



Program Objectives

- Explore the definition of family and co-parenting
- Understand the importance to your child of a healthy co-parenting relationship
- Learn steps for successful co-parenting
- Learn positive communication tools
- Set healthy relationship goals



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What is Co-Parenting?



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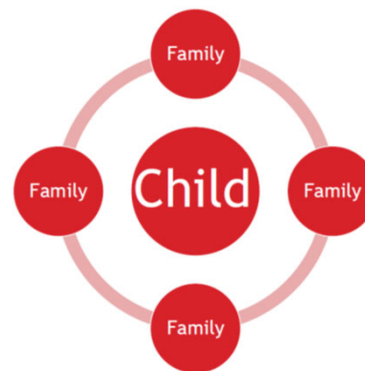
Building a Strong Family

The people in my family are..

My family is important to me because...

My family helps me to...

I help my family to...



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Characteristics of Strong Families

- ✓ A strong commitment to each other
- ✓ Show caring and appreciation
- ✓ Open communication and listening
- ✓ Spend time together
- ✓ Spiritual wellness
- ✓ Able to cope with problems together



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Strong Families Have Fun!



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Mary and John: A Case Study



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Mary and John

Discuss:

What are Mary's strengths?

What are John's strengths?

What are the strengths of Mary and John's family?

9

What strengths does your family have?

What strengths would you like your family to have?



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Characteristics of Strong Families - Priorities



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Co-parenting

PRIORITIES

1. Focus on the goal, focus on the child
2. Relationship is cooperative
3. Positive communication and problem solving



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Children whose parents have a cooperative co-parenting relationship . . .

- Feel secure
- Benefit from consistency
- Better understand problem solving
- Have a healthy example to follow



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What happens to children when parents do not cooperate with one another?

- Negative impact on children's mental health
- Children feel unsafe
- Children worry about taking sides
- Children feel guilty
- Children model what they see and experience
- Parent-child relationships may suffer



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#1

10 tips for Co-parenting Make the child's well-being #1

Keep children out of the middle

Let children know they are safe and loved

Acknowledge children's feelings without adding comments



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#2

10 tips for Co-parenting Be business-like

- Dedication to the product
- Commitment to a win-win relationship
- Acceptance of new ideas for diversity
- Common courtesy
- Communication style



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#3

10 tips for Co-parenting Treat a child as a child

- Adult discussions are with adults
- Remember the child's role



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#4

10 tips for Co-parenting

Encourage your child's relationships



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10 tips for Co-parenting

Encourage your child's relationships

Children benefit when . . .

- All parents are involved.
- Parents show love, talk to their children, and make them feel special.
- Parents work together.
- Parents spend time with children



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End Part 1



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The Human Knot



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#5

10 tips for Co-parenting

Communication:
Positive Strokes



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10 tips for Co-parenting

Communication: Discounting



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10 tips for Co-parenting

Communicate directly

Active Listening

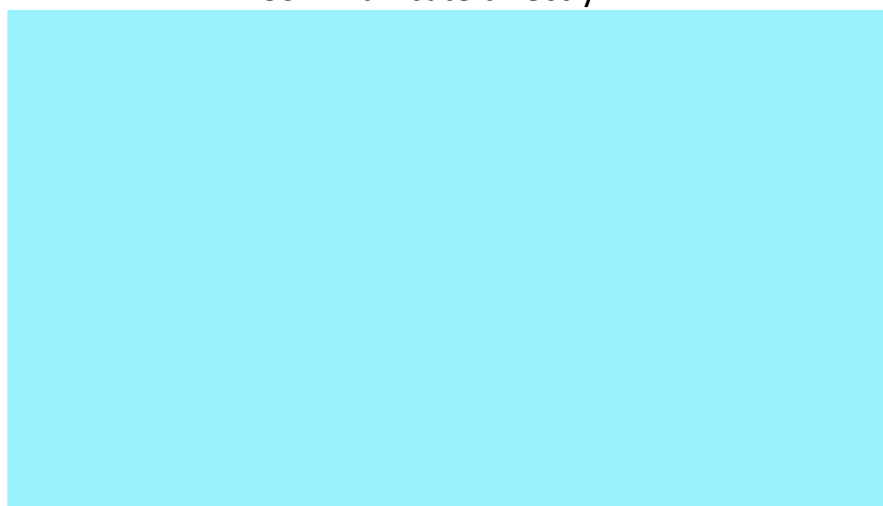
- Stay focused
- Really listen
- Use periods of silence
- Paraphrase back what you were told
- Understand the emotions behind the words
- Ask good questions



