# CO-PARENT EMAIL PROTOCOL AND PROCEDURES

1. **INITIATOR** (Parent #1):

Sends an email to the other parent (copying ONLY the PC) by *Sunday night at 9:00 pm, copying the PC.*

The email will include **only these two sections** (with no salutation, paragraphs, closing, signature or postscripts), with bullet points underneath each section. Limit bullet points to 3-4 under each heading, if possible:

*Example:*

**FYI (For Your Information)**

- Johnny had a sore throat on Tuesday. I had him gargle with salt water three nights in a row and it seems better now.
- I am concerned that Johnny didn't have his weekend homework done when he returned to my house on Sunday. In my house, I make him do it on Friday after school so he doesn't have to worry about it over the weekend, so maybe that could work for you as well.

**RR (Requested or Required Response)**

- Do you want me to pick up Johnny's ADD medicine this week or are you going to do that?
- I can't find Johnny's next dentist appointment on my calendar. Could you please tell me again when it is so I can record it?
- Since Johnny will be going to middle school this year, the start times will be different than his old school. Do we need to do anything differently regarding drop-off or pick-up and/or child care?

**IMPORTANT:** If you have nothing to report to or ask of the other parent on any of the appointed email days, still send an email saying, "None" under the FYI section and "None" under the RRs. This way the other parent is not wondering if you forgot to email or respond. This shows that you place a priority on the communication process and keeps the possibility of negative assumptions at bay.

**2. RESPONDER** (Parent #2)

Responds to Initiator's email by *Monday night at 9:00 pm, copying the PC*

The email will include **only these three sections** (with no salutation, paragraphs, closing, signature or postscripts), with bullet points underneath each section. Limit bullet points to 3-4 under each heading, if possible:

© 2014 Diane C. Dierks, LMFT

*Example:*

**Answers to the Initiator's RRs**

- I will pick up his medicine. Thanks for offering.
- Dentist appointment is October 5th at 4:00 pm
- School begins at 8:00 and ends at 3:45. I plan to drop him off at school at 7:30 am and the bus will take him to After School Karate like last year, and I will pick him up there at 6:00 pm. Let me know your plan.

**FYI**

- I would like to take Johnny to our family reunion over Labor Day weekend, but Labor Day is your day this year. Let me know if you can accommodate.

**RR**

- Did Johnny leave his basketball shoes at your house last weekend? We can't find them anywhere. They could be at his friend, Todd's. If you don't have them we'll call Todd's mother.

3. **INITIATOR** (Parent #1)

Sends email to Responder by *Tuesday night at 9:00 pm, copying the PC, ONLY if the Responder has RRs to answer.*

The email will include only **one section** (with no salutation, paragraphs, closing, signature or postscripts), with bullet points underneath each section. Limit bullet points to 3-4 under each heading, if possible:

**Answers to your RRs**

- Yes, we found them in the basement. I will bring them by your house on Thursday so he will have them for his Friday game.

**TO AVOID CONFLICT:**

- Watch your tone (pretend as if you are writing a letter to your boss and you want to make a good impression)
- Assume your child will read what you write (make him/her proud)
- Give enough information to avoid the other parent making assumptions
- Don't give too much information or the other parent won't read it in full and will likely misinterpret or misunderstand what you are saying.
- Don't scold or bring up the past. It's totally unproductive.
- Don't just complain. Offer suggestions in order to negotiate a solution.
- Fake respect even though you don't feel it. This should be a lifetime goal.
- Let the PC deal with the other parent, who is not your project anymore.

© 2014 Diane C. Dierks, LMFT

**COMMUNICATION NOTES:**

**FYI statements are reserved for (1) items the other parent might want to know in order to effectively do their parenting with the child; (2) opinion statements (always start with "I am concerned" and leave out judgmental words or bringing up the past); (3) requests for schedule changes.** REMEMBER: always stick to the court-ordered parenting plan and don't assume the other parent will accommodate your schedule change requests. Therefore, have your plan B in place in case the other parent does not respond. **No response means NO,** however, a simple response, "I'm not able to accommodate your change request," is better.

**RR questions should be limited to ONLY those that must be answered in order for you to execute your portion of the parenting plan.** Before placing them in this section, ask yourself, do I need to ask this question in order to do my parenting this week or in the near future? If the answer is no, don't place it in the RR section, but make it a statement in the FYI section instead. For instance, it wouldn't be appropriate to ask, "Why did you feed Johnny McDonalds three times on Saturday?" in the RR section. That is a veiled criticism. Instead, say, "I am concerned that Johnny said he at McDonalds three times on Saturday. He ended up with a stomach ache."

**Neither parent is required to respond to anything in the FYI section!** However, you can if you can keep it respectful or if it seems in the best interests of the child to do so. For instance, you might use the FYI section to share information a child says if it will promote honesty/integrity in your child. If one parent shared a concern that Johnny said he got in trouble at school on Thursday for putting gum in a student's hair. The other parent might answer, "That's interesting. He told me that he got in trouble because he was WITH the kid who put the gum in her hair. Sounds like Johnny is fibbing to one of us. We should both talk to him about that." If information may indicate that a child is manipulating or the information doesn't match, it's helpful to share it so that the child knows he can't play one parent against the other. However, if a child shares a heartfelt concern or painful experience about the other parent, you might not choose to share it because he may feel betrayed by that (and you cannot know how the other parent will react to the child if you tell). Try to find a balance between what needs to be shared and protecting the confidences with your child so he will continue to share important things with you.

**If you feel you must share your emails with your attorney, please do so by blind copying (BCC).**

© 2014 Diane C. Dierks, LMFT