

WORKING WITH PARENTS SUPPORTING A COPARENTING TEAM



COPARENTS: Adults recognized as a child's parents who act and communicate for the child's well-being, regardless of their parenting situation.

Main objective: To help parents work better together as a team!

Your best work tool is you!

As people who work with families, it is important to be aware of how our perceptions and representations of parenting roles can influence our view of the importance of teamwork between coparents. We must take into account our potential biases related to our values, beliefs, and personal or professional experiences.

For example:

- Am I comfortable communicating with and reaching out to all coparents, whether they are mothers or fathers and regardless of their sexual and gender identity?
- If I focus on one coparent, do I feel like I am neglecting the other?
- Do I trust fathers as much as mothers, recognize their importance, and believe in their potential to change?
- Am I aware of the diversity of coparenting forms and family dynamics?
- Could personal experience or background lead me to have certain prejudices that may affect my approach?

Strategies

Identify issues related to the coparenting relationship

- * Take different dimensions of coparenting into account.
- * Help parents think about and work on the main dimensions of their coparenting approach.



To foster a dialogue with and between parents, see the tools available at: rvpaternite.org/coparents

Build on the strengths of the relationship

Have a positive view of the coparents and identify strengths that can serve as vehicles for change, before addressing difficulties.

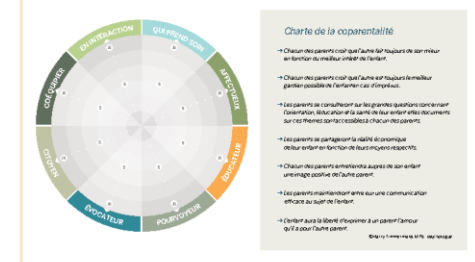
- ➔ Acknowledge that coparenting presents challenges for all parents.
- ➔ Recognize what each coparent brings to the table.
- ➔ Highlight what the coparenting team is already doing well and what the coparents appreciate in the coparenting relationship.
- ➔ Identify positive aspects to build on and encourage them to do a little more in that direction, rather than staying focused on the problem (cause, responsibility, etc.).

Promote teamwork between parents

When working with coparents, help them look at their perceptions and target potential areas for improvement.

- ➔ Help the coparent or each member of the coparenting team name their own strengths and find a positive image of their role as a parent.
- ➔ Help the coparent or each member of the coparenting team pinpoint each other's strengths and their role with the children.
- ➔ Identify and work on any perception gaps between the two parents.
- ➔ Help parents see and acknowledge what each coparent brings to the table to implement better collaborative strategies.

NB: The *PAPPA Guide* offers some tools to support this type of work with coparents, such as The Facets of Parental Engagement and The Coparenting Charter by Harry Timmermans. Overview:



Principles of working with a coparenting team

- Communicating, getting involved, and having a positive view of the coparents, so that they feel competent and engaged
- Accepting differences in family dynamics – the important thing is that everyone benefits
- Acknowledging what each coparent brings to the table
- Focusing the discussion on the child when talking to the parenting team
- Emphasizing the importance of mutual respect

Put the child front and centre in the process

Focus and bring the discussion back to the child as necessary, so that parents remain concentrated on their common goal (their child's well-being) and the discussion does not get sidetracked to other issues.

- ➔ Emphasize what the child needs in terms of the relationship between their coparents (see *The Coparenting Approach in Family Services*).
- ➔ Use photos, toys, and words to remind parents of their child's presence in the process.
- ➔ Ask parents to consider their child's perceptions of and reactions to their coparenting relationship (e.g., How do you think your child feels when things get tense between you? If the child were here, what would they tell you?).
- ➔ Use language that relates to the parental relationship and not the marital relationship (e.g., "father," "mother," and "parent" rather than "[ex-]spouse").

SOURCES:

Dubeau, D. (2018) *Intégrer la coparentalité dans ma pratique... de beaux défis à relever!* [Presentation – Workshop given at CISSS Laurentides on October 24, 2018]; Regroupement pour la Valorisation de la Paternité (2020). *A Guide to Father-Inclusive Practices*.



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