

How to *Best Communicate* with Your Challenging Co-Parent & *Come Out on Top*



*Exclusive content for listeners of the
How Not to Suck at Divorce podcast*

First of all, we get it. Communicating with someone you'd rather not communicate with is such an eye roll moment.

Yet, it's an inevitable part of co-parenting and we're here to help you not only not suck at communicating with your ex—and even communicate in a way that sets you up for success.

The hosts of the How Not to Suck at Divorce podcast, Morgan Stogsdill and Andrea Rappaport, have teamed up with family law attorney and legal liaison for OurFamilyWizard, Katharine Rupp, to bring you our expert tips for communicating with your challenging co-parent (and come out on top).

Now, we obviously can't guarantee that these tips are going to have your ex graciously granting all of your wishes (wouldn't that be nice?). But we can guarantee that these simple tips will help you become a better and more effective communicator, which is crucial for representing yourself in the best light if your matter escalates to attorneys, or worse, before a judge.

So how do you channel your frustration into positive actions that will inch you closer to your desired outcome?

It's time to stop irritating the situation—and pushing yourself closer and closer to a dreaded court date (which will cost you a lot of money, and a big, fat headache).

Keep Your Communication “BIFF”

Here's an example of a typical conflict between two co-parents. We'll show you how our suggestions would apply.

Let's say that you're requesting to switch parenting weekends so that you and your children can take a trip to visit your mother.

The conversation could look something like this:

You: Hey, would it be okay if we switched weekends in March (switching the 22nd and 23rd for the 29th and 30th) so that I could take the kids to visit my mom towards the end of their spring break?

Your Ex: I'm not comfortable with that.

OKAY....now, what you might *want* to say is,

You: What do you mean? It's a simple request!! What could you possibly have going on?

Or

You: You're not comfortable with anything!! You're going to ruin their Spring Break!!

Or

You: Are you serious? What is your problem?? Go get a life and stop being so difficult. You always do this!!

...You get the idea.

The problem with these responses is that they are likely going to elicit anger and aggression from your ex. That won't help you get anywhere closer to resolution. Instead, try using the BIFF acronym.

BIFF was created by Bill Eddy, who is a lawyer, therapist, mediator, and the co-founder of the High Conflict Institute and also a fabulous guest on the How Not to Suck at Divorce podcast.



BIFF stands for being: Brief, Informative, Friendly, and Firm.

It's an easy and effective guideline for communicating with someone who tends to be aggressive and argumentative.

Another pro tip from us to you is to repeat back to them what their pain point is. It's basically a mirroring exercise, which you might have done in couples' therapy. We're not saying that you need to agree with their pain point, but by repeating it back to them, you're at least acknowledging how they feel, which will likely elicit a less aggressive response.

So your response could look something like this:

You: Okay, I understand that you're not comfortable with switching weekends. As you know, the children are on spring break during that time, so they would not miss any school for this travel. I would like to find a resolution that works for the both of us. I can travel the first part of the break or second. Which do you propose?

In this response, you acknowledged their pain point (not feeling comfortable with switching weekends):

- You were Brief (you didn't write them a novel).
- You were Informative (you explained the reasons why the switch is important and reasonable).
- You were Friendly (you used kind words and made no insults or threats).
- And you were Firm, (you didn't cave in and say, "Oh never mind, I guess I don't need to go out of town...")

You also put the ball back in your co parent's court to propose another resolution. You didn't leave room for them to respond with just a yes or no.

Pro Tip: When in doubt, get quick help from AI

If you're struggling with what to say, try using ChatGPT. Robots tend to be much less aggressive than humans!

Keep Your Communication Factual, Not Emotional

When communicating with your challenging co-parent, which, again, we know can be a freakin' HEADACHE, keep these other pro tips in mind:

- For legal reasons, never refer to the kids as "my" kids, always refer to them as "our" kids
- For legal reasons, make sure you back up factual statements
- For legal reasons, make sure that everything you say, you would be comfortable having a judge read. (No embarrassing insults... save those for happy hour with your friends.)



- And again, for legal reasons, keep in mind that text messages, and yes, even emails can be altered.

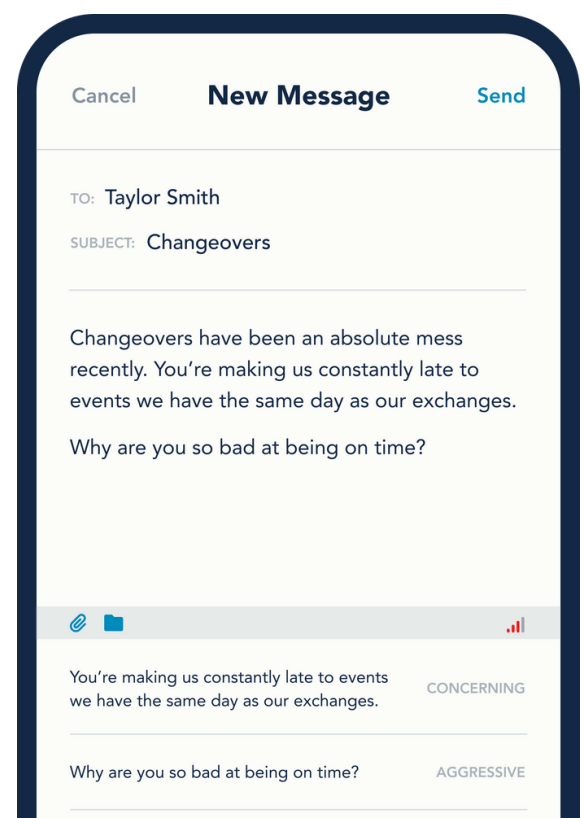
Communicating on an unalterable co-parenting app, like OurFamilyWizard, is the safest way to correspond with a challenging co-parent. OurFamilyWizard's messages are non-alterable, so you can ensure that if your matter goes before a judge, the evidence will be clear and factual.

OurFamilyWizard also captures the meta data (like the time and date when a message is sent and when it's read) that could be important if your dispute ever went to court.

Unlike with many popular email and text message systems (which let you make edits or even delete messages after they're sent), OurFamilyWizard keeps your co-parenting communication history secure, so you've always got peace of mind in knowing that your words cannot be tampered with.

Pro Tip: Keep your tone amicable with help from ToneMeter

For extra support to keep your tone firm yet friendly, try OurFamilyWizard's exclusive tool, ToneMeter. Before you hit send, ToneMeter gives you quick feedback on any phrasing that might sound confrontational.



Final Thoughts

In the end, you can't change the person you're co-parenting with, but you CAN change your strategy for handling conflict. We hope that these simple tips offer you the guidance you need to not suck at communicating with your ex. They should help you come out on top.

And in case nobody has told you lately, you're doing great and you're going to be better than okay.

*For more support, ask your attorney about signing up for **OurFamilyWizard** — read their monthly newsletter to learn more.*

*And listen to the **How Not to Suck at Divorce podcast** — available everywhere you get your podcasts. And join “The How Not to Suck at Divorce” private community on Facebook!*