

CO-PARENTING 101

BY SARAH T. SCHAFFER, CFL-S

“MOM, WHERE ARE MY CLEATS?” When you hear this from your daughter as you are helping your son with his homework, dealing with a work issue, and thinking about what you are going to make for dinner, your first thought is to fire back with the time-honored: “Where did you leave them?” Then it dawns on you that they are probably at her dad’s house—and the cascading thoughts begin: “Why isn’t her father more responsible? It’s not fair to make her keep track of things across two houses.” And finally, the lament of many new single parents: “If only we could have stayed together until the kids were older” After the moment of self-recrimination has passed, you realize that she is supposed to be at practice in 10 minutes and needs those cleats now. What do you do?

This is an issue that many co-parents face, whether its cleats, coats, books, or school projects. Of course, the easiest way to deal with the problem is to have a cooperative co-parent who lives nearby who can either run the cleats over to you or show up at practice with them. Failing that ideal scenario, what can you do when you don’t have access to the other co-parent’s home and don’t want to endure the drama of another call or endless text messages?

The most important ingredient for successful co-parenting is communication between the co-parents. Where direct communications are challenging, one option to maintain that communication is to use an application like Talking Parents, Our Family Wizard or even a shared google calendar. These applications allow the judge to view all of the communications between parents that take place on these platforms. In most situations, the knowledge that a judge will review the messages tends to keep communication more factual and civil.

On a more fundamental level, valuing your child includes respectful communication with the other parent. Negative statements about the other parent have been shown to harm the child’s self-esteem and create anxiety. Although it may be tempting to unload on the co-parent, it will always be better for your child to confine your communication to factual matters using positive language whenever possible.

Plus, having a foundation of positive communication will also make it more likely that you will get your daughter to practice on time—with her cleats.

Sarah T. Schaffer, CFLS, LL.M, is the founder and managing partner of the Schaffer Family Law Group, a full-service divorce, mediation, and family law firm known for effective legal representation and compassionate client service. For more information, please visit www.schafferfamilylaw.com.

Photography by Meg Nobriga

