

New Family Narrative

To minimize critical comments by a parent or a child, each parent read the following statement and rules to the children.

It is our divorce. You should not feel responsible for it, hear about it, worry about our emotions, or put up with either of us getting upset and not behaving well.

Here are our new values as a family moving forward:

1. You should not feel responsible for the divorce or for either of our feelings.
2. We want you to grow up to take care of your feelings, and we will take care of our feelings and ourselves.
3. We will not share anything about the divorce process with you. You may feel you are old enough to hear more, but we think you have already heard too much.
4. We think it is really important for you to have a good relationship with each of us because [...]
5. Spending time with both parents will allow you to see changes over time, changes each of us commits to making.
6. We each agree that we have made mistakes--as parents and as co-parents. We will try to do much better with this.
7. What we have been doing has not worked. It's time to do something different. We are each responsible to participate in the solution.
8. We don't expect things to be perfect from here. There will be issues and concerns. We want to learn from mistakes and do something different. We want to move forward.
9. We want to work together to resolve issues. We think avoiding issues is not a good solution, has not worked. Facing issues will be much healthier for you.
10. We will speak to one another with respect and curiosity, including our counselors.

Here are our rules:

1. Neither Parent is allowed to make critical statements about one another.
2. If you hear us make a critical statement about one another, please point out that we are breaking the rule. You may tell the other parent what you heard said, if you wish.
3. You are not allowed to read court documents, read our text messages or emails to one another, or overhear our conversations with other adults about divorce-related matters. It is your responsibility as well as ours to ensure that you are not exposed to such matters.
4. If one of us seems angry or upset about the separation, please don't ask us to talk about it; instead, give us time and space. We are competent adults and can take care of our own business, although sometimes we need a "time out" to settle our emotions.
5. If you have a complaint about either of us, bring it directly to the one you have the complaint about rather than the other parent. Everyone has to learn to address relationship problems. We know it can be tough for a kid to be direct with a parent; we will help you along if you start the talk. But going forward, if you complain to me about the other parent, I will listen politely and ask you to bring the issue to that parent. I won't jump in for you.
6. However, if you tell one of us that you have an issue with your other parent and are not comfortable to talk to your other parent directly, we can all meet together, and I will do my best to help you talk about your issue without talking for you.
7. You can also share your concerns and issues with your counselor.

By signing your name below, you agree to follow these family rules beginning _____.