

AXIOMS OF HEALTHY FAMILY FUNCTIONING IN CASES OF PARENTAL SEPARATION/DIVORCE—for best interests of the child

(Based on the foundation that both parents are fit)

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1. Each parent must maintain a cooperative and civil co-parenting relationship involving shared decision-making concerning their child/children in significant areas as educational, medical, religious, and social developments and activities.
2. Each parent must **guarantee** the relationship between the other parent and their child/children including but not limited to:
 - a. the parenting/visitation plan.
 - b. regular communication via texting, phone calls, and emails between the non-residential parent and child/children as required by court order or mutual agreement. (but cannot be used by the residential parent to disrupt the parenting time of the other parent.)
 - c. the exchange of gifts and cards on holidays, birthdays, father's day/mother's day, etc.
 - d. each parent to be able to observe the child's public/outside activities even when not on the parent's parenting time.
 - e. pleasant transitioning for the exchange of parenting time.
 - f. pleasant atmosphere at the transition times e.g. police stations are not a pleasant atmosphere and sends the wrong message to the child about the other parent.
3. Neither parent will hold the stepparent out to the child to be more important than the other biological parent nor shall be referred to by a name that conveys greater significance to the child than the name attributed to the biological parent.
4. Children must not be asked to take a position on custody and visitation anymore than they should be asked if they are willing to attend school or keep medical appointments. Children should not be subjected to conflicting loyalties.
5. Children have the right to love and be loved by both of my parents, without guilt, pressure, disapproval, or rejection from a parent or a parent's ally.
6. Emotional cutoffs are never a healthy way for children to resolve interpersonal conflict—especially with a parent.
7. Neither biological parent will engage in behaviors to encourage or force the child to reject or disrespect the other biological parent.

8. Neither biological parent will engage in behaviors to encourage or force the child to reject or disrespect the other biological parent's new partner/spouse.
9. At the same time, there are appropriate measures that must be undertaken to introduce a new partner to the child. This depends on many factors too numerous to list here but are easily researchable and/or achieved with professional advice.
10. Children must be protected from acquiring knowledge about adult issues—especially as it relates to legal and financial issues, custody and visitation disputes, and to either parent or to their extended family.
11. Each parent must abstain from being critical of the other parent either directly to the child or in the situation in which the child can overhear a conversation about the other parent.
12. Resolving differences in parenting involves compromise, and each parent must recognize the importance of reaching an accommodation with the other parent about major areas of child rearing. In less important areas—in the absence of health, child safety, and education areas, for example—there will likely be the need to grant the other parent the flexibility to make a unilateral decision for the child during that parent's parenting time.
13. Each parent must guarantee the child's right to be kept out of the middle of the parental conflict, including the right not to pick sides, carry messages, or hear complaints about the other parent.
14. Each parent must respect the child's right to have her/his own feelings and beliefs and be able to express those feelings and beliefs without fear of reprisals as long as the expression is in a respectful manner.
15. Parents must refrain from burdening their child with their emotional difficulties. It is a reversal of healthy family hierarchy for a child to be worried about the parent's needs and emotional stability.
16. Children should not be expected to make adult decisions. They have the right to remain a child and not be burdened with parental responsibilities or to act as an adult companion, personal friend, or comforter to the parents.
17. Children have the right to decide whom to like and love among each parent's family and friends without guilt and without being made to feel disloyal. But regardless of how they feel about other authority figures, they must behave respectfully towards them.

18. Neither parent shall permit the children to overhear arguments, negotiations, or other substantive discussions about legal, business dealings, or conflicts with the other parent or that parent's emissary.
19. Neither parent shall physically or psychologically attempt to pressure or influence the child's personal opinions concerning the custody and visitation disputes between the parents or feelings about the other parent.
20. Each parent will permit the child to display photographs of the other parent and extended family in the child's room.
21. Each parent will acknowledge that the child has two homes, although the child may spend more time at one home than the other. This is important for many reasons—not the least of which is to convey to the child that the non-residential parent is equally important to the child.
22. Each parent has an obligation to the child/children to convey the importance of the other parent in their lives. Any misinformation about the other parent that portrays that parent in a negative light should be corrected by both parents whenever possible.

I am sure that I have left out an important Axiom. This is intended to be an initial primer. If these axioms are adhered to, your child has a highly favorable prognosis for dealing with parental separation/divorce.