Before you begin the course, please read the following important information:

- You can spend as much time as you need in the course, but you must spend at least **4 hours** cumulatively before you can get your certificate.
- **Always log out and fully close your browser** whenever you leave the course. This keeps your progress and timer accurate.
- After completing the **course and timer is at zero,** you may proceed to take the final exam. Click the course **evaluation/certificate**link at the bottom of the final exam page and submit the evaluation.
- Once the evaluation is submitted, **your certificate will be sent to your email** automatically.

This course has one purpose: to help parents effectively care for their children and themselves while co-parenting with someone from a previous relationship.

Single-parent families are part of our culture. You don't have to look far for it: movies, talk shows, books, and the Internet are overflowing with information about the causes and impact of raising children in a single-parent family. Most people hold preconceived ideas about what it means and how it affects their lives and the lives of their children. One goal of this book is to provide practical information and strategies for parents. Another aim is to debunk some limiting, stereotypical, and outdated beliefs about single-parent families and raising healthy children.

Most people know there will be changes in their lives. Few, however, recognize just how significant and unsettling these changes may be. The good news is that not all changes are bad, even if changes of any kind take some getting used to. The decision to end the relationship starts a chain of events that occur over time.

The choices you make during that time greatly affect how well your children adjust and whether they develop any significant or lasting difficulties. Taking the time to read and think about the ideas presented here should be helpful. Learning about the emotional, psychological, physical, and legal aspects of living in two households will help you and your children deal with the inevitable changes associated with the new normal your family will have.

The number of single-parent families in America continues to increase, as it has for the last 25 years. Most experts agree that roughly one out of every two marriages end in divorce and overall, it's estimated that one million children per year experience the impact of divorce. More important than these statistics, most experts agree that continued conflict between parents is the most harmful aspect of parents separating and the most detrimental to children.

Effective co-parenting (and that term embodies a variety of concepts and behaviors) is critical. It can be the most powerful antidote to the stress on children. Depending on their age, it is not uncommon for children to feel rejected, abandoned, confused, and hurt. Parents may feel overwhelmed by their own stress and emotions. However, it is crucial for

parents to recognize their children's age-appropriate needs and take the steps necessary to reassure children that their parental roles will continue.

Positive Co-Parenting can:

- Help your child feel safe and secure.
- Ensures your child will meet developmental milestones because they can focus on themselves.
- Teach them how to better regulate their emotions by your example.
- Aid in their development of healthy relationships in the future
- Learn how to effectively manage conflict and how to overcome it
  The degree of stress that children experience during their parent's break-up usually increases with any additional turmoil in the family, which can easily result from parents' own distress. Problems begin to fade as parents regain their own emotional stability and can provide more nurturance and support. For this reason, parents must remember to be parents first and foremost with respect to their children before, during, and after the termination of marriage. Generally speaking, problem behavior in children can range from nonexistent to prolonged difficulty years after the divorce is final. There is no such thing as a typical breakup, however, and you must find out what works and is effective for your individual family.

Most research and experience tell us that children successfully adjust if parents create specific necessary conditions. For example, open, age-appropriate communications, clear boundaries and limits, and stable routines all help children develop the internal controls necessary for healthy adjustment. Problems appear in families who are chronically stressed with instability and continued open conflict. Current life circumstances can play a critical role in children's long-term problems.

Resources you can turn to for help, please see below:

- https://www.coloradodivorcemediation.com/family/support/
- https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/groups/divorce/colorado
- https://www.ourchildinfo.com/how-it-works-101

Reference Books for Parents

Surviving the Breakup ***by Wallerstein, Judith S. & Kelly, Joan Berlin***

The Divorced Parent: Success Strategies for Raising Your Children After Separation, ***by Marston, Stephanie***

Mom's House, Dad's House: Making Shared Custody Work ***by Ricci, Isolina***

Skill Building and Coping Strategies

Skill building and coping strategies are essential tools that help both parents and children navigate the emotional, practical, and relational challenges of separation and divorce. These aren't abstract concepts, they are concrete, learnable abilities that can make the difference between a family that struggles indefinitely and one that adapts and ultimately thrives despite significant disruption. When parents actively teach and model healthy coping strategies, they're not just helping their children get through the immediate crisis of divorce; they're equipping them with life skills that will serve them in every future challenge they face. The skills children learn during this difficult period, emotional regulation, communication, problem-solving, resilience, become part of their permanent toolkit for managing stress and adversity throughout their lives.

