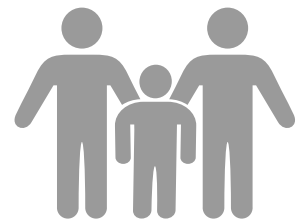




## Stronger Together: Co-Parenting Strategies

Families who build strong, trusting bonds with one another often handle financial and emotional stress better. Consider the following four strategies as you co-parent.



### Four Co-Parenting Strategies

#### 1. BUILD STRONG RELATIONSHIPS:

Relationships with friends and helping organizations can make difficult times better. These people and organizations can provide practical assistance, emotional support, and connection to a larger community. Children learn to develop social connections at home, so as you work to maintain strong relationships outside of the family, also work on developing your relationship with your children.

#### 2. SHARE PAINS AND JOYS:

When children go through difficult times, it is important for them to be able to talk about strong feelings. Consider using “emotion coaching.” Emotion coaching teaches children to understand and cope with emotions by noticing and naming their feelings, then discussing behaviors that can express those feelings. When children act out, you can ask them to name what feelings are causing those behaviors. Encourage family members to communicate their joys, needs, and sorrows and to express appreciation for each other. You can role model how to express emotions in a healthy and safe way. Without asking your children to take care of you, you can tell your children what you are feeling and what behaviors you are using to express those feelings.

#### 3. COMMUNICATE HONESTLY:

Communication that is direct, clear, and consistent helps all family members understand the difficulties the family is facing and encourages them to share. Be sure your children have basic, age-appropriate facts about the separation. Promote statements that start with “I” rather than statements that start with “you,” such as “I feel hurt when my thoughts aren’t acknowledged” rather than “you never listen.”

#### 4. BE FLEXIBLE:

Resilient families have a flexible structure that they can modify to fit their needs and challenges over time rather than holding a rigid conception of family roles and rules. This mindset allows the family to adapt to changes which may come about, like changes to the parenting structure or financial situation. Traditions are important in our life, but what new traditions can you create to meet the changing needs of your family? What have you gained? What has stayed the same? What have you lost?

**What are three things you can do today to build stronger relationships with your children? With your co-parent?**

UW-Madison Division of Extension offers co-parenting courses and support for families in caring for each other in ways that promote growth and understanding. For more information about these courses, contact your county Extension educator or visit <https://extension.wisc.edu/family/>.