

# PROVIDING SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE ON *Coparenting*

In Family Resource Centres



Fédération québécoise des organismes  
communautaires Famille



English version was made possible through the financial support of:



## This document was made possible thanks to the following references.

Cloutier, R., Filion, L., & Timmermans, H. (2018). *Les parents se séparent : comment vivre la crise et aider son enfant*. Montréal, QC: Éditions du CHU Sainte-Justine.

Fédération québécoise des organismes communautaires Famille (2023). *Reference and Facilitation Toolkit on Autonomous Community Action for and with Families*. St-Lambert, QC.

Regroupement pour la valorisation de la paternité (2021). *Un coparent : c'est toujours gagnant*. Accessed July 29, 2021, on [rvpaternite.org/coparents](http://rvpaternite.org/coparents).

Vallerand, N. (2020). *La coparentalité: quand les parents font équipe!* Accessed July 29, 2021, on [naitreetgrandir.com](http://naitreetgrandir.com).

Regroupement pour la valorisation de la paternité (2020). *Guide d'adaptation des pratiques aux réalités paternelles*. Montréal, QC: Regroupement pour la valorisation de la paternité, programme PAPPa.

This brochure, titled in French *Soutenir et accompagner la coparentalité dans les organismes communautaires Famille*, was translated into English by the CHSSN with the agreement and review of FQOCF. All content has been carefully translated in order to preserve the essence of the French version of this brochure. Only the "Additional Resources for Parents" and "Additional Resources for Children" sections have been modified to better meet the needs of English-speaking families.



Fédération québécoise des organismes  
communautaires Famille



Family resource centres (FRCs) are resources that offer a range of services aimed at all members of families, from welcoming spaces to mutual assistance, support, enrichment, development, and community involvement opportunities.

**FRCs recognize that mothers and fathers are the first and primary educators in their children's development.**

These organizations provide flexible support and guidance aimed at **promoting the parental role and child-rearing at every stage** of family life. FRCs offer a safe, nonjudgmental, and supportive space where a child's parents can come together as a team, regardless of their family situation.

# Who

## IS THE TOOL FOR?

This tool is intended for people working in FRCs (management, workers, board and committee, parents facilitators, and volunteers) who want to **learn about and develop an awareness of the coparenting approach in their prevention practice with families.**

# Why

## THIS TOOL?

- To provide FRCs with a shared vision and common language when it comes to the coparenting approach.
- To support reflective practices among people working in FRCs on how to integrate the coparenting approach into their daily practice working with families.

This companion tool is intended to be both an informative and reflective experience, rooted at the core of family resource centres practices.

**KEY:**



STORIES FROM PRACTICE



WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

# WHAT IS *Coparenting?*

Coparenting occurs when two **coparents collaborate to raise a child<sup>1</sup>**, ensuring **physical, emotional, and developmental needs are met**.

Coparents are recognized as the adults who share the responsibilities of raising a child.

Coparenting can take many forms: it may involve parents living together, sharing custody, same-sex parents, adoptive parents, legal guardians, or even grandparents.

To establish a coparenting arrangement that works for them and is beneficial to their children, mothers and fathers can work together on the four main dimensions of their coparenting:

• Communication • Acknowledgement of the other parent • Consistent parenting • Task sharing



**"The family is a shared emotional and social experience between parents and children, where each person teaches and learns from the other."<sup>2</sup>**

Coparenting is part of that experience.



## **A good coparenting relationship...<sup>3</sup>**

- Reduces stress for both parents and supports their mental well-being.
- Enhances the quality of parent-child interactions and strengthens attachment bonds.
- Boosts couple happiness when parents are in a relationship.
- Encourages fathers to be more involved, available, and sensitive to their children's needs.
- Lowers the risk of children developing behavioural problems and adjustment difficulties in the event of a separation.



## 1st DIMENSION OF COPARENTING: *Communication<sup>4</sup>*

Communication is key to coparenting. Good communication helps people understand each other and stay on the same page.

In coparenting, the devil (misunderstandings, conflicts, etc.) is often in the details of everyday life.

