

# Supporting Co-Parenting Families

Building Resilience for Children and Families  
Throughout Separation and Divorce



Extension  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON



## Parent Divorce and Separation in Wisconsin

Parent divorce or separation can bring about many challenges for families, including changes in living arrangements, increased financial burden, and new relationships. The resulting stress of these transitions is associated with increased risk for child adjustment problems that can appear in different ways, such as decline in school performance, behavior problems, anxiety, and depression.

**There is good news.** Research shows that when parents learn and develop specific skills related to cooperative co-parenting relationships, they can shield children from the negative effects of parental conflict, family stress, and instability. This can make a significant difference in the short- and long-term well-being of children and families.

## Supporting Families Raising Children Together While Living Apart

Extension's Human Development and Relationships educators provide two research-informed programs, Parents Forever and Resilient Co-Parenting, to support families raising children between two homes. We help co-parents manage conflict, improve communication, and support the role of the other parent in the child's life. We encourage co-parents to center their child as they make decisions for their family.

### Parents Forever

Parents Forever is a four-hour educational program for parents experiencing the transition of divorce or separation. In many counties in Wisconsin, this program fulfills a local court mandate of co-parent education for divorcing parents with minor children. Parents Forever aims to improve resilience and affect change in three areas including parental well-being, parent-child relationships, and co-parenting relationships. Parents Forever is offered in-person and virtually throughout Wisconsin.

### Resilient Co-Parenting

Resilient Co-Parenting is a series of monthly classes for any parent or caregiver in a co-parenting role. Each class highlights a topic related to co-parenting. Launched in 2023, Resilient Co-Parenting was created in response to Parents Forever participants asking for more education related to specific ongoing co-parenting issues. Participants come to these classes with a variety of family situations. This class series recognizes that co-parenting relationships continue to evolve over time and are unique and powerful contributors to child and family well-being.



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# The Results

In 2022 and 2023, over 650 parents attended a Parents Forever program offered by Extension. Evaluations were distributed immediately following each program, along with a six-month follow-up evaluation.

After the Parents Forever class, most parents reported being:

94%

More prepared to coach their child through difficulties related to divorce or separation.

95%

More confident that they can keep their child out of the middle of parenting issues.

**“I am excited to use the tips on better communication with my daughter, I think it will help build our relationship.”**

-Parents Forever participant

Six months after the Parents Forever class:



**3 in 4 parents**

reported that a conversation that normally would have become a conflict **did not escalate.**

## Resilient Co-Parenting

In 2023, we offered 11 sessions of Resilient Co-Parenting with an average of 20 participants per class. Ninety-four percent of participants who completed a post-program survey learned something that could help make their family interactions more positive. When asked to share one thing they learned or a skill they wanted to try, one parent said:

**“Thinking about ways to reframe negative thoughts into something more positive was a helpful reminder. Getting affirmation that what I'm trying to do is worth it for my kids, and just not feeling so alone in the co-parenting struggles was helpful too.”** -Resilient Co-Parenting participant



Parents reported a wide variety of useful takeaways related to the three focus points of Parents Forever.



### Parental well-being, including:

- Managing anger
- Prioritizing mental health
- Strengthening support networks



### Co-parenting relationships, including:

- Keeping kids out of the middle
- Using effective communication
- Managing conflict



### Parent-child relationships, including:

- Learning how children are impacted by divorce at different ages
- Helping children cope with stress
- Recognizing emotions