

Parent Transition Self-Assessment

This self-assessment can give you a picture of your success in handling a family transition like separation or divorce. It measures partly how you yourself are doing and partly how you and your co-parent together are doing.

For each of the 15 items below, pick *the one response* that best fits in your case. There's no grade. This assessment is for you, so be as honest as possible.

Each item also comes with a Bonus you should circle and claim for yourself if you've progressed that far.

First, one quick exercise before beginning, just to help you remember that you've done many things well. Write here some caring thing you've done to shield your child (or children) from the hurt of parent conflict. It might be a time you spoke highly of your co-parent, withheld criticism, or defended your co-parent to your children—any of the times you made helping your child a priority over the urge to lash out.

1. During pick-ups, drop-offs, and other times the kids see us (their parents) together:

- a) We often fight or have icy interaction. (0 points)
- b) We sometimes fight or have icy interaction. (1 point)
- c) We are pretty mechanical—we never fight, but the children can tell the difference between the way we relate and the way courteous people relate. (2 points)
- d) We are consistently courteous. (4 points)

Bonus #1. Claim a Bonus if you can say—or would someday like to be able to say: *We use times when we're all together to show our children they have consistently courteous and cooperative parents. These times belong to our children, and we would never poison any of them with conflict between us.*

2. When our children think of the next time their parents are together in public:

- a) They probably wonder if there'll be a scene. (0 points)
- b) They probably think we'll be at least courteous. (2 points)
- c) They know for certain that we'll be courteous and that they'll have nothing to be embarrassed about. (4 points)

Bonus #2. Claim a Bonus if you can say—or would someday like to be able to say: *Our children know they can count on us to keep their lives conflict-free. They'd be saddened to think other children ever had to see or be embarrassed by parent fights.*

3. Our children would say that their parents:

- a) Have little respect for each other. (0 points)
- b) Have some respect for each other. (2 points)
- c) Have a lot of respect for each other. (4 points)

Bonus #3. Claim a Bonus if you can say—or would someday like to be able to say: *Our children know that we have **at least** as much respect for each other's opinions as we do for anyone else's; they often see us asking for, and constructively discussing, each other's ideas.*

4. Our children hear me say something good about their other parent:

- a) Never. (0 points)
- b) About once a year. (1 point)
- c) About once a month. (3 points)
- d) At least once a week. (4 points)

Bonus #4. Claim a Bonus if you can say—or would someday like to be able to say: *Our children know (because I regularly tell them) that I know many of their best qualities come from their other parent.*

5. When it comes to having peace and predictability with my co-parent for the sake of our children:

- a) Forget it—there's no having peace and predictability with a person like that. (0 points)
- b) We want to achieve peace and predictability for the sake of our children, but we don't usually succeed. (1 point)
- c) We usually succeed. (3 points)
- d) We always succeed. (4 points)

Bonus #5. Claim a Bonus if you can say—or would someday like to be able to say: *Either my children have a right to a good childhood, or I have a right to fight with their other parent. And for me, my children’s right to a good childhood wins out—every time.*

6. When it comes to remembering that our children are deeply affected by the way we (their parents) relate:

- a) I probably haven’t given enough thought to that, because anyone seeing us relate would conclude we don’t respect each other. (0 points)
- b) I sometimes remember that my children are deeply affected by the way we relate. (1 point)
- c) Now that I’m learning more about the effects of parent conflict on children, I’m committed to making courtesy with my co-parent something our children can count on. (3 points)
- d) My children have been through enough, and I would never add to their burden by having anything but a courteous relationship with their other parent. (4 points)

Bonus #6. Claim a Bonus if you can say—or would someday like to be able to say: *It’s sad that my children don’t have the perfect childhood with an intact family. They certainly deserve to have the benefits of consistent and predictable goodwill, respect, and courtesy between their parents.*

7. Rate your agreement with this statement: “*Children will experience any attack between their parents as an attack on them.*”

- a) I completely disagree. (0 points)
- b) I mostly disagree. (1 point)
- c) I mostly agree. (3 points)
- d) I completely agree. (4 points)

Bonus #7. Claim a Bonus if you can say—or would someday like to be able to say: *I make it a habit to reflect on how the world would look and feel to someone of my children’s ages. As I look through a child’s eyes, and as I remember my own fears as a child, I realize that parent fighting has no place in my children’s lives.*

8. Helping my children have a good opinion of their other parent is:

- a) Nothing that would help my children—their other parent is not a good person. (0 points)
- b) No concern of mine—the kids will just have to make up their own minds. (1 point)
- c) Somewhat important for me. (3 points)
- d) A high priority for me. (4 points)

Bonus #8. Claim a Bonus if you can say—or would someday like to be able to say: *A child knows he's half whatever good or lack of good lives in his mother and half whatever good or lack of good lives in his father. I have the greatest hope that our children will always think well of their other parent.*

