**Referral Letter to Post-Divorce Client w/children; Post Divorce Parenting Tip Sheet Plus optional discount cards**

Dear \_\_\_\_

We haven’t spoken since we concluded your divorce case [last year]. I’d like to thank you for choosing me as your attorney. A divorce is one of life’s most difficult transitions and I’m gratified that you trusted me to help you through it. I hope you and your family are adjusting well to your new situation.

I’m writing today to offer you some help with a problem faced by many divorced parents: how to successfully share parenting after divorce.

**Improve Your Post-Divorce Parenting**

Co-parenting with an ex is seldom easy. The thought of close collaboration with the person you just divorced may bring on a panic attack or at least a bad case of heartburn. But setting aside your personal issues and developing an amicable co-parenting relationship is possible and highly desirable for your children. They want and need to keep both of you in their lives.

My enclosed Tip Sheet: **12 Tips for Successful Post-Divorce Co-Parenting** can help you deal constructively with the most common problems you are likely to encounter. These tips will enable you maintain your sanity, minimize conflict, and provide your children with the structure and consistency they need to feel safe and loved.

**When Circumstances Change or Serious Parenting Problems Develop**

Sometimes, despite the best intentions of both parents, a change in circumstances means a parenting plan no longer works. Parents change jobs or work schedules; they remarry; they move. Children mature and develop new interests and activities. Often, when the adjustments are minor, the parents can agree. But when the change one parent wants significantly affects the other parent’s time with the children, legal action is likely to be necessary to resolve the conflict.

Should you ever find yourself in this situation, I am here to help. I can also help if your ex is not letting you see your children or is doing things that cause you genuine concern for their safety.

**A Legal Services Coupon for You**

I have enclosed a Legal Services Coupon for you. This coupon entitles you to a FREE \_\_\_\_-minute consultation (a $$ value) *and* $\_\_\_ off of any legal services I provide. During our consultation, I will listen to your problem, answer your questions, give you my assessment of your case, and offer you my opinion about what to do next.

You can use this coupon for help with changes to your parenting plan, problems with child support, or any other legal matter handled by [me/my firm]. To redeem your coupon, just call my assistant, \_\_\_\_, to schedule an appointment, and bring the Coupon with you when you come to see me.

**Referral Discount Card for a Friend or Family Member**

I have also enclosed a Referral Discount Card. The card is good for a FREE \_\_\_\_-minute consultation with me and $\_\_\_ off the cost of any legal services I provide. Please give the card to a family member or friend. To schedule an appointment, he or she can call my assistant, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_, at [phone number]. Be sure your friend or relative knows that the appointment must be scheduled before the card expires on [date].

Thank you, in advance, for giving the card away. Referrals from trusted clients are an important way for me to expand my law practice. You can be confident that I will treat anyone you refer to me with courtesy and respect. If your friend or relative retains me, I will work just as hard to earn his or her confidence as I did to earn yours.

**Please Call Whenever You Have a Legal Question**

If you have a legal question, about *any* matter, call me. We can spend some time talking about the issue and discussing possible solutions. *I won’t ever charge you for that phone call*. Moreover, if I can’t help you with that particular issue, I will help you find another lawyer who can.

Best personal regards,

[Attorney signature]

Your Attorney

P.S. If you would like additional copies of my Tip Sheet: **12 Tips for Successful Post-Divorce Co-Parenting** to give to your family or friends, please call me. I will be happy to send them to you.

P.P.S. Be sure to put your name on the Referral Discount Card before you hand it out, so I will know who to thank for the referral.

## 12 Tips for Successful Post-Divorce Co-Parenting

***Prepared for you by***

***[Attorney]***

***[Contact Information]***

Parental conflict is extremely damaging to children. Your children will thrive after the dissolution of your marriage only if you and your spouse eliminate conflict. Show that you love your children more than you hate your ex by following these tips.

###### #1 Defuse Anger by Detaching

Anger is the most common reason that parenting plans fail. The best way to solve the anger associated with the shared parenting is to detach yourselves from each other emotionally. Try to see your former spouse, not as a failed life partner, but as your children’s other parent. One technique that may work is to treat your ex like a business associate. Think of each contact with him or her about the children as a business meeting. Develop an agenda and stick to it.

###### #2 Stick with the Schedule

Seeing the kids whenever you feel like it or whenever you have the time is not going to work. Children need structure to feel secure and develop normally. Simply showing up to see your kids at odd times causes stress on the children and their other parent. You must make time for your children based on what they need, not what you need.