For parents, developing your own coping strategies is not selfish or secondary to your children's needs, it's foundational to being able to parent effectively during this transition. You cannot pour from an empty cup. Parents who are overwhelmed, emotionally dysregulated, or lacking healthy coping mechanisms will struggle to provide the stable, supportive presence their children desperately need. This means you must prioritize learning and practicing skills that help you manage your own stress, process difficult emotions, communicate effectively even in conflict, and maintain your physical and mental health. When your children see you using healthy coping strategies rather than falling apart or lashing out, they learn by example that difficult situations can be managed constructively.

Managing Your Own Emotional Response

Dealing with a difficult coparent can trigger your own stress responses and negative emotions. Develop strategies to manage these reactions before they impact your parenting. This might include taking a cooling-off period before responding to inflammatory messages, practicing deep breathing techniques, or having a support system you can call when feeling overwhelmed.

Remember that you cannot control your coparent's behavior, but you can control your response to it. Focus your energy on what you can influence: your own parenting, your children's experience in your home, and your emotional regulation. Consider working with a therapist who specializes in high-conflict divorce situations to develop coping strategies specific to your situation.

Healthy Ways to Deal with the Stress of Co-parenting

1.Distractions

After it's been decided that you each will go your own way, it's easy to start obsessing about past choices or worrying about the future. Find engaging distractions that allow you to focus your attention elsewhere such as funny movies, time with friends or doing activities with your children or pets. Those that are creative should find outlets such as journaling,

gardening or painting. These are highly recommended because expressing yourself is fun and cathartic.

2.Active

The healthiest way to refocus your energy during this stressful time is through physical activity. According to many research articles, exercise can calm you down by reducing levels of the body's stress hormones adrenaline and cortisol. Examples such as joining a gym, biking, tennis, swimming, and other aerobic activities will help you release pent-up frustration. Less strenuous activities such as walking or hiking can clear your head and revitalize your spirit. Playing a team sport like softball, soccer or volleyball is a option if you are thinking of making new friends and interact with other people having fun.

3.Support

When the feelings co-parenting or parenting alone become overwhelming, many people find comfort in processing their emotions with family or friends. Another alternative is seeking therapy from a professional in a judgment free zone with the benefit of confidentiality. A support group can also be very helpful. In this environment, you will connect with others going through similar situations so you won't feel so alone. It's important for you to take responsibility for your own emotional well-being and make sure that you nurture yourself emotionally, physically, and spiritually.

4.Self-Care

Self-care, such as getting a full night's sleep, eating a healthy, well-balanced diet, getting a massage or mani-pedi are recommended. Avoid binging on comfort foods that often feel in the moment, but can leave you feeling worse later. Be cautious around drugs and alcohol as these substances often perpetuate negative and remorseful feelings.

5.Permission to Grieve

Because divorce and/or separation is a loss of your partner and the life you had together, feelings of anger, resentment and sadness are common responses. For those parenting alone, feelings of isolation and abandonment can be overwhelming. Be prepared to confront a wide range of unexpected emotions and give yourself time and space to grieve what is changing. In time you will find a new normal and the feelings of grief will lessen.

6.Prioritize

On especially tough days, prioritize the most important tasks you can handle and reschedule others for another time. It is okay to call professional services to deliver

groceries, help clean your house or spend time with kids. Learning to say “no” to things you don’t really want to do in order to spend time doing the things you do want to do is perfectly acceptable. Plan activities that bring you pleasure and participate in them regularly. Maintain a close circle of friends and socialize often as to not to isolate yourself from others. Get out and enjoy life even if it means forcing yourself to.

7.Explore

This unexpected change in your life can bring a positive change if you look at it from a place of hope. Take stock of your interests and take up an old hobby or try out a new one. Join a book club, enroll in a cooking class or volunteer in your community. Immersing yourself in an activity you enjoy or a cause you are passionate about focuses your attention on the present. Following your interests can also be a great way to meet like-minded people and to cultivate new relationships. You’ll find that once you’re out engaging in fun activities, you’ll feel less stressed.

8.Decision-making

Being on your own while co-parenting can be a very confusing time. Using emotions to make decisions on significant choices that will determine the course of your life is not recommended. Whether you take these choices to a trusted family member or friend, therapist or life coach, make sure to weigh out all options and consequences before making a final decision. When making decisions, use logical thinking instead of emotional thinking to guide your decision making. Give yourself time and be patient with the decision-making process.

Real estate agents, tax experts, and an experienced attorneys can all be invaluable resources during this important period in your life.

