You may not see it from this angle just yet, but your children will turn into parents one day and will thank you for teaching them the importance of stability and rules. Having a parent who is engaged, sets clear boundaries and rules, and established consequences for disregarding those rules, provides a child with the sense of support. Of course to actually be effective, all of this needs to be combined with calmness, stability, and conversation with you children. You'll actually be more loved and respected for it, even if your children are claiming the opposite right now.

Accept Constructive Criticism

If you and your ex have managed to remain friends, you probably discuss your children's behaviour. In fact, you might be able to benefit from receiving some advice and techniques from your ex. Besides, the best thing you can do for your children is to work as a team. However, it's very easy to feel hurt or be intentionally hurt by criticism. For your own sake, as well as your children's, it is important to learn to tell the difference between good advice and destructive criticism.

How to Establish Your Household Rules

Deciding what rules to pick may be a challenging ordeal. On the one hand, you might want to keep the rules your children are already acquainted with, so that the adjustment would be easier. On the other hand, however, this is your opportunity to live in an environment of your choice, and you deserve that.

Clearly State that there Is a Difference

You can try saying something along the lines of, “You can do whatever your dad/mom says is appropriate, while in their home. Here the rules are different.” And children can tell the difference, they just need to get used to it. It can take some time and effort to ease them into the new routines, but eventually they’ll become comfortable with it.

Be Firm

Children need routine and stability in their lives, in order to feel safe. They will not be able to assimilate your rules, if you keep changing them, according to your patience or level of guilt. If something is unacceptable today and leads to certain consequences, the pattern should not change tomorrow - your response needs to remain the same. Of course, there can be exceptions and all exceptions must be explained. It is also important to explain the rules you set, and avoid at all costs the phrase, “Because I said so”. It only confuses children and breeds distrust.

Ask for Help

Unfortunately, children don’t come with guide books. It was probably easier to take care of them, when you could discuss your approach with your partner. Now that the two of you are separated, the best you can do is still seek help, whenever needed. If you don’t want to feel lost, and your children to be unstable, discuss parenting with your ex, your family and friends, teachers and psychologist. Of course it is also important to have your own opinion and stick to your guns, when you have an objective reason to do so.

Make the Rules Clearly Visible

If needed, discuss the rules with your children and write them on a piece cardboard, use drawings, arts and crafts, or any other creative way you can think of, so that the rules are visualized. Place the visualization someplace easily accessible to your children, so that they can see them often and therefore remember them. Your kids have internalized many rules so far and if you discuss and create some rules together, it would be even easier for the children to follow them. Negotiating and discussing the rules is even more important, when it comes to teens.

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