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10 tips for Co-parenting

Communicate directly



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Non-Defensive Listening

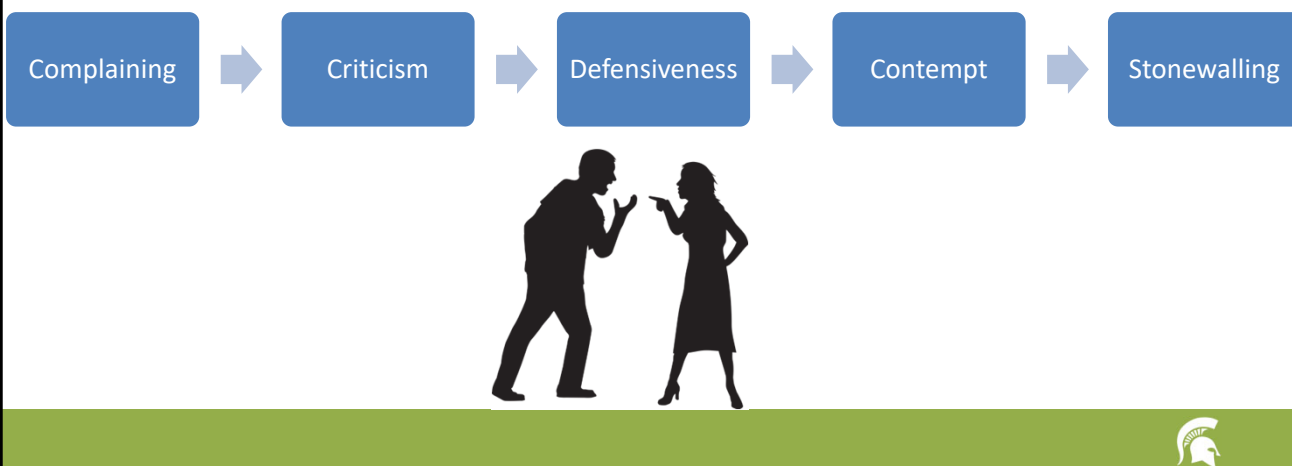
- Don't interrupt
- Be empathetic
- Be aware of body language
- Don't judge
- Know your feelings and emotions
- Embrace the anger
- Read facial expressions



What's your conflict communication style?



Common patterns of behavior that escalate conflict



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More challenges in communication:

- ✓ Mind reading
- ✓ Sarcasm
- ✓ Gunny-sacking
- ✓ Sharp tone of voice
- ✓ Gas-lighting
- ✓ “You” statements vs. “I” statements



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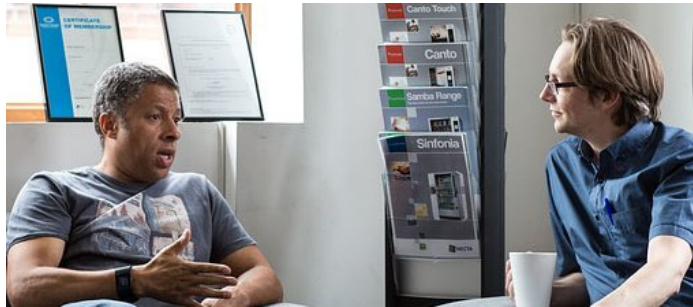
Blame



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Using “I” Messages

- I think/feel (state the specific thought or feeling).
- **When** (state exact behavior you don’t like).
- **Because** (describe the reason for your feeling).
- What I **Need** (or want) is (state what you want or need to have happen).



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- I think/feel (state the specific thought or feeling).
- **When** (state exact behavior you don’t like).
- **Because** (describe the reason for your feeling).
- What I **Need** (or want) is (state what you want or need to have happen).