When verbalized and understood, these conflicts and misunderstandings can be defused more easily. Factors such as knowing when to talk about issues and how to manage one's own emotions can help promote optimal communication.



### **What do you think are the key components of good communication?**

For more information on the topic, visit [rvpaternite.org/coparents](http://rvpaternite.org/coparents)

<sup>1</sup> In order to simplify the text, it was decided to refer, in the singular, to the child who unites the parents. Parents can have several children together.

<sup>2</sup> Taken from "Families, A Collective Wealth!" included in the FQOCF's *Reference and Facilitation Toolkit on Autonomous Community Action for and with Families*.

<sup>3</sup> Diane Dubeau, Department of Psychoeducation. UQO (Université du Québec en Outaouais). presentation at CISSS Laurentides, October 2018.

<sup>4</sup> The definitions of the four dimensions of coparenting are from the [Regroupement sur la valorisation de la paternité](http://Regroupement sur la valorisation de la paternité) website, accessed on July 29, 2021.



## 2nd DIMENSION OF COPARENTING: Acknowledgement

Being acknowledged as a parent by the other is a fundamental need for both mothers and fathers. Every parent is unique, with their own strengths and challenges.

The goal is for coparents to acknowledge each other's contributions and collaborate in a way that respects their individual differences, in a non-judgemental way.



**What's a good way to help a parent acknowledge the strengths and challenges of the other parent and what are the benefits?**

For more information on the topic, visit [rvpaternite.org/coparents](http://rvpaternite.org/coparents)



## 3rd DIMENSION OF COPARENTING: Consistent Parenting

Consistent parenting occurs when coparents share a unified vision for raising their child, agree on expectations, and establish common ground rules. This approach prevents mixed messages—whether through words or actions—that could confuse the child.

No matter which methods coparents choose, the key is to ensure their actions align with the shared goals they've set.



**What key factors should parents consider when establishing a code of conduct, and what are the benefits of doing so?**

For more information on the topic, visit [rvpaternite.org/coparents](http://rvpaternite.org/coparents)



## 4th DIMENSION OF COPARENTING: Task Sharing

Women still tend to shoulder a larger share of household and family responsibilities than men. The gap is thankfully narrowing, especially among younger parents.

There is growing awareness of the importance of balancing tasks more fairly and recognizing the mental load that comes with it.

There's no one-size-fits-all approach to dividing responsibilities. Coparents need to find what works best for their partnership, remaining flexible and open to how the other person handles tasks.

*Note: The different aspects of coparenting aren't fixed; they should be regularly reassessed as the child grows and the family dynamic evolves.*



**By viewing the family as a small business, how can coparents become more aware of all the tasks need to keep it running smoothly?**

**How can coparents move beyond stereotypes and divide these tasks based on their individual strengths, skills, and interests?**

For more information on the topic, visit [rvpaternite.org/coparents](http://rvpaternite.org/coparents)

**When supporting parents who are facing challenges in their coparenting situation, you might wonder if there are specific strategies to assist them.**

What does teamwork mean in this context? What can two parents work on to improve their teamwork?



**"In our FRC, we want to support parents so they can reclaim their power and their role. They can develop critical thinking regarding the information they receive and make their own choices about how to act within their families.."<sup>5</sup>**

## WHAT IS THE COPARENTING APPROACH *in an FRC?*

People working in FRCs that promote a coparenting approach **recognize its value and incorporate it into their daily work with both mothers and fathers.**

They understand the important and engaging role that both parents play in sharing and managing responsibilities to support the health, development, and well-being of their children. While they acknowledge the importance of teamwork between coparents, they also recognize the challenges that come with it—coparenting isn't always easy!

One way FRCs can integrate a coparenting approach is by addressing key topics such as communication between parents, task-sharing, and setting mutual expectations in their activities.



**How do you promote the coparenting approach at your FRC?**



**An involved father benefits:**

- **His child:** Improved ability to manage everyday stress, along with better social, cognitive, academic, and psychological development
- **The coparent:** Reduced stress from child-rearing responsibilities and enriched spouses/partners relationships
- **Himself:** Enhanced self-esteem, a stronger sense of competence in his parental role, and greater spouse/partner satisfaction



<sup>5</sup> Taken from "Enriching The Parental Experience, at the Core of Family Resource Centre Practices", page 18, included in the FQOC's *Reference and Facilitation Toolkit on Autonomous Community Action for and with Families*.



