

## 7 Habits of Highly Successful Co-Parents

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There are plenty of challenges that come with co-parenting but if you are in it to raise the kids that are as resilient and effective in their lives and relationships as possible, there are a few things to be mindful of.

### **1. Chores and being responsible:**

We all have chores to do whether at home or at work. If the kids are doing what's age-appropriate for them, you are doing what is age-appropriate for you. By doing chores, they're part of the 'collective' team (family), learning how to contribute to the family's well being, by clean up after themselves, being responsible and taking care of their own belongings ~ including the house and yard and car, all something they are likely to own and maintain as they become adults. You are raising future college roommates and spouses. Sharing this value as co-parents is helpful to your raising responsible, capable kids.

### **2. Social Learning:**

Researchers from Pennsylvania State University and Duke University<sup>1</sup> tracked more than 700 children from across the U.S. between kindergarten and age 25 and found a significant correlation between their social skills as kindergartners and their success as adults. These social skills include reading social cues from peers, cooperating in a group setting (being team-players), understanding and feeling compassion for others' experiences and knowing how to give voice to this (sympathy/empathy – this is learned, NOT innate), and conflict as well as problem resolution, without negative judgments. Parents often don't realize that "problem behaviors" are really associated with skills that are missing. Rather than punishment (taking things away – which is a set up for power struggles later on, or time out), what's most effective is to help them figure out what skill is missing, and then expect them to rehearse the skill that is missing and gain some mastery. Doing this across households and conferring about the skills your children need to identify and rehearse increases their success with peers, as well as adults.

### **3. Master conflict resolution:**

The conflict between parents prior to divorce affects children negatively, post-divorce conflict has a strong influence on children's long-term adjustment, according to Robert Hughes Jr., professor and head of the Department of Human and Community Development in the College of ACES at the University of Illinois and study review author<sup>2</sup>.

After divorce, children fare better when a father without custody has frequent contact with his kids and there is minimal conflict between parents. But when there is ongoing

conflict between parents, frequent visits from the father are related to poorer adjustment of children and has a cascading effect on them through their formidably years, and on to young adulthood.

When kids witness mild to moderate conflict that involves support, compromise, and positive emotions in and across both their homes, they learn better social skills, self-esteem, and they stand on a foundation of greater emotional security. Mutual support, understanding and resolvable conflicts between co-parents can improve parent-child relationships in both households, and helps predict how well they will do in school, E. Mark Cummings, a developmental psychologist at Notre Dame University<sup>3</sup>.

The key is to teach children the conflict resolution skills you are learning on your own, or in your co-parenting work with a specialist, and practice facilitating your children developing the same skills in their relationships with you, as well as their siblings and peers.

#### **4. Close Relationships with Children:**

Parents who are sensitive caregivers “respond to their child’s signals promptly and appropriately” and provide a secure mental and emotional base from which children can explore the world. These parents avoid negative judgments and assumptions of each other, they make respectful requests instead of issuing complaints, and they are benignly curious, instead of jumping to negative conclusions. Effective co-parents manifest these communication skills, both verbally and nonverbally with their children, and with each other in ways that foster trust and stability across households. Patient (rather than impulsive), receptive, nonjudgmental and open communication in early parent-child relationships may result in long-term returns that accumulate across individuals’ lives. Children grow to be confident and adjusted regardless of the family configuration, including effective co-parenting communication across households.

#### **5. Cook with them:**

Both boys and girls need this basic life skill more than ever. By setting a ritual of cooking with kids, there are opportunities to teach them about basic cooking technique and clean up, nutrition, patience, and the importance of healthy balanced eating.

There are great opportunities to build wonderful memories with either mom or dad in the kitchen. One day they may not be living in your house and you want to be sure they can feed themselves and develop a healthy relationship with food, by self-monitoring and ensuring their own nutrition and wellbeing, rather than you doing it for them. It takes more effort to teach them to cook in the beginning, and it’s an essential skill that provides shared time to talk as well. Building this competency across two households is fundamental. While some cultures emphasize the gift of one parent’s doing all the cooking, it’s still important to teach those skills, children planning to thrive in this culture, regardless of gender, will be expected to share in food preparation as partners.