What children eat
 Screen time
 Safety rules
 Bedtime rules
 Routines
 Money
 Helping out with children/household



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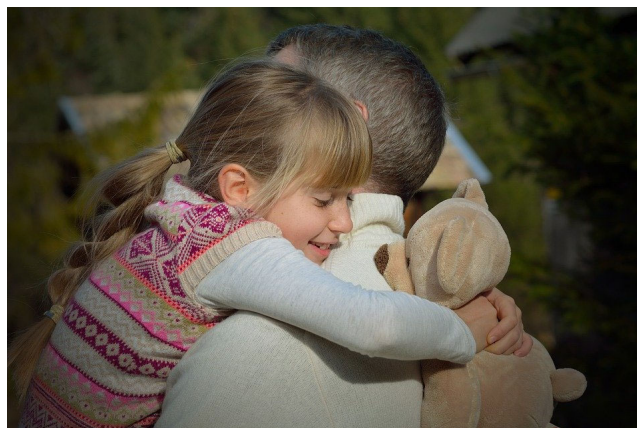
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10 tips for Co-parenting

Make exchanges happy & pleasant

“Children do best and feel most secure when parents make the child’s physical and emotional welfare a top priority.”

Dr. Al Ravitz, Clinical Psychiatrist
New York University Child Study Center



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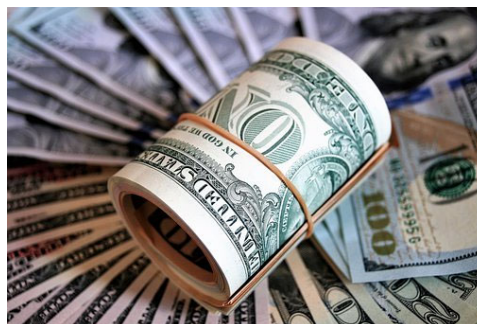
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10 tips for Co-parenting

#8

Take a parenting class

Pay support on time



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#9

10 tips for Co-parenting

Be patient and flexible

Think about who has the power when you **react** to your co-parent's inappropriate behaviors vs. when you **act and respond** in the best interest of your child no matter how the other parent is choosing to behave.



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#10

10 tips for Co-parenting

Get counseling if you need to

Refilling your “pitcher”

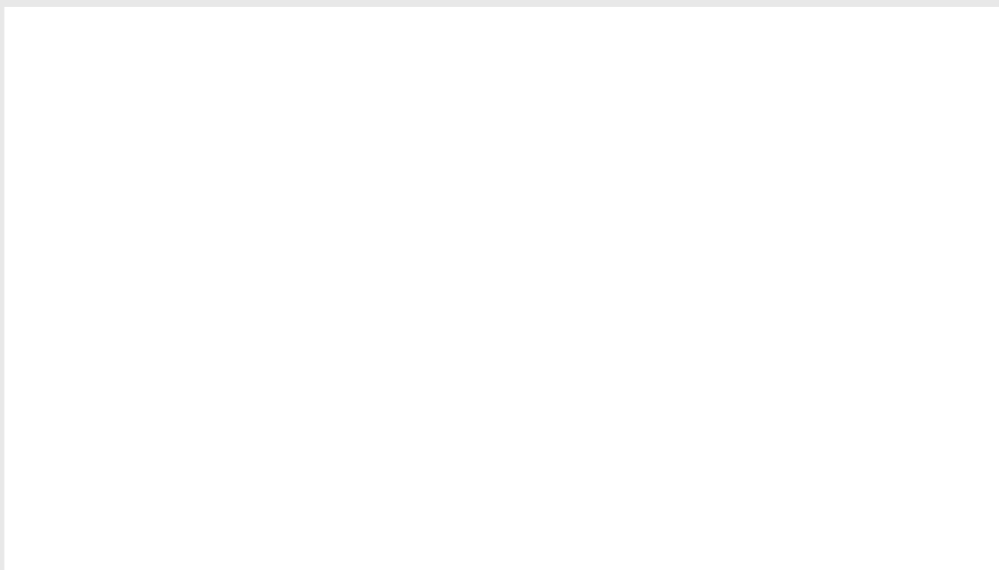


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How does stress look and feel for you?



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How Well Do I Manage Stress? Questions to consider



Strengths?

Supports?

Strategies?



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What is your co-parenting relationship?

Business

Friendship

Intimate



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Is my adult partner relationship healthy for me and my children?



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Becoming A Stepfamily



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**It's not about
what you hope
or want.**

**It's about
what's in
the best
interest
of the child.**



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10 Tips For Co-Parenting

Maintaining a positive coparenting relationship can be difficult. Below are tips that can help make coparenting as positive as possible. All of these tips may not apply to your family right now, but may helpful as your child(ren) get older.

