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The 5 Categories of Co-Parenting

In the Binuclear Family Study (BFS), a national study funded by the National Institute of Mental Health and the University of Wisconsin Graduate School to explore how families change after divorce, Dr. Constance Ahrons concluded that five categories of co-parenting relationships exist. **Why is that important to you?** Because understanding what category you and your co-parent are currently in, you can better strategize where you are going next, and how to get there. In Dr. Ahrons' book, *The Good Divorce*, she describes these five categories. As seen in Tammy Daughtry's book *Co-Parenting Works!* (pg.96)

Application Exercise

Which category do you find yourself in?

- 1.) Pick the category that defines the co-parent dynamic today _____ Date: _____
- 2.) In which category do you think your co-parent would place the two of you today? _____
- 3.) Which category do you think is best for your kids? _____
- 4.) What is today's date? _____ Then, re-evaluate in 6 months. ☁️

If the category you identified as best for your kids is not the one you think best describes the current place you and your ex occupy, how much effort are you willing to expend to move your "best parenting practices" with your co-parent to the level you identified in the final question above?

CATEGORY

- Perfect Pals (*Friends*)
- Cooperative Colleagues (*Business/Parenting Partner*)
- Angry Associates (*Active war*)
- Fiery Foes (*Flashpoint*)
- Dissolved Duos (*Solo parenting*)

WHAT CHILDREN EXPERIENCE

- CONFUSION
- FREEDOM
- FEAR/EMOTIONAL STRESS & ANXIETY
- PARENTIFICATION
- ABANDONEMENT

Experts agree that Cooperative Colleagues is the most healthy co-parenting style for children—and also for co-parents. Some might have thought, at first read, that Perfect Pals seems ideal; but a Perfect Pals relationship between exes is confusing to the children—and, frankly, it's also emotionally confusing to the ex spouses. If you and your former spouse have divorced, then your emotional needs will be met elsewhere, and your family traditions will most likely be adjusted to your new lives. This is one of the hardest parts of starting new family legacies.

The key to successfully developing a Cooperative Colleagues relationship is for both co-parents to “compartmentalize” the relationship—to understand your reasons for working cooperatively. It isn't so that the two of you can help meet each other's emotional needs. It isn't to give the two of you a chance to share the intimate personal details of your new lives or to argue and fight at every ball game & ballet recital. The purpose is to co-parent your children forward into the most healthy and well-adjusted adults possible. To do so, you'll need to discuss schedules and financial matters. You'll need to have searching and thoughtful discussions of discipline and boundaries for each stage of life your children pass through, from potty training ideas to when they get their first cell phone or set of car keys. ***Please never give your child a cell phone or electronic device that allows them to get on-line before you discuss the game plan with your co-parent! The internet can be an educational experience or allow a child to roam the unhealthy landscape leading to problems with pornography. Great kids find porn accidentally if co-parents are not pro-actively working together BEFORE giving an electronic device to the shared children.*

Co-parenting is real life, lived out in two homes by two caring co-parents who are committed to playing the game on the same TEAMM. The end adult matters most.

HELPFUL WEBSITES FOR SCREEN TIME:

- **Covenant Eyes:** <https://www.covenanteyes.com/> ****use code "coparent" to receive a discount!**

- **Bark.us:** <https://www.bark.us/>

- **Screen Strong:** <https://screenstrong.com/>

01 Perfect Pals

(High interactors—high communicators). Perfect pals still call themselves good friends, even after divorce. Perfect pals stayed well connected, asking about each other's lives, activities, and feelings. They even asked for advice and helped each other out, as friends would. One couple in the study even continued to own a business together after the divorce. Perfect pals stayed connected with each other's extended families. All perfect pals had joint custody; some even spent many holidays together. A common pattern was that these couples followed this type of relationship early after the divorce, but grew more distant, though still friendly, as time passed.

02 Cooperative Colleagues

(Moderate interactors—high communicators). More of the couples in the study fell into this group than any other. Unlike perfect pals, cooperative colleagues did not consider themselves to be friends. Holidays were split according to a mutual agreement—not spent together. Cooperative colleagues talk often, always about the children or possibly extended family, not about their personal lives or feelings. In some cases, the dads had full custody, with the mother having visitation. Cooperative colleagues seem to have the ability to compartmentalize their relationship: They didn't confuse the issues connected to their marital relationship and those related to their parenting relationship. Their desire to provide the very best for their children trumped their own personal issues. Five years after divorce, 75 percent of these couples remained cooperative colleagues, even though most had remarried by that point.

03 Angry Associates

(Moderate interactors—low communicators). Twenty-five percent of the sample were angry associates. Instead of being able to compartmentalize their anger about the past, they let it spread into related and even non-related issues. With each other they were generally tense and hostile, or even openly conflictual. Most of the custody arrangements were for sole custody. Even five years after divorce most couples were dissatisfied with how things were going. By that time, one-third had transitioned into cooperative colleagues, one-third to fiery foes, and one-third remained angry associates.

04 Fiery Foes

(Low interactors—low communicators). Twenty-five percent of the sample were fiery foes—ex-spouses who rarely interacted. When they did talk, they usually ended up fighting. Their divorces tended to be highly litigious, and their legal battles often continued for many years after the divorce. They were not able to work out arrangements for the children without arguing, and many relied on third parties (lawyer, friend, or child) to settle their disagreements over each issue as it arose. Fiery foes were unable to remember the good times in their marriage; instead, they clung to the wrongs done to each other and even exaggerated them in order to keep building their case. Many of these ex-spouses exchanged their children at the door without saying a word.

05 Dissolved Duos

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