

## Activity – Dos and Don'ts How to Develop a Working Relationship with the Ex-Partner

You and your partner have decided to make a life together and form a new family that includes children from one or both of your previous relationships. What lies ahead can be a rewarding, yet challenging experience. Being in a relationship with a partner who has a child with someone else is difficult, especially if there is conflict. You may, at times, feel alone as some of your partner's time is spent dealing with his or her ex-partner. While the situation may never be perfect, there are things you can both do to try and build bridges and keep any conflict to a minimum.

It can take time before you are all able to feel comfortable and function well together. However, the following list of dos and don'ts, provided by both experts in the field as well as folks that are just like you, will help you start building those bridges.

Instructions:

Step 1 – If you are the “Partner with the ‘Ex’” start with the dos and don'ts in the left column. The other partner will start with the dos and don'ts in the right column. Read each do and don't and check Y if the statement represents how you currently interact with the ex. Check N if the statement represents an area you will want to work on. If both partner's have exes, swap roles and complete the exercise again. You may use another activity sheet.

Dos	Yes / No	Dos	Yes / No
1. Make schedules work for both you and your ex-partner. Arrange a schedule for visitations, attending sporting events and other extracurricular activities, and for attending doctor and dental visits. Whether it is court ordered or set by the two of you, be flexible so that it works for everybody.	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	1. Do your part to have a good relationship with the ex; understand that no matter how he or she feels about each other, they are both of equal importance to the child. When you and your partner's ex have contact remember that the child's welfare is most important. You don't have to be friends but you do need to be friendly.	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
2. Always be confident around your ex and never show insecurity. Let them see that you are more than just a great parent, that will do your best to raise your child and that you also deserve respect just as much as he or she does .	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	2. If the ex-partner should ever talk bad about your partner in an attempt to warn you off, simply smile and say “thank you” for the advice. Whether it is genuine or just mean, you have your own unique experience with your partner.	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
3. Most important!! No drama! If your ex-partner should have a new partner or friend that you don't like, don't show jealousy or be mean to that person. Let them see that you're ok with being in your child's life, especially if they have a child of their own.	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	3. At an appropriate time, take the ex to the side and explain that you are in no way trying to replace him or her in their child's life. Most of the bad feelings usually stem from jealousy. Explain that, while you care about the child's welfare, you understand that he or she is the child's parent and that you respect his or her relationship with the child.	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

<p>4. Do not depend totally on your ex-partner. Show them that no matter what happens, you are capable of taking care of your child.</p>	<p>4. Do ignore the ex-partner if he or she ever tries to cause a fight. Walk away and stay out of the drama. If you do need to confront an abusive ex-partner, do it through legal channels.</p>
<p>5. If you are taking the next step in the relationship with your new partner, assure your ex-partner that no one will be taking his or her place. Let him or her know that you have chosen someone who understands the importance of your child's parental relationships, and make it known that you're not looking for a replacement. If this seems tough, just remember that you wouldn't want to be replaced by a new mommy or daddy yourself.</p>	<p>5. Let the parents discuss the kids. When it comes to the kids, the actual parents should be the ones making the decisions. It's easy for an ex-partner to cause problems between you and your current partner if you are the ones making the plans and decisions. At least for a while, let your current partner stay out of a parenting role and develop a relationship with the child/ren that is different.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Don'ts</b>                      <b>Yes / No</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Don'ts</b>                      <b>Yes / No</b></p>
<p>6. Don't call your ex-partner your "baby mama" or "baby daddy". The term is definitely inappropriate.</p>	<p>6. Don't personalize what your ex-partner says or does. If you show that his or her behavior is making you jealous or upset, he or she may keep doing it.</p>
<p>7. Avoid getting your new partner involved in matters between you and your ex-partner. If you keep your relationship with your ex-partner strictly about business, your new mate should feel no insecurity and, therefore, feel no need to interfere with the parental system you've set up with your ex-partner. The catch with this step is that your ex-partner has to be respectful and do the same with his or her new partner.</p>	<p>7. Don't talk negatively about ex-partners; gossiping about ex-partners is just immature, as is gossiping about anyone else. When you talk negatively about an ex-partner, your significant other might begin to think you have some jealousy or insecurities. If you are foolish enough to talk bad about an ex-partner in front of the kids, expect them to rightfully be angry with you, even if your comments are based on fact.</p>
<p>8. Do not speak negatively to your ex-partner parent in the presence of your child. While you don't have to be best of friends, but you should at least be civil with each other in order to provide a role model for healthy relationships. A child can pick up on any ill feeling you hold for their mommy or daddy and will likely resent you for speaking poorly about him or her.</p>	<p>8. Don't involve yourself in issues regarding the child as they will only serve to aggravate the ex-partner, causing unnecessary tension. As difficult as it is to accept, anything to do with the child is between your partner and his or her former partner.</p>
<p>9. Communicate with your ex-partner. Do not use your child as a go-between because it can be painful for them and can lead to miscommunication. Miscommunication can develop if a message is misconstrued, whether intentionally or unintentionally. It's best if you and your ex-partner talk directly with each other.</p>	<p>9. Don't expect your partner to form boundaries for the both of you without communicating about your expectations. Even if the relationship with the ex-partner is friendly, or where the ex-partner is over involved or intrusive, both you and your partner need to decide how much contact with the ex-partner is acceptable. The ex-partner may be unaware of how intrusive his or her behavior seems. Decide together, where, when and how much contact is ok.</p>

<p>10. Do not involve your ex-partner in other, unrelated personal matters. It is often best to speak only about your child. If your own personal matters must be discussed, it should be done solely due to scheduling concerns related to the child. As long as you are not doing anything that could cause harm to your child, your personal life is private and your ex-partner should no longer be a part of it.</p>	<p>10. Don't be insecure and jealous. Remember that the ex-partner is, and will always remain, a parent of the children. Remember, your boyfriend or girlfriend left that relationship and is now with you, so stick to being yourself and to making this relationship be as healthy as can be.</p>
<p>11. Never use the child against your ex-partner when you get angry. Don't restrict your child's rights if you're really struggling with a personal problem between you and your ex-partner. Your ex-partner shouldn't be punished if he or she is a good parent to your child. This kind of behavior will only build resentment toward you.</p>	<p>11. Don't bring up the ex-partner. Your significant other may have to vent or ask your opinion about something, but it is helpful to keep your comments brief.</p>

Step 2 – Once you have completed step 1, exchange your activity sheet with your partner. Discover where there are similarities in your responses and where there may be some differences. Begin to discuss your differences and a few next steps that you can take to improve how you manage the relationship with the ex-partner. Spend additional time outside the visit working on those next steps. Your case manager can assist with some ideas or provide appropriate referrals for more intensive help, if necessary.

**Activity Take-Away:** Aim to develop a working relationship with your ex-partner. Be aware of the way you communicate with him or her. If you're serious about making a life together with your new partner, but are struggling with this aspect of your new relationship, it's recommended you continue to learn about the realities of stepfamily life – read books, attend stepfamily courses. Relationships take a lot of work, but it is possible to have a healthy working relationship with ex-partners that are a blessing to your children.