1. Make your child's happiness and well-being your number one goal.
2. Treat the other parent(s) in "a business-like manner."
3. Treat your child as a child.
4. Encourage your child's relationship with the other parent(s).
5. Communicate directly with the other parent(s).
6. Make visitation exchanges pleasant and happy.
7. Take a parenting class.
8. Pay your child support on time.
9. Be patient and flexible.
10. Get counseling if you need to.

Adapted from: Cauley, M. H., Davis, J. and Barnes, M. From Parent Wars to Co-Parenting. Arkansas Bar Association. Retrieved from the Internet at URL:
http://www.arkbar.com/pdf/pw_pamphlet.pdf

Our Parenting Agreement

Having a parenting agreement is helpful in making sure that you and your child's other co-parent(s) are on the same page regarding time spent and the responsibilities of each parent to the child. Use this parenting agreement as a guide to discuss parenting issues with your co-parent.

This agreement is written for our child:

Name Age Birthday _____

I also have these other children:

Name Age Birthday _____

Name Age Birthday _____

Name Age Birthday _____

Name Age Birthday _____

I have chosen to (check all that apply):

- Stay romantically involved with my child's co-parent (may or may not include possibility of marriage).
- Co-parent with my child's other parent(s), but not in a romantic relationship.
- Find another person who can co-parent my child with me. List here _____

Parenting Time

We commit to working together to raise this child. We will share the care of our child. We will make decisions together about our child's care, education, and welfare, now and in the future.

I, _____, am the child's parent and give the following kind of care to my children:

Our Parenting Agreement

I, _____, am the child's parent and give the following kind of care to my children:

Making Decisions

We will make decisions together about:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> what school our child will attend | <input type="checkbox"/> how we will spend holidays, birthdays and other special days |
| <input type="checkbox"/> needed health care, including mental health care | <input type="checkbox"/> what religion we will be and where we will worship |
| <input type="checkbox"/> needed dental care | <input type="checkbox"/> other, please describe |
| <input type="checkbox"/> who will provide child care for our child | |

Solving Problems

Sometimes we will not agree on important issues. When we disagree, we will:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> meet in a quiet place where we can be alone | <input type="checkbox"/> work only on one or two issues each time we meet |
| <input type="checkbox"/> talk to each other in a respectful way | <input type="checkbox"/> discuss issues about money and issues about parenting at separate meetings |
| <input type="checkbox"/> decide at the beginning of the meeting what we will talk about | <input type="checkbox"/> work hard to resolve our differences |
| <input type="checkbox"/> stick to the things we decided to talk about | |

Our child may have a problem in school, get sick, or get in trouble with the law. If possible, we will go together to talk to the police, doctors, or teachers. If one of us can't make it, the other will tell the other parent what happened. We will also involve the other parent(s).

Our Parenting Agreement

If at anytime we cannot solve our problems, we will find another person to help us. This person will be someone who will “not take sides.”

Expenses for our child

Parents are responsible for providing support for their child. Child support needs to cover: food, shelter, clothing, education and medical care. If the child’s parent does not live with the child, list four ways that this parent agrees to provide for the child now and in the future:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____

To be certain that you can meet your children’s needs for the next 18 years, list four steps you and/or your child’s other parent(s) can take:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____

Making Changes to Your Plan

Once a year we will look at our parenting plan and decide if any changes need to be made. We agree to follow these steps to make changes to our plan:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> meet in a quiet place to talk about the changes. | <input type="checkbox"/> discuss changes related to money and parenting tasks at separate meetings. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> talk to each other in a respectful way. | <input type="checkbox"/> work hard to resolve any differences we have. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> work together to identify what needs to be changed and what can stay the same. | |

