



Your Exercise Responses, David

Exercise A - Benjy's perspective

Benjy:

Benjy is an amazing boy for his insightfulness, kindness, and potential. He'll turn 11 soon, but so may people comment on "what an old soul" he is. He greets friends, family, adults, and everyone with an interest in them and their happiness. He expresses thanks with spoken words and even notes. He can be a tough athlete with his friends (especially in soccer and hockey), but he can also care about anyone who's down. He says he wants to be either a research scientist to find the sure to different diseases or a veterinarian for his love of animals. He works hard in school and everywhere. This has been an extraordinarily hard year on him because of the mistakes Kendra and I have made in letting our anger at each other spill over.

Benjy's losses:

Benjy's reactions and problems from parent conflict:

Benjy bends over backwards to try to absorb the hurt that we have dumped into each other's lives and into our home. Benjy's face will show such terror and sadness when we do this. He won't complain, instead pulling all that hurt into himself. He used to try to fix things (trying to distract us, trying to get us to talk about something else, whatever). More recently, he goes to his room, where I've sometimes heard him crying. He's talked to his one aunt about all this, and it's been devastating to think we've done to him what has happened to the 3 sisters on the video on this website. I know Kendra and I haven't meant to cause this hurt. But we have.

Changes you think Benjy would like to see in his parents' interaction:

He'd just like us to be civil and decent. He'd like us to speak with kindness and be open to each other's ideas on how to move forward. He'd like not to have to be scared or embarrassed about how we will act when other people are around.

Exercise B - Ten good memories and compliments to share with Benjy

- Mom was the most responsible person among all our college friends. She was probably responsible for about 5 of us getting through school who otherwise would have failed. Yes, me included!
- Mom has always been special in the ways she's found to share good news. And the best example (which I used to tell you about when you were little) was when she told me she was pregnant with you. We were overcome with joy.
- Wasn't Mom the kindest and most caring person in the world when Grandpa Jake was failing? So many people thought Grandpa should be in a professional home because of how much attention he needed. But Mom wouldn't hear of it.
- Mom has always made sure your birthdays and holidays were the best.
- You get your brains from Mom—thank the Lord!
- When I see how you are with your friends (funny, encouraging, and appreciated by everyone), I can't help but think of how Mom has always been with her friends. You get so much of your caring side from Mom.
- You know Mom is the only reason we have two dogs. I had so many doubts this could work. But she knew you'd be a great caretaker for Norm and Daisy.
- Every time I see you go out of your way to help someone (which is so often), I see how you walk in Mom's footsteps.
- I love how Mom encourages you in everything. Your school, your hockey and soccer, and just being you. Mom says it's easy to encourage you because you always want to do great things, but still it's wonderful I can always know she will be the best guide in the world for you.
- Mom called me after using this website, and she cried (and got me crying) over wanting to do better for you. And we will.

Exercise C - Ways we make times together as good as possible

To complete this we encourage you (if you haven't done so already) to make a copy now of the Child Safety Zone Pledge.

- For parents with more than one child, click [HERE](#).
- For parents with a daughter, click [HERE](#).
- For parents with a son, click [HERE](#).

Few things are as important to children of divorce as what they see of their parents' interaction. Again, without faultfinding, describe here what Benjy has seen lately when he sees his parents together.

This has been a problem. Kendra and I (for reasons I think we both regret) stayed together in the house much too long. This year has been a nightmare. We finally agreed about 2 weeks ago I would, move out, and I'll be doing that a week from now. I'm hopeful some of these ideas will help us do this right. Kendra called me crying after doing this website work and asked me to do it ASP. I think we can use these ideas.

What suggestions do you have for any useful improvements in what Benjy sees and hears in your interaction?

I'm 100% committed to doing this as well as we can. Benjy isn't asking anything unreasonable. He just wants us to be decent and grown up. I love this Child Safety Zone Pledge, and I'm actually looking forward to working with Kendra on this. We can say "Hi!" We can save hard topics for times when Benjy isn't around. I'm sorry (and a little ashamed) we weren't doing this all along.

Exercise D - Mapping our future

1 Putting Benjy's Needs First

- a. We will remember: (Choose all that you think can help)
- that Benjy's needs are especially great at this time,
 - that most of those needs are ones only we, his parents, can meet,
 - that he deserves for us to make a priority of meeting those needs, and
 - that pursuing Benjy's needs will likely benefit us as well.
- b. For all these reasons, we will pay the closest attention to all of the following needs of Benjy. Choose all that you think can help—and use the last box to mention any additional needs you think Benjy has.
- His need for a good relationship with each of us (meaning a relationship that is regular, joyful, and admiring).
 - His need for us to support his good relationship with—and good opinion of—each of us.
 - His need for our good relationship with each other as his parents (meaning a relationship that is as safe, respectful, and cooperative as possible).
 - His need to see his parents happy and healthy.
 - His need for our help with his feelings of deep loss, grief, and fear.
 - His need to know that children do not cause problems between their parents.
 - His need to know that children cannot control their parents' decision whether to be together or apart.
 - His need for our support of his other important relationships (with grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and others important to him).
 - His need for our mature handling of our adult responsibilities (including peacefully solving all our separation and co-parenting tasks).
 - His need: ~~feel free to add any additional needs you believe he has at this time:~~
 - I would add: Benjy's need to hear Kendra and me say (maybe together) that all this is in service a better life for all of us AND THAT THE FUTURE WILL BE COMPLETELY DIFFERENT FROM THE LAST YEAR.