# Supporting COPARENTING IN AN FRC

## Popular education about coparenting

Coparenting is often seen as a form of team work between mothers and fathers, but it involves much more than that. What does teamwork really mean in this context, and how can you collaborate with your partner on this journey?

In an FRC, a popular education approach—grounded in awareness-raising—can inspire parents to reflect more deeply on coparenting:

- **Keep Children at the Centre:** Suggest that parents keep children at the heart of their discussions.
- **Acknowledge Challenges:** Remind parents that coparenting challenges are a daily reality for everyone, fostering understanding and support.
- **Highlight the Four Dimensions of Coparenting.**

## Supporting the coparenting experience means

- **Speaking positively about the coparent**

The language we use is of the most importance for everyone's well-being in the family. Encourage parents to refer to each other as “the father” or “the mother” of their child, or simply “the other parent,” rather than using terms like “ex-spouse”.

When one parent expresses frustration about the other, gently steer the conversation towards the positive attributes and actions of the other parent.

Advise parents to avoid absolute terms like “always” and “never” when discussing the other parent. For example, instead of saying, “Your father is always late,” consider rephrasing it to focus on specific situations.

**Denigrate (put down)**  
**Insult**  
**Weakness**  
**Contradict**

**Recognize**  
**Respect**  
**Strength**  
**Support**

- **Highlighting the coparent's strengths**

Encourage parents to share their coparent's strengths during discussions. This practice helps validate their individual parenting experiences and fosters a positive perspective.

- **Encouraging parents to engage in conversation about coparenting.**

These dialogues can prompt meaningful reflection and motivate both mothers and fathers to pursue a more fulfilling coparenting relationship.

- **Keeping the child at the core of the discussion**

Remind parents to keep their child at the forefront of their conversations. This focus helps them concentrate on their primary goal—the well-being of their child—rather than getting sidetracked by unrelated issues.



**In your experience, can you identify a situation where you used the approaches above in your work with mothers and fathers?**

# Is Coparenting

## DIFFERENT FOR SEPARATED PARENTS?

**Coparenting occurs regardless of the parents' conjugal status.** Whether in a couple or separated, coparents must collaborate to raise their child and ensure their well-being.

Even after separation, parents **need to maintain a cooperative approach** to coparenting. This involves prioritizing effective communication, acknowledging each other's contributions, parenting consistently, and sharing responsibilities equitably.

**For separated parents, the presence or absence of conflict colours the coparenting relationship.**

### Coparenting as a couple

#### Communication

Communication opportunities regularly take place face-to-face. On a daily basis, they allow parents to capture non-verbal cues.

#### Acknowledgement

It's essential for parents to acknowledge and highlight their coparent's strengths and skills.

#### Consistent parenting

Consistency can be challenging, but it's crucial for coparents to identify clearly which key elements they want to have in their child's upbringing and education. Both parents must commit to these guidelines, which promote the child's well-being and ensure a unified approach. Consistency also helps prevent the child from feeling torn between conflicting loyalties.

#### Task sharing

For parents living together, sharing child-related responsibilities can be more straightforward. Some couples divide tasks based on individual strengths, while others alternate as needed to maintain balance.

### Coparenting as separated parents

#### Communication

Most communication between coparents happens via phone or text message. While convenient, these methods lack non-verbal cues, which can increase the risk of misunderstandings or conflict.

#### Acknowledgement

How acknowledgement is experienced may vary depending on the quality of the relationship between separated coparents. However, it's important to remember that both parents possessed strengths and skills before the separation—strengths they continue to bring to their coparenting roles.

#### Consistent parenting

Consistency can be even more challenging for separated coparents. It's essential that they define clearly the key elements they want in their child's upbringing and education, especially if other significant adults are involved in the child's life in either household. Both coparents must remain committed to upholding these mutually agreed-upon guidelines. This not only supports the child's well-being but also helps reduce the risk of the child feeling caught in conflicting loyalties.

