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## How To Co-Parent With Your Ex's New Partner, According To Experts

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Family relationships can be tricky, and chances are, yours comes with its own unique sets of challenges. But things can get exceptionally complicated once your ex's significant other gets involved. While the easy thing to do would be to just completely avoid this person altogether, it might not be what's in the best interest of your kids, especially if it looks like your ex and their new bae are getting serious. So, if you're wondering how to have a good relationship with your co-parent's significant other, you've come to the right place.

I checked in with clinical psychologist and Director at [Curry Psychology Group](#) Dr. Shannon J. Curry, family therapist of [Masion Vie in Louisiana](#) Susan Harrington, and co-parenting counselor and coach Susan Haworth of [Cambio Coaching](#) to see how moms can navigate these treacherous relationships.

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The good news is, as an adult, you are completely in charge of your half of this relationship. Meaning how well you get along with your ex's new partner is, in large part, up to you. Harrington says relationships work best when you focus on "communication, consideration, and care." For most people, this is easier said than done (especially when it comes to your ex), but it's a relief to know that there are things you can do to make sure you're taking responsibility and doing your best in this tricky and potentially emotionally charged relationship.

## 1. Practice Empathy

When emotions are running high, it's not always easy to see things from the other person's perspective. But if you're trying to cultivate a healthy relationship with the new person in your child's life, you may want to consider what it's like to be them. Dr. Curry explains to Romper, "Imagine how you might feel (worried, nervous, insecure, fearful, hopeful) if you were in the new spouse's position; meeting someone who not only shared a life with your partner, but also shared children with them." Knowing that you share a history with your ex that they never will can be intimidating, so try to practice some grace.

## 2. Keep Your Negativity In Check

Keep the negative thoughts (and words) to a minimum. You're all human, and you all have feelings that you're completely entitled to. But remember, your attitude will affect your kids, as well as your behavior – perhaps without you even realizing it. "Watch out for common negative thinking traps like fortune-telling (predicting that the future will be bad based on a current conflict), emotional reasoning (believing that something scary is happening if you feel afraid), catastrophizing (imagining that the implications of a problem are far more serious and lasting than they actually are, using terms like "always," "never," "must," "should"), and black-and-white thinking (assuming that something is either good or bad without compromise or allowing for differing perspectives)," Dr. Curry says. "Keeping your negative thoughts in check could help you be open to more positive communication and teamwork with your ex and their new spouse."

The most important thing to remember is that the quality of your relationships impacts your kids. "The relationship one has with the new partner of an ex will often reflect the quality of one's relationship with that ex," Haworth says. "If the relationship with an ex is cordial and healthy, having a cordial and healthy relationship with the new partner is much easier. If, on the other hand, resentments and hurt feelings linger, having a good relationship with his/her new partner is more of a challenge."

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## 3. Work On Your Communication

Communication with your ex may be challenging enough without throwing their new partner into the mix, but it's important. "Communication is paramount," Harrington says, but she acknowledges that depending on who you're talking to, what the other person is saying, and the solution for any situation can be tricky, "especially if the parents continue to be argumentative and their behaviors seem to say they are still living in the past." So instead, focus your communication efforts on finding solutions instead of playing the blame game and harping on past resentments. Stop worrying about who you're talking to and remember *why* you're talking to them.

## 4. Be A Good Listener

Practicing good listening skills is hard enough as it is, which can make it all the more challenging when it comes to your ex's new partner. "Listening with compassion, consideration, and care gives us the ability to allow the new party to form his or her own direct relationship with the other parent, providing a safe, caring connection for the children who are 'in the middle,'" Harrington says. No parent wants to put their kids in the middle of a tumultuous relationship, and practicing good listening skills can be key to making sure your relationship runs smoothly. Remember, listen to understand, not to respond.

## 5. Remember, You're A Grown-Up



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Being a grown-up means being able to identify when it's better for you (and your kids) to be the bigger person. It's not always fun, but sometimes it's what needs to happen to keep the peace. **If you're having trouble with this, Dr. Curry**

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suggests, "Look them in the eye, and take a moment to see the person – their humanity and their vulnerability – and then breathe in, noticing yourself relaxing and softening toward the person." Remembering it's important to show respect and be a good example for your kids should be your priority.

"When kids are involved, having a workable relationship is paramount. Being respectful is the only way to build healthy relationships," Haworth says.

## **6. Work On Your Self-Awareness**

Having the self-awareness to understand your own feelings and behaviors isn't easy. "If you are feeling heightened emotions while interacting with your co-parent's new partner, try to identify the thought or worry that is behind your distress," Curry says. Understanding the root of your inner conflict can help you move the relationship in a more positive direction.

## **7. Be A Good Example**

An extension of being a grown-up is leading by example, and as a parent, that is your number one job. Take a moment to think about what kind of environment is best for your kids and lead them through the best you can. "Modeling clear, consistent communication teaches your child that you want to hear him or her, as well as resolve disagreements," Harrington says. "Care is an act that must be modeled to be learned."

## **8. Adjust Your Expectations**

You should also realize that the relationship may not go the way you want it to, and that's OK. "Taking a hard look at one's expectations will help put these relationships in perspective. Expecting everyone to enjoy each other as one big happy family [may be] unrealistic," Haworth says.

## **9. Don't Be Afraid To Establish Boundaries**

While maintaining the peace and being the bigger person is important, it's equally important to make sure you establish healthy boundaries for you and for your kids. Haworth gives an example: "If the new partner is trashing you in front of your children (or stepchildren), this needs to be addressed quickly with the perpetrator. If the new partner is overstepping boundaries (such as disciplining your children), this should be addressed privately and compassionately."