

HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO CO-PARENT WITH THIS JERK?

For starters, quit calling him or her a jerk.

So here you are, divorced from this person whom you married and fully intended to live with happily ever after. Turns out, this person is less than what you expected. To make matters worse, you had a child or children with this person. Now you're stuck with each other for the rest of your lives.

It will surely be a long, grueling life if you choose to live it full of anger and resentment towards your ex-spouse. I tell my clients that the quicker they accept that this other parent is not going away, the quicker they will be able to move on with their lives. One way to make it more palatable to deal with this person is to think of your kids. Your kids don't see you as Petitioner and Respondent, just Mom and Dad. Nothing upsets a child more than anything than seeing Mom and Dad fighting.

A friend of mine who teaches co-parenting classes poses it this way:

- Would you jump in front of a car for your kids? Sure, you bet.
- Would you give your child one of your kidneys? Absolutely.
- Would you get along with your ex for your kids? Oh, come on! Anything but that!

So your ex won't go away and won't die. It looks like you're going to have to put up with this person. Trust me, you will get to a point where your ex won't bother you as much. I liken it to a game of tug of war where you each have an end of the rope and are pulling away at it. Suddenly, you get the idea to simply let go of the rope. You don't want to play anymore. There's a great deal of freedom in letting go of the rope.

A counselor once told me to treat my ex like the clerk at the local convenience store. When you're checking out, you don't ask the clerk who he's sleeping with or where he's been, do you? Do the same with your ex. Whomever your ex is dating or married to, remember that you don't get a vote in the matter unless your child is legitimately in danger.

Just keep in mind that it will get better over time. You and your ex's wounds will heal and, you never know, you might actually end up friends after all. Fighting like this over the years will definitely take its toll on your mind and your body and that's not good for your kids. They need you now more than any other time in their lives. You both may get to a point where you've beat each other up so badly that you both throw in the towel and cry Uncle. When you get to that point, you might just realize that it's not just all about you.