Stick with the parenting schedule as if it is the most important thing in your life. Your children are expecting you. Think about how they feel when they are all packed up and ready to go and you show up two hours late or not at all. What does that tell your children about how much they matter to you? Imagine how they are affected when you don’t get them home until after midnight and they have to get up six hours later for school?

If you know you will be late, let your ex-spouse and children know immediately. Better yet, plan ahead, reschedule activities that interfere with your parenting schedule, and don’t be late.

###### #3 Realize You Cannot Control Your Ex-Spouse’s Parenting

Divorced parents often differ in the parenting styles and opinions on how children should be raised. Differences of opinion on everything from diet to discipline and from hairstyles to hygiene are common. Some parents run a tight ship; others prefer a more relaxed environment. Differences in parenting styles are apt to become even more pronounced once you are in separate households.

In most cases, when one parent describes the other as inept, it is simply a difference in parenting styles. Do you actually believe the other parent would hurt your children? If the answer is no, then you need to relax and learn to accept what you cannot change.

For example, you can’t control what your spouse feeds or doesn’t feed your children, so long as she doesn’t let them go hungry. But if good nutrition is your concern, think about what you *can* do. You can feed your children properly when they are with you. You can pay for their school lunches or breakfasts. If the children are really in danger, a court will be willing to intervene. Otherwise, let it go and do the best you can while they are with you.

If you couldn’t change your spouse while you were married, your certainly can’t change him now. The only thing you can control is yourself and how you parent. Unless your spouse is guilty of child abuse or neglect, no court is going to interfere with his parenting of the children while they are in his care. If he isn’t providing what you think the children need, then it is your job to see that they get it while they are 2with you. Other than that, you do not have control of the situation.

###### #4 Plan Ahead for Sick Days and Emergencies

Decide now who is going to be called when your child is sick at school or there is an emergency. The job belongs to whoever can best minimize the impact on their finances. If mom is salaried and can make up the time whenever, and dad works on an hourly basis and can’t get away without getting in trouble, then it’s mom’s job. If dad is laid off due to winter weather, then it’s his job. Make sure the school has contact information for both of you.

###### #5 Try a Dual Calendar System

Get two calendars. Highlight dad’s days of parenting in blue and mom’s in pink, or let your children choose two different colors. Each parent should have an identical calendar showing parenting time to put up in his or her home where the children can see it. Even very young children will be able to see in advance when they will see dad or mom next. Like regular meals and regular bedtimes, the calendars add to the sense of structure children need to feel secure.

###### #6 Write to Each Other if Direct Communication Is a Problem

Try keeping a notebook that goes back and forth with the children. Use it to communicate important information about your children to your ex-spouse if direct contact is a problem. Write in it anything you want your ex-spouse to know about the children. Read what your ex has written and write a response so your ex knows you got the message.

Alternatively, you can email each other each time the children switch homes or more often to report on their progress and needs.

Don’t give your children verbal messages to pass on to your ex-spouse. If you cannot speak directly to your ex, then put it in writing, and do not share the contents with your children. You can make the kids mail carriers, but don’t make them messengers. Communication with your ex-spouse may not be easy, but it’s absolutely necessary for your kids.

###### #7 Share School Notices and Schoolwork

Get a large manila envelope for each child. Write the child’s name on it. Put into the envelop copies of any notices you receive from your child’s school or teacher that your ex should be aware of. Include some of the child’s schoolwork and artwork so the other parent can keep up with the child’s progress.

###### #8 Stop the Transfer Wars

Is there a battle every time the children switch homes? Eventually, your ex may decide to cut back or even stop seeing the children. Although that might seem a good outcome to you, it’s a disaster for your children. Moreover, a parent who stops seeing the children sometimes decides to stop paying child support, which is a disaster for both you and your children.

Avoid engaging your ex during transfers. If necessary minimize your contact with him or her. Agree that the exchange will take place at the curb and be as perfunctory as possible. Some parents even decide to make the switch at a neutral spot. One idea is the supermarket during the weekly shopping expedition.

During the exchange if what you have to say isn’t about the kids, don’t bring it up. If it’s about the kids and you can’t be civil, put it in a note.

**#9 Don’t Use Your Children as Spies**

Don’t pump your children for information about mom’s new boyfriend or dad’s latest expensive purchase. You can listen to what they have to say, and certainly follow up on hazards to their health. However the real danger is that you may make the children feel like traitors to their other parent. Hurt the relationship between your children and their other parent, and you will hurt your children.

###### #10 Don’t Overreact to Decompression

Children who go from one home to another may need time to adjust to the differences, unwind, and prepare time for the next day.