#### Task sharing

While task-sharing may look different for separated coparents, it's still achievable. Identifying and dividing tasks related to the child's well-being—like medical appointments, extracurricular activities, or ensuring the child has clean clothes—can help both parents get a clearer picture of their responsibilities. This improves communication and makes it easier to share the load fairly.



**What are some of the key factors for effective communication between separated coparents? Are they different for coparents living under the same roof?**

KEY FACTORS OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION: THE FOUR PS<sup>6</sup>

- **P**reparation (do not improvise anything)
- **P**roposal (do not impose anything)
- **P**atience (listen)
- **P**erseverance (wait for the right moment, try again)

<sup>6</sup>Lorraine Filion, SW, family mediator and coparenting coach, *Guide destiné aux parents pour restaurer ou maintenir une communication efficace et faire équipe en tant que coparents*, version from August 2021.



# *The Coparenting Charter*

## **A TOOL FOR TALKING ABOUT COPARENTING**

The Coparenting Charter by Harry Timmermans is a tool that can be used with parents who want to work with their coparent to be a better team, regardless of their conjugal status.

1. Each parent believes that the other always makes every effort in the best interest of the child.
2. Each parent believes that the other is always the best possible guardian of the child in case of unforeseen circumstances.
3. Parents will consult each other on major issues concerning the child's development, education, and health, and documents on these topics are accessible to both parents.
4. The parents will share the financial responsibilities for their child according to their respective means.
5. Each parent will foster a positive image of the other parent in their child's eyes.
6. The parents will maintain effective communication with each other regarding the child.
7. The child will have the freedom to express to one parent the love they feel for the other parent.

©Harry Timmermans, M. Ps., psychologist



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES *for Parents*

- ARTICLE** - Vallerand, N. (2020, novembre). *Parenting is a team effort*. Naître et grandir.
- PAMPHLET** - Public Health Agency of Canada. (2016, March). *Because life goes on... helping children and youth live with separation and divorce*
- BOOK** - Bonnell, K. (2017). *The Co-Parenting Handbook: Raising Well-Adjusted and Resilient Kids from Little Ones to Young Adults through Divorce or Separation*. Blue Star Press.
- BOOK** - Pedro-Carroll, J. (2010). *Putting Children First: Proven Parenting Strategies for Helping Children Thrive Through Divorce*. Avery/Penguin Random House.



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES *for Children*

- BOOK** - Masurel, C. (2003). *Two Homes*. Candlewick Press.
- BOOK** - Walsh, M. (2012). *Living with Mum & Living with Dad*. Candlewick Press.
- BOOK** - Stern, Z., & Stern, E. (2008). *Divorce is not the End of the World: Zoe's and Evan's Coping Guide for Kids*. Tricycle Press.
- PODCAST** - Kennedy, B. (2022, février 28). *Divorce Doesn't Mess Kids Up* [Balado]. Good Inside with Dr. Becky.

The suggested resources are provided by the CHSSN for English-speaking families to have access to up-to-date information on the topic in their own language. They are complementary to the resources identified by the FQOCF in the French version of the brochure.



# The FQOCF

Since 1961, the FQOCF has represented, supported, and enhanced the impact and professional development of its membership of over 250 community-based family resource centres (FRCs), promoting their unique expertise in empowering parents as their children's first and primary educators.

With its extensive experience and inspiring leadership, the FQOCF serves as a trusted expert and advisor to decision-makers and influencers across Québec on matters related to families and parenting.

# A Project IN PARTNERSHIP

This tool was developed by the FQOCF in partnership with the Regroupement pour la valorisation de la paternité (RVP) as part of the coparenting campaign.

Several FRCs contributed to its creation, ensuring that it reflects their expertise in supporting coparenting. The tool highlights key elements of the coparenting approach in FRCs, provides practical tips for implementing this approach, and offers a variety of resources.



**Regroupement pour  
la Valorisation de la  
Paternité**



Fédération québécoise des organismes  
communautaires Famille