



4 Things to teach your kids if you are Coparenting with an Impossible Ex

Overview & Purpose

If you are Coparenting with an Impossible Ex, you feel truly helpless to protect your kids, protect yourself and somehow foster a supportive and loving relationship with their other parent at the same time. Whether it's the things they say, their temper, lies, disappearing acts, how they blame you, or the impact of the conflict and chaos in general, your ex will have an influence on your kids. And if those things have been harmful to you, it makes sense that you would be worried about the harm it would have on your children.

This guide is designed to help you:

- Teach your kids about high conflict behaviors and alternative ways to deal with others.
- Redirect negative energy coming from your ex into a teachable moment that empowers and protects your children, you, and your relationship in a positive way.
- Give your kids a vocabulary and awareness around recognizing harmful behaviors in bullies and high conflict personalities.

Remember...

The lessons your children take from you will be many. The more clear and consistent you are about the rules you live by, modeling them, not with perfection but with openness and authenticity, the more your kids will get that message.

Your children's lives are challenging in certain ways. They are unique and special for those same reasons.

Their circumstances can strengthen them. They have lost something, but because they have known loss, they have the space to gain that much more.

This is a childhood experience that is so rich with learning opportunities, there is nothing that will likely impact them more. And they are lucky to have you to learn from.

This will be as much about teaching yourself these things as it is about teaching your children.

Be patient with yourself, but firm and dedicated. If you are not willing to commit yourself to acting in this way, your kids will not commit to it either.

Imagine the strength your child will carry into the world when they learn to make choices from that place of awareness.

Lesson 1:

The Difference Between Feelings and Actions

- The Philosophy

One of the elements of someone with a high conflict personality is a lack of emotion regulation. Someone who is easily triggered, defensive. They may be known for having a temper, or a short-fuse. Their reactions to things makes everyone around them feel like they are walking on eggshells.

Emotion Regulation is the ability to feel your feelings but not be overwhelmed by them. In a high conflict divorce and coparenting situation, there are a lot of overwhelming feelings for everyone to feel.

You want your kids to understand that it's ok for them to feel as mad as they want, but being mad doesn't mean they get to break things, curse at you, or hit their sister.

You want to teach them that it's ok to feel whatever they are feeling and that they are in charge of how they handle those feelings, not the other way around.

Teaching them to see and name their feelings as something separate from their actions, allows them to take ownership over their choices.

In a high conflict situation, there are so many high intensity emotions surrounding your kids. The very place that your kids go to feel safe is always on the verge of war. That can be an unsettling feeling, but it can also be very empowering when your kids learn how to feel safe within themselves.

How someone treats you says more about them than it does about you.

Lesson 2:

We Don't Blame People

- The Philosophy

Blame is the opposite of empowered. When we blame other people for any part of our life experience, we give our power away.

We all want our kids to have happy, healthy relationships. Ones in which they are not learning to blame others, and ones in which they are not taking blame.

Someone with a high conflict personality consistently lacks the ability to take responsibility for their situation, emotions, and experiences.

They view things as black and white, all or nothing, win or lose - and for them to be the good guy, there must be a bad guy. It will never be their fault, so it must be someone else's fault.

Very often, that person is you.

They may blame you for the divorce, that they have no money, their anger and other emotional outbursts. They may blame you for the decisions they make, or use blaming you as a way to justify their decisions.

Blame is most damaging when that message gets communicated to your kids.

This can cause kids to feel like they need to pick sides, that it's ok to blame others, and to start questioning themselves and you.

Being blamed has a way of making people feel like they have to defend themselves. You may feel compelled to tell your side of the story, explain yourself, point out where your ex is wrong.

Your kids don't need to be involved in the details. Call the blame for what it is and let your kids know they don't need to worry about the rest.

Of course, if your kids get blamed directly, this can be a massive blow to their self-esteem, so helping your kids to see it for what it is, is crucial to empowering them against it.

You can't control what your kids learn from their other parent, but you can control what they learn from you.

Lesson 3:

We All Have Our Own Truth

- The Philosophy

Your kids have a very meaningful and influential relationship with someone who has a very poor opinion of you. No matter what you do, it is unlikely that your ex's opinion will ever change. There is not much you can do about that. There is not much you can do about the time your kids will spend with them. And there is not much you can do to prevent your ex from sharing their opinion of you to your kids.