9. When I'm with friends:

- a) Criticism of my co-parent is pretty commonplace. (0 points)
- b) Criticism of my co-parent happens occasionally. (1 point)
- c) Criticism of my co-parent is rare. (3 points)
- d) Criticism of my co-parent never occurs. (4 points)

Bonus #9. Claim a Bonus if you can say—or would someday like to be able to say: *In polite but clear terms, I would never hesitate to stop any bad-mouthing of my co-parent. It wouldn't help either a child of mine or me.*

10. When my co-parent makes a request or suggestion, my first reaction is usually:

- a) Resentment. (0 points)
- b) Suspicion. (1 point)
- c) A wish that my requests and suggestions be taken seriously. (2 points)
- d) The same open-mindedness I'd feel about anyone else's request or suggestion. (4 points)

Bonus #10. Claim a Bonus if you can say—or would someday like to be able to say: *I welcome requests and suggestions from my co-parent. I don't have a monopoly on good ideas—and hearing and working with my co-parent is always a chance to build the world of goodwill we all want our children to live in. We won't always have the same ideas, of course, and the goal is to make sure we have the kind of relationship where we resolve together the issues affecting our children.*

11. When my co-parent and I have differences of opinion:

- a) We tend to get into a fight about not just the matter at hand but other issues as well. (0 points)
- b) We get into a fight but manage to keep it to the matter at hand. (2 points)
- c) I make concessions over small things to serve the bigger picture. (4 points)

Bonus #11. Claim a Bonus if you can say—or would someday like to be able to say: *It hurts a little to remember that we used to fight over nonsense. We were probably fighting because we hurt, and it wasn't even over the topic we thought it was over. Today we remember that our love for our children is greater than any issue we could ever have with each other.*

12. When a child of ours has a problem:

- a) My first reaction is to blame my co-parent. (0 points)
- b) My first reaction is to blame my co-parent, but I can usually come to see the bigger picture and the need to work on a solution. (2 points)
- c) I immediately start thinking about how to solve the problem. (4 points)

Bonus #12. Claim a Bonus if you can say—or would someday like to be able to say: *My first priority is to try to solve the problem with help and discussion from my co-parent. Not only does this give me the advantage of help in facing the problem, but it shows the children that they have a consistent team working for them.*

13. If a child of ours ever wanted to “play us against each other,” or cause a split in how we were cooperating, the child would find it:

- a) Easy. (0 points)
- b) Doable with some effort. (1 point)
- c) Hard. (2 points)
- d) Impossible. (4 points)

Bonus #13. Claim a Bonus if you can say—or would someday like to be able to say: *It'd be easier for our children to get a pork chop past a pit bull than start a quarrel between us. We know that what our children really most need (and probably most want) is cooperation and goodwill between their parents, even if that keeps them from being able to play us against each other.*

14. We argue over things that occurred more than 6 months ago:

- a) Often. (0 points)
- b) Periodically. (1 point)
- c) Rarely. (2 points)
- d) Never. (4 points)

Bonus #14. Claim a Bonus if you can say—or would someday like to be able to say: *One of the great benefits of having decided to build peace for the sake of our children is that we developed the habit of not fighting.*

15. When my co-parent speaks or acts negatively, I usually:

- a) Look for some way to get even. (0 points)
- b) Find myself joining right in. (1 point)
- c) Do my best not to respond in kind. (3 points)
- d) Remain focused on their need for courtesy and predictability in their world. (4 points)

Bonus #15. Claim a Bonus if you can say—or would someday like to be able to say: *I know that everyone, my co-parent included, has bad days. Knowing that they can happen, I'm prepared to save the day when I need to. The stakes are too high to do otherwise, and keeping the children's right to a peaceful childhood as my first priority is something I am proud to do.*

Scoring

Make sure you've chosen one response for each of the 15 items, and then add together all the points from those responses. And count up your Bonuses as well. So, your total might be 42 points and 2 Bonuses.

Here are some ideas on evaluating your progress.

- I. Probably the best goal *is to make progress*. A score of 28 and 1 Bonus might be the best you can do when you are in the middle of a difficult divorce and first learning the idea and importance of cooperative co-parenting. Two months later you'll want to be doing a lot better. Try retaking the self-assessment until your children have the benefit of parents with the best possible co-parenting relationship.
- II. Be balanced in judging your progress. *You've likely done many more good things than you realize, and so has your co-parent*. Give yourselves credit. At the same time, you won't want to be content until your children have what other children have: parents who never require their children to pick up the terrible price for parent conflict.
- III. Consider the very real possibility that *your children need you to do better sooner*. While it's always encouraging to hear from parents who say they are doing better, it's a little sad to hear how many of them regret not doing so sooner. Children can carry hurt long after parents have forgotten what their fights were about. What would it mean to your children if you decided to immediately do the things necessary to boost your score by, say, another 12 points and 3 Bonuses?
- IV. Use good resources to make progress. This can include the *Parents Corner* on www.UpToParents.org, a good book, counseling, and, of course, continuing to see things through your children's eyes.