

“Short Relationship Story” Worksheet

One essential element of effective co-parenting is the “short story” you each tell yourselves and others about what happened to your relationship that resulted in separation/divorce. The “short story” can be even a sentence or two. It tells what was valuable, and what happened, *without assigning any blame or negative judgments* to either of you. Often it is a sad, compassionate story and can help soothe some of the pain and anger that’s arisen. The story also serves as the “party line” you share, and allows your children, as well as friends and family, to love you both, without feeling pressured to take sides in your extended communities.

Instructions: 1) Say what was valuable and gave rise to your having kids. 2) Say what happened to the relationship, how it was lost. 3) Take responsibility so kids are off the hook, and reassure children/adult children that you’ll both love them and remain present and involved in their lives. 4) Use “we” language to empower yourselves to work towards being on the same page *for your children’s wellbeing*. Curb any impulse to blame/negatively judge your co-parent. You both had a part in creating whatever you did / didn’t create together... and your children need to hold onto a blame-free story. This blame-free, shared-responsibility story grants your children permission to love both of you, and by extension, to love the parts of themselves that are like you both.

Some Blame-free Descriptive Examples:

#1: *“We loved and enjoyed our life together for a long time. At the same time, we were so different we didn’t grow together as loving friends and partners, and never developed the “we” kind of teamwork and consideration that loving partners need.”*

#2: *“We were very much in love when we had you. We didn’t get the help we needed to grow the skills that would have made continuing a loving relationship possible. Since then, we hurt each other so much in court, that we can’t see a way to ever trust each other again.”*

#3: *“We loved each other very much when we had you. We think so differently, that over time we struggled to understand one another. Without that understanding, we gradually felt further and further isolated from each other.”*

Edit, alter or add elements to the following basic “divorce explanation” a few experts recommend for children:

*“We (your parents) loved each other very much. We really believed we could make a life together. We tried our best and despite seeking help we were unable to make our relationship work. [Yes, this assumes that people do the best they can.] We’re so sorry about how this hurts you and forces certain changes on your lives. At the same time, we want you to know that we both love you very, very much. We will both stay close and involved with you, to help you grow up strong, capable and happy. Our making our relationship work was up to us - totally our job as adults, not yours, and it’s about our about grown-up stuff, that has **nothing** to do with you.”*

When you have it right, it will honor what was valuable, and just feel sad.

Once you have it right for yourself, edit it down to something easy to memorize – bullets may help. Then share it with your co-parenting specialist(s). S/he’ll/they’ll help edit to combine both your ideas as a draft for you to accept or alter. Then copy it into your phone where you can reference and recall it easily. A blame-free story helps you each pull yourselves free of holding onto being stuck in blaming, angry, or victim stories that disempower you and your kids by extension. You’ll find yourself more at peace when you can tell yourself and others this kind of affirming, blame-free narrative. Our thoughts and narratives drive our feelings as well as our behavior. What you tell yourself/others makes a difference in how you’ll parent and co-parent your children for years to come.