9.Expectations

When you’re in a co-parenting situation, you might feel as though you’ve lost control over everything. Remember, no one has any control over the feelings and actions of another person. Don’t try to control any aspect of what your co-parent might feel or what actions they will take. Let go of what you feel the outcome should be and learn to accept whatever might happen.

If you are faced with an uncomfortable or painful situation, learn to let it go. Take some time to figure out what is best for you and then come back to it. Stay focused on what you have control over and let go of the rest.

Moving from Hope to Acceptance

There often comes a point in coparenting when you must shift from trying to control the relationship to accepting the reality of what it is. This transition can be one of the most challenging aspects of co-parenting because it requires grieving the cooperative parenting relationship you hoped to have. You may have spent months or even years trying different communication strategies, attending mediation sessions, or making concessions in the hope that your coparent would eventually reciprocate with more reasonable behavior. Recognizing that these efforts have reached their limit and that your coparent's patterns are unlikely to change is not giving up, it's choosing to redirect your energy toward what you can actually control.

This acceptance doesn't mean you stop protecting your children's interests or that you tolerate truly harmful behavior. Rather, it means you stop expecting different outcomes from the same patterns and begin building strategies around the reality of who your coparent is today. When you release the emotional investment in changing your coparent, you free up mental and emotional resources that can be better used for your own wellbeing and your relationship with your children.

Case Study

Our first case study concerns Mark (51), a successful financial analyst, and his wife Kathy (48). When they had their first child, James (now 9), both agreed that Kathy would give up her part-time job as a bookkeeper. This arrangement worked out well and allowed the couple to raise James in a loving and comfortable environment.

Mark's job meant that financial matters were never a major issue and the couple were able to move into an area they had always wanted to live. Over time however, cracks began to appear in their relationship and ten years into their marriage, Mark admitted that he had been unfaithful.

Kathy's response was to file for divorce and this was soon granted. Although both found the situation particularly stressful, their ultimate fear concerned how James would be affected in the long-term. That is why they came to me.

James is now 11 and, as we have discussed, the crucial response required here was that both parents assert their parental roles such that James did not equate his parent's divorce with a separation that involved him. He needed to know that both parents intended to continue *being* parents. This may seem pretty obvious, but I find that parents need to be reminded to make this explicit to their children of this age.

There were, as always, complications. Mark had traditionally been the bread-winner in the family up until the divorce, and this left Kathy in a precarious position. Kathy had to decide whether to seek out independent employment, or have faith that Mark would remain committed to their agreement concerning child support.

This is a classic scenario that one encounters post-divorce, but it need not be a constant source of angst for either party. Ex-partners that respect one another are more than capable of reaching basic financial agreements concerning their children, and fortunately, Mark is an example of a father aware of his duties. This is not always true, and there are times when single-parents find themselves fending for their children alone. This worst-case scenario presents a different set of difficulties, and we will deal with them later.

In this case study, the solution was linked to ironing out the precise and exact responsibilities of each parent, and this involved communication between both sides. So I knew to place the emphasis on reassurance and avoid placing blame on either party in order for the most important person in the process to be addressed: namely James.

In turn, I helped them to develop ways to get this message across to James in a language that was appropriate for his age, and to this particular end, they were successful. I suggested they speak in terms that were appropriate for an eleven-year-old. It was not necessary for them to share every detail of their marital struggles and subsequent divorce with James. It was, however, most important for them to share how the divorce was in no way his fault. They needed to reassure him that they will always love him and be part of his life. I also reminded them that James, like all kids, will have different feelings and understandings about the divorce as he gets older. It was not necessary for him to have an adult understanding when he was only eleven years old.

Through our counseling sessions, Kathy and Mark developed a positive parenting plan that allowed them to clearly delineate boundaries, responsibilities and duties. They decided to equally share tasks, and on this basis, allow each parent quality-time to spend with James. They agreed that the best solution was to set out what they expected from each other, and to make clear to one another than any problems that might arise would be openly discussed. They even made a contingency plan for (inevitable but normal) disagreements that would provide ways for them to make compromises. We also predicted areas of potential conflict and strategized about some possible outcomes. Such areas included, future dating and dealing with unexpected expenses, among others.

In opening up this space for effective communication, Kathy and Mark ironed out a monthly planner, but also made sure there was a degree of flexibility in their plan. These days they remain divorced, but James is well-looked after, and is growing into a healthy young teenager due to the foresight and level-headedness of his parents.

Please click on the link below for a printable copy of this chapter.