



Coparenting with an Impossible Ex

How to Effectively Write and Respond to Messages

Overview & Purpose

If you are Coparenting with an Impossible Ex, reading through, making sense of, and responding to messages can be a huge source of daily stress, anger, overwhelm and fear.

This guide is designed to help you:

- Stop getting caught in the downward spiral of back and forth text and email fights
- Communicate with your coparent in a way that you can feel confident about
- Put yourself in the best position to get to the outcome you're looking for
- Communicate with your coparent in a way that won't make you look or sound like "the crazy one" should a lawyer, judge or anyone else ever see them

First things First

Before you do anything, set an intention.

An **Intention** is what you put energy into.

Before you go into any conversation or interaction with your coparent, you need to ground yourself, in, well, yourself.

Who are you going to be in this conversation? Do you intend to be calm, peaceful, kind, reasonable, fair? Or is the intention to be forceful, aggressive, angry?

These are all ok and serve a purpose, just be sure it lines up with *your* purpose.

Whatever intention you want to bring to your experiences is always the bottom line. Whenever you get stuck in a decision about what to do or what to say, anchor in your intention.

Your intention is always your intention regardless of what your coparent says or does. Your intention is not dictated in any way shape or form by your coparent's behavior. You are always solid in yourself and who you are.

*If Peace is your intention, that does not mean it has to be all peaceful.
It means you don't give more energy to the things that are not
bringing you Peace.*

Summary of Contents

Messages between you and your coparent can be separated into 3 categories.

You are Making a Request, you are Replying to their Request, or it's an FYI.

FYIs are any part of the message that does not require an action. It is simply information that is being shared.

Sometimes the information is useful and necessary, but in these situations, often times it's not.

This guide can help you understand the elements of what to include in your messages and some of the key factors to consider for each of those elements.

Guide for Making a Request

- What Exactly are you Asking?

Boil it down to one question you want an answer on. Putting too much in one message gets messy and ineffective. Any ambiguity is an opportunity to distract from the main goal.

Be brief, be specific, be cordial.

The tone and mindset is professional. NOT personal.

Include all the details needed to make an informed decision. Ie Costs, drop off / pick ups, schedule changes, and if an explanation is needed, why it's important.

- Define the Urgency and Importance for Yourself.

Something is **Urgent** when it needs to be taken care of immediately.

Something is **Important** if it leads us towards our goals.

For example, a doctor's appointment is important because it supports the goal of making sure your child is healthy.

But if it's a check up that needs to be scheduled 6 months from now, it's not urgent and just requires some planning to make sure it gets scheduled.

However, if your child falls and breaks their arm, that would be both urgent and important.

The importance of thinking this through in advance, is for you to decide when and how much energy to invest in the outcome and the conversation itself.

You want to think about establishing a limit of how far you are willing to go to get this resolved BEFORE it gets to that point.

Remember your Intention.

The below chart is a helpful way to begin defining what you give energy to and when.



Q1 - Immediate and high energy investment Q2 - Gradual high energy investment
 Q3 - Gradual low energy investment Q4 - Low or no energy investment

- How and By When do you Need a Response?

Be specific.

How do you want it and when do you need it by.

For example, instead of "I need the new insurance card" try, "Can you please email me a picture of the front and back of the insurance card before Joey's doctor's appointment on Tuesday at noon."

- **Check for Unnecessary Provoking that will Distract from the Issue**

Before you hit send, read it through and make a prediction. Predict your coparent's response by asking yourself some questions.

What do you expect them to say?

What do you expect them to have a reaction to?

How does your message align with your intentions and the outcome you're looking for?

What can you address in advance to put you in the best position of getting what you are asking for?

- **What is the Likely Response?**

There are only a few possible outcomes when making a request. Yes, No, Yes with Conditions, or No Response at all.

Given your history of interacting with them, you likely have a sense of what to expect. Use that information to help you prepare.

- **Prepare a Plan B**

Before hitting send, do some mental preparation in advance.

Think through how you want to handle this if you don't get the response you are looking for.

Remember your Intention.

Guide for Replying to a Request

- What Specifically are they Asking for?

This is different than what they want you to know, or what they are telling you. Some messages are filled with insults, attacks, and blame. What I call FYIs.

Separate out the actual request. This is what you are focusing on right now.