#### **6. Teach them Tenacity:**

Tenacity takes you beyond where others give up. Tenacity, or simply “grit” is the tendency to sustain interest toward long-term goals. It is learned more at home than at school, and you can model it through your own persistence and follow through in your actions. Maybe you spent sometime training for a 5k fun run - share that experience with your kids, and invite your co-parent to do the same in some area of interest to your co-parent. This kind of modeling carries weight given that kids look up to their parents.

In 2013, University of Pennsylvania psychologist Angela Duckworth won a MacArthur “genius” grant for her uncovering of a powerful, success-driving personality trait called grit. Teach tenacity and deliberately point out ‘gritty’ moments when your kids succeed.

If one parent’s house is “time off” and the other parent’s house is not, your kids are not as likely to learn “grit.” Your own grit and ability and willingness to follow through with what you say you’ll do, by when you said you’d do it, even when it’s hard, is something your kids will read loud and clear. Unless both co-parents are willing to cultivate this skill, it’s not as likely your kids will.

Note: “grit” does not mean “grind!” There are more and less effective ways to teach kids to hang in there on challenging tasks, on their own. A child that knows you’ll sit alongside and push him/her uphill with their homework is not learning grit. They’re learning to fight *you*, instead of taking on the challenge that’s theirs, because *you* are more invested than they are in the task. Similarly, a child that expects you to sit there, before they do anything on their own, is not learning anything about “grit.” You want to titrate your participation and require increasing amounts of independent effort before you come check in, if they’re going to learn to hang in there on their own.

The most powerful reinforcer for effective behavior, including grit, is to describe, using a positive voice tone and facial expression, very specifically the behavior that is working for your child, and *how* that behavior *works for your child* (not you, although it is likely to also work for you, what matters to them is what works for *them*). For example, you might say: “That was hard. You gave yourself a couple of breaks, and you stuck with it. You might be a genius but if you can’t stick with something and apply sustained effort, your genius won’t matter. You DID!! and you got the result you wanted!” Just saying “good job” gives your child *no* information about what works.

## **7. Embrace a Growth Mindset:**

A “growth mindset,” thrives on challenge and sees failure, not as evidence of a lack of intelligence or ability, but as a heartening springboard for growth and for stretching existing abilities.

The opposite of a growth mindset is a “fixed mindset”. It assumes that our character, intelligence, and creative ability are static givens that we can’t or can’t change in any meaningful way with sustained effort. Any success a person with a “fixed mindset” experiences simply affirms some innate trait that doesn’t require effort. For such people, striving for success and avoiding failure at all costs becomes a way of maintaining the sense of being smart or talented, for example. The cost of this fixed mindset is that a child’s behavior becomes restricted to only that which helps the child avoid fear of failure.

At the core of the difference between a “fixed” or “growth” mindset is how you and your kids believe your *sustained effort* can impact your ability. Your assumptions about growth across households have a powerful effect on how your kids will approach the challenges in their lives. If kids are told that they aced a test because of their innate intelligence or talent, that creates a “fixed” mindset. If you help them attribute their own successes to sustained effort, that teaches them a “growth” mindset.

Kids who are supported in a “growth mindset” across two households, are more able and willing to take on the challenges in life with confidence and determination. They have a history of “leaning in” to challenges and succeeding even when it’s hard, instead of avoiding and fearing failures, and the ongoing shame that comes with fearing failure.

1. [Early prosocial behavior good predictor of kids’ future | ScienceDaily](#)
2. [The Effects of Divorce on Children, Robert Hughes, Jr. Ph.D](#)
3. [What Happens to Children When Parents Fight, Developmental Science](#)
4. [Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance, Angela Duckworth | Talks at Google](#)