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## **Co-Parenting Counseling Process**

The overarching goal in co-parent counseling is to create a durable structure to support inter-parent communication about the children they share. The structure is comprised of skills and practices that (1) limit communication to only issues involving the children, (2) facilitate reliable information sharing and (3) provide a pathway to defuse and manage disruptions to competent cooperative communication.

### **Necessary Skills and Practices for Successful Co-Parenting**

Mastery of the following skills and practices are critical to successful co-parent functioning:

1. Developing a business-like relationship with each other as co-parents.
2. Separating the co-parent relationship from parent-child relationships.
3. Learning to communicate effectively, regularly, and specifically about the children.
4. Utilizing opportunities to support each child's relationship with the co-parent.
5. Keeping thoughts, feelings, and attitudes about the co-parent out of each child's ears.
6. Refraining from "venting" to confidants about the co-parent when children can overhear.
7. Learning to share medical, educational, athletic, social, and other relevant information about the children effectively.

### **The Lens and the Clarifying Question**

In order to begin work on the skills necessary to build a durable communication structure, co-parents need to be aware that over the course of their relationship with one another, they have developed a lens through which they now see the behavior of the other parent. This lens is likely to color their respective perceptions of the meaning of their co-parent's actions. Becoming aware of this lens allows co-parents to see that they might need additional information before drawing conclusions about the meaning of their co-parent's (apparent) actions that seem off or concerning in some way. Once this possibility is recognized, a co-parent can utilize a "clarifying question". As the name implies, a clarifying question can be asked when a co-parent becomes aware of an incident, or information that is concerning in some way. Perhaps a child reported something that happened at the other parent's home, or someone else reported information that requires input from the other parent for the situation to be better understood. Asking for clarification in an open, non-judgmental way allows co-parents to work together to resolve an issue or plan for further investigation of an incident. The ongoing utilization of clarifying questions can also serve to erode negative lenses that have developed over time and as a function of unresolved conflict.