Even bullying and threats of what they will do should you should fail to comply, are FYIs. They are simply sharing information that they believe will get the outcome they want.

We don't make decisions based on threats. We make the best decision for the issue at hand and deal with whatever comes next, next.

Changing your decision in response to bullying or threats, only serves to reinforce that bullying and threatening is effective.

(If you ever believe you are at risk of harm, contact your local authorities immediately.)

- Define how Urgent and Important the Request is To You.

Something is **Urgent** when it needs to be taken care of immediately.

Something is **Important** if it leads us towards our goals.

You do not have to prioritize things the same way your coparent does. Just because they want something taken care of immediately, does not necessarily mean that it is urgent.

The below chart is a helpful way to begin defining what you give energy to and when.



Q1 - Immediate and high energy investment Q2 - Gradual high energy investment

Q3 - Gradual low energy investment Q4 - Low or no energy investment

- **How and By When do they Need your Response?**

To reduce the possibility of things escalating, it can be helpful to acknowledge your coparent's sense of urgency.

That doesn't mean you need to follow their timeframe, but you can acknowledge it.

For example, "I got your message. I know this is urgent for you. I will get you an answer by Friday."

DO NOT underestimate the power of acknowledging. If your coparent wants to get worked up, they will. But a simple quick message can save you a lot of nastiness and ultimately, a lot of time and energy.

- Write out the Pros and Cons

If you aren't sure whether to agree with the request or not, write out TWO lists.

List one is the pros and cons of agreeing.

List two is the pros and cons of not agreeing.

This may seem somewhat redundant, but it can reveal important differences

Remember your Intention.

- Offer Reasonable Alternatives

There is usually more than one solution to any problem. If the request is something that is important or something nice for your child, you may want to think about alternatives.

Is there another option to their proposal that achieves the same goal, that you would be more willing or able to comply with?

If so, present the new options and explain why this alternative works better.

Sometimes, though, there just isn't an alternative that works.

And that's ok too.

- **Anticipate**

Before hitting send, predict your coparent's reaction.

What will provoke them? You already know what pushes their buttons.

Pushing their buttons will not convince them of anything or do anything for you, but extend the amount of time you are spending on this.

If it is not serving the overall goal of resolving the request, change it or take it out.

Remember your Intention.

Dealing with FYIs

These are those pesky and triggering messages or parts of messages that are just about sharing information - no action is needed.

90% of these messages need no response and can be ignored. Though they are often what consumes most of our energy.

It can take some thought to process and digest some of the more insulting and abusive ones that inevitably come with high conflict coparenting.

Use these steps to help you.

- **Identify your triggers**

Identify any part of the message that upsets or bothers you. I'd highly suggest you begin writing them down and keeping a journal.

The idea here is to simply be more specifically aware of how your coparent hooks into you emotionally. The more you pay attention to what kinds of things trigger you, the more easily you'll be able to address them.

These can be comments about your past, your personality, opinions about your parenting, or attempts to bully or threaten you.

- **What is their Point and Purpose?**

What specifically do they want you to know and why do they need you to know this information?

- **Identify what is Factual and what is an Opinion.**

Be mindful that opinions can be stated as facts but that does not make them so.

Statements about who you are, what is good or bad, who is right or wrong, what you should do - are all ways of expressing opinions.

For example, if the message says, "If you were capable of being a good parent, you would make sure that Matt was brushing his teeth. But since you're not, he has a cavity that needs to be filled."

The Facts: Matt is getting a cavity filled at the dentist.

The Opinions: Everything else.

- **Make a Choice that Aligns with your Intention.**

90% of FYIs do not need any response. Essentially, you can consider any FYI that doesn't help you parent your child, to be a waste of your time.

Most messages between you and your coparent will only ever be seen by the two of you.

If you're barely reading, not engaging and not responding to what doesn't need your attention, your ex will essentially be talking to themselves. You're welcome :)

Final Notes

A little time spent planning upfront will save you so much time and energy in the long run.

In some of the more extreme cases, working through messages may be extra complicated and challenging.

But with a little extra support, it is absolutely doable.

No matter how Impossible your coparent is, learning how you will communicate with them, (and even more important, what you won't engage with them on), regardless of what they throw at you, is essential to your well-being and your ability to parent effectively.

Questions? Thoughts?

For additional support on this or any other Coparenting concern, please send me an email!

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