**

**Dr Todor Proykov**

Clinical psychologist

Systemic family psychotherapist

27 York Road, Stamford

Lincolnshire PE9 1LL

Phone: 07515 355236

todor@systemicfamilytherapy.uk

www.systemicfamilytherapy.uk





**How to Hold a Successful Meeting with Your Ex About the Children**

Co-parenting in high-conflict situations is challenging but essential for your children’s well-being. While it may feel easier to avoid face-to-face interactions, addressing important parenting decisions collaboratively either by meeting face-to-face or online may be important, so that both parents have a voice and that joint decisions are made in the children’s best interests. In addition, parents may be invited to come together to a family therapy session.

This guide outlines some principles for a successful joint meeting, even when emotions run high. It is meant to help you avoid if possible unnecessary arguments and stay focused on working toward mutually beneficial solutions.

**Logistical Considerations**

Before the meeting:

1. **Choose the right environment:** A neutral location such as a community centre, a quiet café, a service station or other venue that is both in public but also provides privacy to talk can help reassure both parents.
2. **Set a time limit:** Agree to meet for a specific duration and stick with it. Make sure the meeting is short (e.g., up to 45-60 minutes) in order to avoid emotional exhaustion and to reduce the risk of falling into an argument.
3. **Agree on an agenda:** Outline the topics to discuss in advance to ensure a clear focus.
4. **Bring tools:** Have a notebook, calendar, or a phone for scheduling and note-taking.

**Principles for a Successful Joint Meeting**

**1. Keep the Focus on the Children**

**Why It Matters:**

Shifting the focus to your children prevents the meeting from becoming about personal grievances. Remember that your role as co-parents is to prioritize their needs above all else.

**Rules to Follow:**

* **Avoid Criticism:** Focus on the present and the future, not past conflicts.
* **Use “We” Statements:** Collaborate as a parenting team to find solutions.

**Examples:**

* **What to Say:**
  + *“How do you think we can make [child’s name] more comfortable during the transition between our homes?”*
  + *“We both want what’s best for [child’s name]. Let’s find a way to support their schoolwork together.”*
* **What to Avoid:**
  + *“You always confuse [child’s name] by breaking our agreements!”*
  + *“You don’t care about what’s best for them.”*

**2. Set Clear Goals for the Meeting**

**Why It Matters:**

Having a shared agenda ensures the conversation remains productive and focused on the issues at hand.

**Rules to Follow:**

* **Agree in Advance:** Decide on specific topics (e.g., holidays, school schedules).
* **Document Agreements:** Write down decisions to prevent future misunderstandings.

**Examples:**

* **What to Say:**
  + *“Let’s finalize the holiday schedule today so we can make plans in advance.”*
  + *“How can we share drop-off duties for extracurricular activities?”*
* **What to Avoid:**
  + *“Let’s see where this goes; we’ll figure it out along the way.”*
  + *“You always find a way to derail these discussions.”*

**3. Adopt a Business-Like Approach**

**Why It Matters:**

Treating the meeting like a professional discussion reduces emotional tensions and keeps interactions respectful.

**Rules to Follow:**

* **Stick to the Facts:** Avoid accusations or emotional arguments.
* **Remain Polite:** Address each other with respect, even when disagreements arise.

**Examples:**

* **What to Say:**
  + *“The teacher said [child’s name] needs extra help with math. How can we work together to support that?”*
  + *“I noticed [child’s name] seems a bit anxious about transitions. Can we brainstorm ways to make them smoother?”*
* **What to Avoid:**
  + *“You’re the reason [child’s name] is struggling in school!”*
  + *“I don’t have time to deal with your excuses.”*

**4. Commit to Respectful Communication**

**Why It Matters:**

Respectful communication ensures both parents feel heard, reducing defensiveness and hostility.

**Rules to Follow:**

* **Practice Active Listening:** Show that you are paying attention by paraphrasing what the other parent says.
* **Avoid Interruptions:** Let the other parent finish speaking before responding.

**Examples:**

* **What to Say:**
  + *“I hear you’re worried about [child’s name] being too tired after practice. How about we adjust their bedtime on those days?”*
  + *“Thank you for sharing your concerns. Let’s see if we can find a solution that works for everyone.”*
* **What to Avoid:**
  + *“You’re overreacting as usual.”*
  + *“That’s a ridiculous thing to say!”*

**5. Use a Neutral Ground or Mediator**

**Why It Matters:**

A neutral setting or mediator helps keep the discussion balanced and reduces emotional triggers.

**Rules to Follow:**

* **Meet in an Impartial Location:** Choose a place where neither parent feels at an advantage.
* **Consider a Mediator:** A professional can guide the conversation and help de-escalate conflicts.

**Examples:**

* **What to Say:**
  + *“I think having a third party present might help us stay focused. Would you agree to involve a mediator?”*
  + *“Meeting at the library worked well last time. Can we do that again?”*
* **What to Avoid:**
  + *“Let’s meet at my house, but don’t bring your bad attitude.”*
  + *“I’m fine meeting anywhere, but I doubt it will help.”*

**6. Time-Limit the Meeting**

**Why It Matters:**

Time limits reduce emotional strain and ensure that discussions remain concise and goal-oriented.

**Rules to Follow:**

* **Set a Duration in Advance:** Agree on a realistic timeframe (e.g., 60 minutes).
* **Pause When Necessary:** If tensions rise, agree to reconvene later.

**Examples:**

* **What to Say:**
  + *“Let’s aim to wrap up by 3 p.m. and schedule a follow-up if we don’t finish.”*
  + *“We’ve covered a lot. How about taking a break and coming back to this tomorrow?”*
* **What to Avoid:**
  + *“We’re staying here until we fix everything!”*
  + *“This is taking too long; I’m done.”*

**7. Prepare in Advance**

**Why It Matters:**

Being prepared ensures clarity about your priorities and helps the meeting stay on track.

**Rules to Follow:**

* **Anticipate Challenges:** Think through potential disagreements and how to address them constructively.
* **Bring Materials:** Have any necessary documents, schedules, or proposals ready.

**Examples:**

* **What to Say:**
  + *“I’ve drafted a holiday schedule to get us started. Let me know what you think.”*
  + *“Here’s the feedback I received from [child’s name]’s teacher. Can we go over it together?”*
* **What to Avoid:**
  + *“I didn’t have time to prepare anything.”*
  + *“You should have handled this before the meeting.”*

**8. Address Conflicts Productively**

**Why It Matters:**

How you handle disagreements determines whether the meeting remains constructive or devolves into conflict.

**Rules to Follow:**

* **De-Escalate Tensions:** Take a moment to breathe or pause if emotions escalate.
* **Focus on Solutions:** Acknowledge the conflict and work collaboratively to resolve it.

**Examples:**

* **What to Say:**
  + *“We seem to be stuck on this issue. Can we agree to revisit it later and move on for now?”*
  + *“I understand we see this differently. Let’s try to find a compromise.”*
* **What to Avoid:**
  + *“You’re impossible to work with!”*
  + *“Forget it; I’ll just make the decisions myself.”*

**Conclusion**

By following these principles, you can turn a potentially volatile situation into a productive and respectful discussion. Your ability to work together for your children’s benefit will not only help resolve immediate issues but also foster a co-parenting relationship that supports your children’s emotional and developmental needs.