“Decompression” happens when children change households and go from one parenting style to another. It occurs very commonly when children go from a household with little or no structure to one with that is highly structured. In the less structured household, your daughter may feel insecure. To compensate, she may try to create structure and actually assume control of when and how things are done. When she comes back to your house, she no longer needs to be in control, so she is momentarily disoriented by her change in roles. This causes her to act out, defying your structure when she is accustomed to creating her own.

The best way of handling the decompression isto avoid overreacting to it. Send the child to a secure, familiar place such as her bedroom to engage in a quiet activity like reading. It’s not a punishment, just some down time. A couple of hours in her own space will usually allow enough time for her to adjust.

###### #11 Pay Your Child Support

If you resent paying child support because you think of it as money you are giving to your ex-spouse, you need to adjust your thinking. Every time you think it’s for your spouse, remember it’s for your kids. If writing the check makes you mad, have it withheld from your pay and transferred to your ex.

###### #12 Keep a Parent’s Log

A parent’slog is a record of the interaction between parents. It can be used to record when things work, when they don’t**,** or even areas where improvement could be sought. Parent’s logs serve several purposes. First, writing down what works will encourage you. When something goes wrong, by reading the log you can remind yourself of successes, and give yourself a pat on the back for everything you did well.Second, thelog can provide you withan emotional release. You candispel any anger you feel for your ex-spouse in a non-destructive manner.And finally, your log may serve as evidence. In a “he said, she said” arena, the parent who presents an organized and concise representation of events may prevail.

There is a line between bad parenting and criminal activity. Appropriately, courts rarely get involved in situations in which they are required to assess the difference between what is good parenting and what is bad. Courts only get involved when the actual, physical welfare of your children is an issue. And those situations requireevidence for the court to take action. One of the forms that evidence can take is your log.

What kind of things should you log that might be serious enough to seek court intervention? You’ll need to use some common sense. A judge will probably not care that the kids had cold pizza for breakfast, stayed up a half-hour beyond their bed time, or went to school wearing mismatched socks.

But a judge probably will care if the children are never buckled into their car seats, or are left unsupervised, or if your ex smells of alcohol when dropping them off. These situations endanger the children. Keep a record of them. The judge is also likely to care if your ex leaves the children in the care of another family member or babysitter for most of the time he or she is supposed to be spending with them. If your spouse isn’t engaged in the lives of your children, the court may find any of his or her demands related to parenting without basis.

[Side 1]

**Legal Services Coupon**

**For my valued clients**

**[Attorney]**

**[Address]**

**[Phone, email]**

This coupon entitles you to a **FREE \_\_-MINUTE NO OBLIGATION CONSULTATION** with me. If you decide to retain me, this coupon further entitles you to a **$\_\_\_** **DISCOUNT ON MY LEGAL SERVICES**.

The next time you have a legal question or need a lawyer’s help, please call. I appreciate the trust you have shown in me in the past, and I look forward to another opportunity to earn your trust in the future.

I can help you with these legal matters:

-- [Describe practice areas]

Call me even if your problem is not in one of the areas I handle. I will help you find a trustworthy lawyer who can help.

***Expires: [date]***

[Side 2]

To get your **FREE CONSULTATION** (a [$$] value) and your **$\_\_\_ DISCOUNT ON LEGAL SERVICES**, just call my office (###-###-####). My assistant, \_\_\_\_\_\_, will help you schedule an appointment. Bring sure to tell \_\_\_\_\_ that you have a Legal Services Coupon and bring the coupon with you when you come.

***Expires: [date]***

[Side 1]

**Referral Discount Card**

**[Attorney]**

**[Address]**

**[Phone, email]**

Congratulations! You have been referred to me by one of my valued clients.

This card entitles you to a **FREE \_\_-MINUTE CONSULTATION** with me. During this meeting, we can discuss any legal matter that is troubling you. I will explain your options and answer your questions. This free consultation is a [$$$] value.

In addition, if you decide to enlist my help, this card entitles you to a **$\_\_\_** **DISCOUNT ON MY LEGAL SERVICES**.

I can help you with these legal matters:

-- [Describe practice areas]

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***Expires: [date]***

[Side 2]

To get your **FREE \_\_-MINUTE CONSULTATION** (a [$$$] dollar value) and your **$\_\_\_ DISCOUNT ON LEGAL SERVICES**, just call my office (###-###-####) and tell my assistant, \_\_\_\_\_, who referred you. She will help you schedule a time to meet with me. Bring sure to bring this card with you to the consultation.

Even if you aren’t ready to schedule your consultation, if you call, I will send you a free copy of my Tip Sheet: **12 Tips for Successful Post-Divorce Co-Parenting.**

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Referred by: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

***Expires: [date]***