



**YOU CAN END A MARRIAGE,
BUT YOU'LL BE CO-PARENTING THE REST OF YOUR LIFE.**

By Frank Gaunt, AgreementHouse.com

When couples are divorcing, it is only natural for your world to get turned upside down. Adults faced with this situation typically experience a great deal of anger and pain. Given the emotional turmoil, it can be very difficult to see beyond your own issues and “do the right thing for your children”. That’s why I’ve developed a quick list of Do’s and Don’ts.

How do you give your children stability when you’re not feeling stable?

How do you give them optimism when you’re not sure what you should and shouldn’t hope for?

One of the best ways to help you deal with your conflict and uncertainty is to resolve it, rather than risk passing it along to your children. That’s where Agreement House™ can help. Don’t debate and argue in front of the children. Rather, bring your issues to us and let us mediate them – in a guided negotiation we can help you figure out the best future for you and your children.

Our motto is “leading you to a more agreeable future.”™ When you work out details of your new life, you reduce your doubt and uncertainty – and if you reduce your uncertainty, there’s less fear for your child to sense and take on.

Further, part of what we do is to get agreement on how parents will deal with future parenting issues. Resolve those, up front, and you can be clear and honest with your children while reducing the anger and criticism between their parents that they are exposed to.

“Do’s and don’ts” to help navigate your children through the divorce process:

Do let your kids know what’s going on at a level that they can understand given their age and maturity. This should be done in a way that avoids badmouthing or putting down your spouse.

Don’t go into detail about the problems you and your spouse are having. Schedule time for discussions without the children present – agree to disagree in private, away from the children.

Do maintain civility with your spouse when the children are present. The fight does not belong to the children and they don’t deserve to be subjected to it.

Don’t put your children in a position of seeing the two people that they love most in the world being unkind or critical to the other.

Do understand that this is a very emotional time for your children. Encourage them to express their feelings with you. They will be sad, fearful, and anxious about changes in their world. At times, this may take the form of negative and attention-seeking behavior. Above all, let them know that you will continue to love them and to keep them safe.

Don’t overlook the potential trauma that your children may experience. While you might feel overwhelmed, it is important to stay tuned into how the divorce is affecting them.

Do understand that it is important that you make it O.K. for your children to love both parents. If you discourage your kids from expressing positive feelings for the other parent, you are shutting off communication about a significant part of their life. You can help the child make a holiday card for the other parent, help them buy a small birthday present for the other parent, or help them put up a picture of the other parent in their bedroom.

Don’t overtly or covertly ask your children to choose sides. The divorce is not about one parent being right and the other parent being wrong in the world of children. Asking a child to divide his/her loyalty can bring on emotional turmoil that the child cannot reconcile.

Do understand that children seek stability and routines. To the extent possible, help them maintain their friendships, remain in the same school, stay on the same sports team, and keep their same activities. When this is not possible, focus on helping them to find new and fun things to replace the old things.

Don't assume that children will just "roll with the punches". While it is true that children are often very resilient, don't take this for granted. Keep a close eye on how the children are adjusting and support and acknowledge the difficulty of change.

Do remain the adult in the relationship, charged with meeting your children's needs.

Don't allow your children to become an emotional crutch for you. Some children, when they see their parents hurting, will try to take on the role of caretaker. This is an unfair and unhealthy position for a child.

Do understand that it is a common fantasy for children to believe that their parents will get back together again and you will all be "one big happy family again".

Don't get angry with children for expressing sentiments of this nature. Let them know that while this is not realistic, both parents still love them even though you can't live together.

Many of the problems described above can be avoided or ameliorated by the parents coming to set of agreements early in the separation or divorce process. When a husband and wife are in the midst of problems that endanger the marriage, it's difficult to have civil, clear-headed agreements on how to deal with the children and with the future. We can help.

At Agreement House™ we work to help you reach agreements that will let you move gracefully into the future. We can help minimize the issues that cause anger and contention and let you focus on what counts – doing the right thing for your children.

As one of our Agreement House™ associates, parenting expert Judy Thome, likes to remind her clients: **You will be co-parenting for the rest of your life.**

Let us help you make solid decisions that will make it easier for you and better for your children.