2 Special Help

When it comes to needing special help to succeed as co-parents: (choose one of the two choices below)

- a. We don't require any special outside help:
- b. We could use outside help, including the following (check all that you think can help).
- Court assistance (please describe this possible help if you wish)
 - Domestic abuse or violence (please describe this possible help if you wish)
 - Counseling for us or Benjy (please describe this possible help if you wish)

I think Kendra and I could use a little bit of counseling to help us execute on these ideas. We probably could succeed purely on our own, but I don't think we should decline some help—the stakes are so high.

- Mediation (please describe this possible help if you wish)
- Other (please describe this possible help if you wish)

3 Specific Steps We'll Take

(Click on the ones you think can help.)

We'll take the following specific steps toward our co-parenting success.

- We will copy and review our website work to see that we're observing all the Commitments we chose as important to Benjy.
- We will merge our Commitments and pay special attention to the ones we both selected as important to Benjy.
- If we have trouble carrying through with the Commitments we chose, we will reach out for whatever counseling, child-focused mediation, or other help we need to succeed in our co-parenting.

To succeed as soon and as well as possible, we'll avoid the following from the "Nix 6" list.

- We don't argue with each other.
- We don't hold on to old resentments.
- We don't look to each other as opponents in anything.
- We don't look to our legal rights to solve what could be solved by common sense and our love for Benjy.
- We don't do anything that creates unnecessary insecurity or suspicion in each other.
- We don't forget our good integrity, sense of humor, or love for Benjy.

To succeed as soon and as well as possible, we'll do the following from the "Fix 6" list.

- We enjoy and admire Benjy.
- We live by the Child Safety Zone—making all times Benjy sees us together or hears us speaking entirely positive.
- We regularly share with Benjy good things about his other parent.
- We celebrate with Benjy what he gets to do with his other parent.
- We regularly and cheerfully encourage Benjy to call his other parent.
- We promptly share all child-related information with each other.

Any other ideas we have for succeeding in raising and supporting Benjy from our separate homes.

4 Our Decision-Making on Major Child Matters

We will choose the decision-making model that is best for us. (Choose one of the following—and feel free to fill in any additional ideas you think will help you succeed in good decision-making for Benjy.)

- A. We are mature and safe enough in our interaction—and focused well on Benjy's needs—that we choose to use joint decision-making. This means that we will:

- Treat each other as partners rather than competitors—and treat our differing opinions as assets rather than problems,
- Promptly share all the child-related information with each other and make the major decisions in Benjy's life together in the same respectful way we would use if we were happily together,
- Respect that there will always be some differences in the way our separate households run, and
- Lead all new partners and other family members to understand that we are a team for Benjy—a team we expect them to respect and support.
- Other features of our joint decision-making:

B. There are reasons that joint decision-making would not be best in our circumstances, so one of us... will be making the major decisions in Benjy's life. The amount of communication between us on these decisions will depend on the degree of safety and cooperativeness between us. Other features of our decision-making:

- C. We will use a different decision-making arrangement. (Describe here.)

5 Parenting Time

We will choose the parenting time model that is best for our circumstances. (Choose one of the following—and feel free to fill in any additional ideas you think will help you succeed in giving Benjy the gift of both parents' support of his good relationship with both of his parents.)

- Because of the excellent way we relate and the physical closeness of our homes, we will make our own parenting time arrangements as we go along.

I really feel we can do this. Neither of us wants Benjy to be without a mom or dad regularly involved in his life.

- We relate well and will make adjustments whenever needed. However, as a help to our scheduling, we will start with the following schedule (including for school weeks, vacation weeks, birthdays, holidays, and other special occasions):

We will use the following parenting time schedule (including for school weeks, vacation weeks, birthdays, holidays, and other special occasions) and, except for true emergencies, will live by that schedule:

- We will use another arrangement. (Please describe.)

6 Other Arrangements for Us to Make.

If we have additional arrangements to make or issues to resolve (financial, personal, or parenting), we'll do so maturely and in ways that help Benjy feels proud of his family.

At this time, our respectful attention is required on the following.

I want to work with Kendra to make this time of separation as reassuring as possible to Benjy—and ourselves.

My other concerns (and my ideas for addressing them) are these.

I want to be sure we have lawyers who will help us do this right—OR NO LAWYERS AT ALL.

7 What We'll Be Telling Benjy.

In the days and years ahead, it may help Benjy to hear how you'll be making things better. Write here your idea on what you'll be telling him. Here are some possibilities—but feel free to add of your own.

Write some ideas about what you can tell them. Here are some possibilities. Write below any that fit for you—and feel free to add ones of your own as well.

- Both of us will always love you, and we want you to love both of us.
- No one is breaking any connections with you. No one ever will.
- You did not cause any part of the breakup or conflict.
- You could not have prevented the divorce.
- You cannot get Mom and Dad back together, but we can all share and talk about your feelings about everything.
- We want you to tell us what you're feeling and what you need.
- Everybody will be okay, and things will be better in the future.
- You will have plenty of regular contact with both of us.

- Things are going to be better STARTING RIGHT NOW.

8 How Benjy Will Be Better Off

As you use your chosen Commitments and other ideas on this website and draft a Co-Parenting Plan (a) what will Benjy first notice and (b) what difference will this make to him?

Benjy will be better off in every way. Literally. I can't think of a single thing about his life that won't be better when we live up to these Commitments and Pledges.

9 How We Will Be Better Off

How do you think you yourself will be better off?

Geez. I guess I'd say the same about me. I'll be better off in every way. I hope I can learn I don't have to argue with Kendra, even if she chooses to. But I think we can succeed at this in every way.