What you can do is make sure that your kids learn to hear opinions for what they are. Opinions are not facts. How someone thinks or feels or what they declare about things, is not THE truth. It's THEIR truth. How you think or feel or what you declare about things is not THE truth. It's YOUR truth.

People with high conflict personalities hold a polarized reality of many things. Their win/lose mentality forces things into all or nothing categories. Us or Them. Good or Bad. Right or Wrong.

What this means, is that you must be bad for them to be good. You must be wrong for them to be right. Your way must be stupid because their way is the smart way.

Not only is this an extremely limited and simplistic view of a world so full of capacity and complexity, it creates a landmine of conflict, chaos and confusion around your children.

When kids are raised by parents who believe that the other parent is a bad and dangerous person - either one parent IS bad, or the other parent can't be trusted. How do they choose? Who do they trust?

By teaching your kids that we all have our own version of the truth, you give your kids the ability not to have to choose between their parent's versions. Bad is just an opinion anyway. Dad can see it his way. Mom can see it hers.

Mom and Dad can have their truth about each other, but it's not the same truth your children have about each one of you.

You want to show them how to create a space for all the conflicting messages that exist within THEIR truth and reality.

Give your children a way of holding all of the conflicting pieces of their story in a loving and accepting way.

Lesson 4:

How to Show Curiosity

- The Philosophy

Curiosity is the opposite of judgement. It is a desire to understand. To learn more. It keeps us from skipping steps and jumping to conclusions.

Labeling people as good, bad, right, wrong, smart, stupid and so on, is judgemental. And people with high conflict personalities love to cast their judgements.

Teaching your kids to counter judgement with curiosity means that you are teaching them to question things. To be open to learning. Open to new information.

You want your kids to be open to different ways of seeing things, because they love 2 people who have very different ways of seeing things.

Frankly, everyone sees things differently, and by teaching them that, you are giving them the tools to interact effectively with more people in a productive way.

People like feeling accepted and safe. No one wants to be judged or blamed. The more you create an environment where your kids feel safe to be themselves, where they feel listened to, spoken to with curiosity and interest, the less it makes a difference what your ex says about you.

The more curiosity you show with your children, the more you will learn about who they are and what matters to them. You protect your children when your relationship with them is stronger than anything your ex can say or do.

If your ex is teaching your kids to use blame and judgement as a way of dealing with life, than you can show them another way. A way that does not create more conflict, a way that connects to people, and shows an understanding and acceptance of differences.

Teaching your kids how to identify and allow for other people to have their judgements and beliefs, and how they can use curiosity to explore their own, is one of the most empowering lessons you can give them.

For kids living in high conflict, this is an absolute gift. Curiosity gives kids an open ended question mark and a way to stay authentically connected to all the people they love without feeling guilty for betraying either side.

The key is finding a way to talk to them about it in a way they can take in and understand.

The more curiosity you show, they more you learn ways to connect with them and more ways to share things with them.

How to Get Started

- Catch It, Name It, Don't Judge It, Replace it.

The more often you are able to catch blame, judgement and those other high conflict behaviors, name them for what they are, and communicate an alternative approach, the more you will be helping your kids develop the skills they need to defend against it.

In actuality, your ability to help your kids learn these lessons comes down to you learning how to teach it to them.

And that is where I can help.

I have strategies that will help you quickly identify where blame and judgement are having an affect on your kids.

Using techniques in motivation and coaching, I will help you identify ways to connect and communicate with even the most hard to reach kids.

I can show you how to create simple but powerful language you can use to start teaching even your little ones. In fact, the earlier you start teaching your kids this language, the more natural and fluent it will become for them.

I want you to start shifting the worries you have about your kids into learning opportunities that will help keep them safe and empowered around high conflict behaviors and in all of their relationships going forward.

Need some help creating your personal strategy and lesson plan specific to your situation? Not sure how to start incorporating these essential concepts into your relationship with your kids?

Email me at julie@aspiretogrowth.com and let's get you and your kids feeling stronger and safer right now.

Meet Julie:

I'm a Certified Professional Coach from the Institute of Professional Excellence in Coaching, as well as a certified career counselor from New York University.

I have experience and training in Dialectic Behavior Therapy, Effective Communication, and Mindfulness techniques with a background working in business and Human Resources.

I have experience navigating the transitions of divorce and dealing with the loss of a loved one, addiction, and health & fitness.

