

Breakout Sessions – Parenting Summit 11.11.17

It Only Takes One: Keeping Conversations Productive Not Personal

By: Lee Eddison, MA, LP, Our Family Forward

You have kids. Therefore, the end of your marriage does not mean that conversations with your former spouse have also ended. In fact, when parenting decisions, logistics and arrangements need to be managed from two homes instead of one, the need for conversations can increase. This is a real dilemma for parents whose communication worsened before the marriage ended, or who never really established effective co-parenting communication. How can important decisions about kids be made without tension, rancor, arguments or putting the kids in the middle? Is there an app for that?

It does take two people to come to agreement but it only takes one to set a respectful tone and keep the conversation from escalating no matter how the other person responds. It takes courage and commitment but it can make all the difference.

This breakout session will focus on several specific communication skills from the highly-regarded book and training program, *Crucial Conversations*. One skill, called *Start with Heart*, will help you learn to identify your own difficult feelings and unspoken motives that can derail a conversation right out of the chute unless you can recognize, acknowledge and accept them while focusing on what you really want. Another skill, called *Master My Stories*, will ask you to identify what judgments you have about your co-parent that fuel negative emotions in you and get in the way of constructive dialogue.

These *Work on Me First* skills, should enable you, with practice, to improve the tone, clarity and outcome of conversations with your co-parent, even if you are the only (or, optimistically, the first) parent trying something new to improve co-parenting communication. And even if the most important and heartfelt conversations you will have are with your co-parent about your kids, these communication skills are universal and can be used with anyone and in any situation in which there is an emotionally-charged disagreement.

Understanding Grief and Divorce

By Rachel Livingston, MA, LMFT, RELATIONshift

Understanding grief and divorce means understanding how to move forward with hope in the midst of hurt and loss. Understanding grief and divorce means understanding the reasons and triggers that keep divorced parents from focusing on their children the way they really want. Understanding grief and divorce, what it is and what it isn't, can make a big difference in children's lives. Parents and children grieve when there is a divorce in their family. This is natural. It is healthy. It is not something to avoid, rather something to understand and accept. Learn about when divorcing parents are in stages of denial, bargaining, anger, depression and acceptance. Learn about the stages where co-parents in conflict get stuck. An entire family will grieve a divorce, but they won't grieve in the same ways or for the same reasons or at the same times. Understanding grief and divorce allows parents and children opportunities for healing as families let go of what once was and look ahead into the future with hope.

The grieving process starts before the legal process begins and it does not end when the legal process is over. As parents, we have an opportunity to model for our children how to do life when life gets hard, and divorce can be hard. For those of you who have been trying to sort out feelings of sadness and anger about the divorce, or things that have happened now that the divorce is over, but it's just not working, there is good news. Things can change and you do have a choice to do things differently. Learn about some common feelings and issues that keep parents from letting go of the emotional triggers that keep the cycle of hurt and anger going. Understanding grief and divorce allows parents the opportunity to focus on hope and healing that will benefit your children and your future.

How in the world do you blend families.

By Joe Noble, MA, LMFT and Kelly Noble, J.D., Family Mediator

Blending families can be fun, exciting, happy and a time for celebration. And, sometimes it is not what you imagined or dreamed it would be. It can be confusing, difficult, emotionally charged and bring about conflict in relationships. This workshop will highlight why parents so often struggle in their blending efforts. Blending families is a complex process. Creating healthy boundaries in blended families is key. If you are divorced and you have children, this is important information for you. Topics include:

- When and how to introduce the new significant other
- When and how to introduce “blending family” information with children
- Healthy boundaries for parenting and step-parenting
- What about discipline?
- Your kids, my kids
- Yours, mine and our kids
- Creating new traditions

Bridging Parental Conflict – Parenting with a high conflict spouse.

By Lori Thibodeau, MA, LMFT and Joe Noble, MA, LMFT, The Bridging Center

This workshop is designed to assist parents in managing themselves in conflict for the purpose of co-parenting and providing positive benefits to their children. The information and skill building tools in this workshop will benefit anyone who is already experiencing conflict with a co-parent and for parents who are just beginning the transition to a co-parenting relationship. This will be helpful for all co-parents, even if they have not experienced conflict. Topics include:

- Children in the middle of parental conflict
- Causes and effects - Parental conflict from a child’s perspective
- The effects of conflict on the family system
- How families become stuck in conflict
- Fundamental requirements of co-parenting that support the children

Creative De-escalation: How to keep things merry and bright during the holidays

By Erin Pash, MA LMFT & Amanda Schuster, MA LMFT, Ellie Family Services

This breakout session will focus on how to keep things merry and joyful during the holidays by using creativity and skills to manage flaring emotions and stress. During the holiday season we are often combining really positive feelings with feeling overwhelmed, and when we are faced with high conflict or difficult people it can really ruin the magic of the holiday season. As if, the holidays alone aren't stressful enough, navigating the additional complications that stem from divorce can make things go from nice to naughty faster than you can scarf down a plate of turkey! By teaching how to calm the central nervous system, identifying your triggers, using planning and prevention strategies, and providing really unique ways to de-escalate stressful situations, you will leave with a tool kit that will help you enjoy this holiday season with more peace and joy!