

Co-Parenting Successfully: HONESTY **The first step to mean what you say.**

Honesty. This virtue allows you to most accurately see your situation. It helps you take responsibility for your part in the breakdown of your spousal relationship. This is a necessary step to fully respond to the separation honourably. The shock and pain of separation is an opportunity to assess who you are and how you will construct the next phase of your life. It is a chance to examine your life path, the choices you make, the values you profess, and your goals and aspirations for yourself and your family. Being honest with yourself helps you be honest with others, including your former spouse with whom you are now co-parenting.

A starting point for this assessment is to respond to the following questions:

1. What did you do that contributed to the breakdown of your relationship?
Examine what you did (or did not do) that led to the breakup. **Do this** in the spirit of inquiry and curiosity. **Do not get stuck** in guilt or blame. Your goal is to understand what happened and learn from your experience. Change only begins by taking responsibility for your actions and behaviour.

2. What did your partner do that contributed to the breakdown of the relationship?
I am quite sure this question will be easier to answer than the first question. Approach this question with inquiry and curiosity. **Do not** get stuck in blame. Look deeper and try to assess your partner's intentions considering their personal and family history. See if you can view the relationship from his or her point of view. Try imagining a conversation where your partner is explaining to you why the relationship broke down. **If you have children with your partner – switch gears now and focus on your children. Take out a pen and write down three positive statements you can make about your partner as a parent.**

3. What are you doing to take responsibility for your contribution to the breakdown of the relationship? What process did you choose during the separation? What process have you chosen since the separation? Do these processes reflect your values or your goals for yourself and your family? Have you chosen angry and demanding outbursts, when you value self-control and consideration of others? How do you want to co-parent to support the interests and developmental needs of your children? Are you modelling healthy adult relationships for your children?

4. Are you open to “accepting influence” especially when what you hear emotionally triggers you? What are you doing to deal with the emotional challenges of dealing with the separation, your ex-partner and co-parenting? Separation is a painful and emotionally taxing experience best done with the support of family, friends, and counsellors. Are you accepting assessments of the behaviours of you and your ex-partner? Are you responding to assessments of the needs of your children?

The Challenge: The commitment to honestly examine the profound changes brought about by separation and divorce, and to continue such examination even when you are emotionally overwhelmed. If you are honest with your self – regarding your past actions,

present needs and behaviours, and hopes for the future, you can be more honest with your ex-partner and better able to assess the needs of your children.

The Opportunity: After such honest examination, you can focus your energy on identified needs, positive communication with your ex-partner and children, and strengthen your parental alliance.

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