

Parenting Phone Call and Parenting Information Exchange sheet

When things are tense, finding ways to communicate successfully can be problematic. In the early days, especially, it can be difficult to talk and communications can easily become arguments.

Nevertheless, it's vital that you find a way of sharing important information about your children. Failure to communicate around their needs can make life more difficult for them, make it harder for them to adjust and, in the worst situations, can put them at risk. One solution to difficult communications is to agree to structure your communications.

The Parenting Phone call (sometimes referred to as a Scripted Phone Call) or the Parenting Information Exchange (where you substitute oral communication for written communication) are ways of having a business like exchange of information that keeps firm boundaries in place.

Over time, as things begin to improve, this can form a solid foundation for exchanging important information about your children and can even set the standard for a new parenting relationship between the two of you. It can also help to build trust between you and will demonstrate to your children that you are working together around their needs.

Rules for the Parenting Phone Call

The Parenting Phone Call works by placing strict rules around what can and what can't be talked about. As relations between you become less tense, it's possible to relax these rules. But, at the beginning, it's important to stick to them. The four basic rules are:

- 1. Talk only about things that are relevant to the children**
If you want to talk about your relationship, ask for a separate phone call.
- 2. Stick to the agenda**
Talk only about pre-agreed items, if something else comes up book another call.
- 3. No pleasantries**
Don't ask each other what you've been doing or how you are; this is about the children.
- 4. No Comments**
Seek clarification if necessary but comments will sound like judgements.

Try to keep your PPCs time limited. You're trying to achieve a business like transaction that produces the maximum amount of information sharing with the minimum amount of fuss. It can also be a good idea to agree in advance what you will do if the call descends into an argument.

Find a phrase or word that signals you are uncomfortable with the way the call is going. Warn your children's other parent that you aren't happy and that you will end the call unless it gets back on track. Only then hang up.

Rules for the Parenting Information Exchange

If either of you is finding it too difficult to manage talking on the phone, you could try turning your Parenting Phone Call into a Parenting Information Exchange Sheet. Simply use the same structure but, instead of trying to discuss things on the phone, write the information down. The same basic rules apply – what you're trying to do is pass important information between you. Try to make your communications short, clear and precise.

If you're not able to hand over your Parenting Information Exchange Sheet by meeting face-to-face, post it, email it or get a friend or relative to pass it on. **Never ask your children to take responsibility for handing over your Parenting Information Exchange Sheet.** It makes them feel responsible for your relationship, puts them psychologically in the middle of the uncomfortable space between you and, on a very practical level, they will forget to hand it over.

The structure of your Parenting Phone Call or Parenting Information Exchange sheet

Please use the following form as a template.

If you agreed to try a Parenting Phone Call, you can use it to make notes so that your call stays on track. If you have agreed to try a Parenting Information Exchange, simply fill in the appropriate information.

This form may be edited which means that you can enter the information directly into the boxes on your computer and then print it off. Otherwise, please print it off and complete it by hand.

Information about: [Child's name]	
Date:	

<p>Positive news</p> <p>It can be a good idea to start the call with exchanging some positive news about your child or children. Think about things that have gone well since the last call. Perhaps your toddler has learned a new word or an older child has won a swimming certificate. Don't forget that this is an opportunity to share good news, not compete over it.</p>

<p>Information about health and wellbeing</p> <p>It's absolutely vital that information about your children's health and wellbeing is communicated. Have they had any colds, upset stomachs or headaches? Have they been prescribed any new drugs? Has their behaviour changed? Are they more tearful, angry or disruptive? Are they eating and sleeping well?</p>

School or nursery news

How are your children getting on at school or nursery? Pass on information about general things such as the topics that your children are working on and talk about specific things such as behaviour, exams and changes that are likely to occur in the foreseeable future.

Information about friends

It's important that both parents know who their children's friends are. These may have changed as a result of your separation, for example if your children have moved home or school. It's also important to share any concerns that you might have about the company that your older children are keeping. Presenting a united front to them might just prevent them slipping into trouble.

Information about activities

Pass on any information about the activities your children are undertaking. Perhaps they've joined a football team or have started dance lessons. Pay particular attention to any activities that might complicate your agreed parenting patterns. Don't spring changes on each other as a *fait accompli* - say what your child wants to do, what changes this will mean to the parenting patterns and agree a new phone call to discuss how that should be managed.

Care issues

This is especially important if you have younger children as they are less able to communicate their needs for themselves. It's important, therefore, to share information about things such as bed times and nap times, diets, changes in behaviour and toilet training. With older children, you will need to share information about boundaries. Although it's unrealistic to expect the boundaries you both set to be exactly the same, similar boundaries around behaviour, the time they need to be home and how much TV they watch will help them to adjust more easily to life after separation.

Special events

Don't leave discussions about birthdays, Christmas and holidays to the last minute. It can be tempting to put it off but doing so is likely to lead to more conflict not less. If a special event is on the horizon, agree to add it to the agenda of your next PPC.

Next PPC

Agree or confirm the date and time of your next PPC. Many parents find it useful to set a regular and predictable pattern with the call taking place once a week, on the same day and at the same time, with the provision for additional calls for serious issues in between. Decide on whatever works best for both of you but at a time when the children won't be listening in or requiring your attention. Make sure that you also mention any new business that you want to talk about during the next PPC. If it's something urgent, agree a call for later that day – this allows each of you to consider the issues before you try to discuss them.