Rules To Guide Stepfamilies

- 1 Recognize that the stepfamily will not and cannot function like a natural family. It has its own special state of dynamics and behaviors. Once learned, these behaviors can become predictable and positive. Do not try to overlay the expectations and dynamics of the intact or natural family onto the stepfamily.
- 2 Recognize the hard fact that the children are not yours and they never will be. We are stepparents, not replacement parents. Mother and father (no matter how AWFUL the natural parents) are sacred words and feelings. We are stepparents, a step removed, yet in this position can still play a significant role in the development of the child.
- 3 Don't be a super stepparent—it doesn't work. Go slow. Don't come on too strong.
- 4 Sort out your discipline style together as a couple. The couple needs to work out what the children's duties and responsibilities are. What is acceptable behavior and what are the consequences when children misbehave? Generally, in the beginning, we suggest that the biological parent does the disciplining as much as possible. The couple together specifically works out jobs, expected behaviors, and family etiquette.
- 5 Make clear job duties between the parent, stepparent, and your children. What specifically is the job of each one of us in this household?
- 6 Know that unrealistic expectations lead to rejections and resentments. There is no model for the step relationship except for the wicked stepchild and invariably cruel stepmother of fairy tales. Note the absence of myth around the stepfather. It is vital for the survival of the stepfather to be able to see and delineate expectations for each member of the family, especially the primary issues of upset: e.g., money, discipline, the exspouse, parenting time, authority, emotional support, territory and custody.
- 7 Remember that there are no ex-parents ... only ex-spouses. Begin to get information on how to best handle the ex-partner or ex-spouse.
- 8 Be prepared for conflicting pulls of sexual and biological energies within the step relationship. In the intact family, the couple comes together to have a child. The child is part of both parents, generally pulling the parents' energy together for the well-being of the child. In step, blood and sexual ties can polarize a family in opposite energies and directions.
- 9 Know that children will feel loyal to their own parent. Often, just as the child begins to have warm feelings toward the stepparent, the child will pull away and negatively act out. He/she feels something like this: "If I love you, that means I do not love my real parent." The feelings are normal and must be dealt with. The pulls of "Who am I loyal to first?" go all the way around in the stepfamily.
- 10 Guard your sense of humor and use it. The step situation is filled with the unexpected. Sometimes we don't know whether to laugh or to cry. Try humor.

Becoming A Stepfamily: Questions To Discuss

As you decide to enter a serious relationship with someone, it is important to discuss the expectations, boundaries, etc. of your new family. Use these pages to guide the conversation with your partner.

1. Who will live with us in our home? What are their relationships to each of you and their ages?

2. Who will be visiting our home on a regular basis, especially children who have parenting time?

3. How will we handle discipline of children?

a. Who will discipline whom?

b. What are the rules in our home?

c. What will happen when children break the rules?

d. How will we support each especially when our children resist changes and try to pit us against each other?

Becoming A Stepfamily: Questions To Discuss

4. How are we going to handle family finances?

a. How much does each of us make?

b. What financial responsibilities does each of us have to other family members?

c. How should money be given to children?

5. How do each of you presently communicate with your former spouse(s)?

6. How much contact do your children have with their other parent?

7. What steps can we take to make sure that we attend to our couple relationships?



Becoming A Stepfamily: Questions To Discuss

8. What new family traditions do we want to begin in our stepfamily?

9. What are activities that we can enjoy together as a stepfamily?

10. How we will devote one-on-one time to our own children?

Not Everyone Makes a Good Relationship Partner

Deciding to get married is an important decision for both you and your child or children. The items in the “yellow flag” area are things that you need to consider before deciding to marry this person. If you find that your potential partner does several of the things in the “yellow flag” area, you probably want to discuss your concerns with you partners and work things out before getting married.

Mental illness is not a barrier to getting married but you will want to be sure that your partner or you is willing to seek and follow treatment.

A decorative header for the 'Yellow Flags' section, featuring the text 'YELLOW FLAGS' in white, bold, uppercase letters. The text is flanked by several yellow flags on black poles, set against a green background.

YELLOW FLAGS

- If your partner often seems depressed, unsure of himself or herself, and very anxious.
- If either of you ask over and over again, “Are you sure you love me? Do you really care about me?”
- If you spend most of your time together arguing and disagreeing.
- If your partner overreacts to simple problems or situations.
- If you keep thinking, “Things will be better when we get married.”
- If your partner wants to make all the important decisions and you resent it.
- If you are feeling pressure to get married but don’t want to.
- If you spend a day alone with your partner (not watching television), and you find you can’t stand it.
- If your partner does things you cannot stand but you are afraid to tell him or her because he or she will get mad.

Not Everyone Makes a Good Relationship Partner

Items in the “red flag” area mean that you should not marry the person until these things have been addressed by both of you.

A decorative header for the 'RED FLAGS' section featuring several red flags on poles against a green background. The text 'RED FLAGS' is centered in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters.

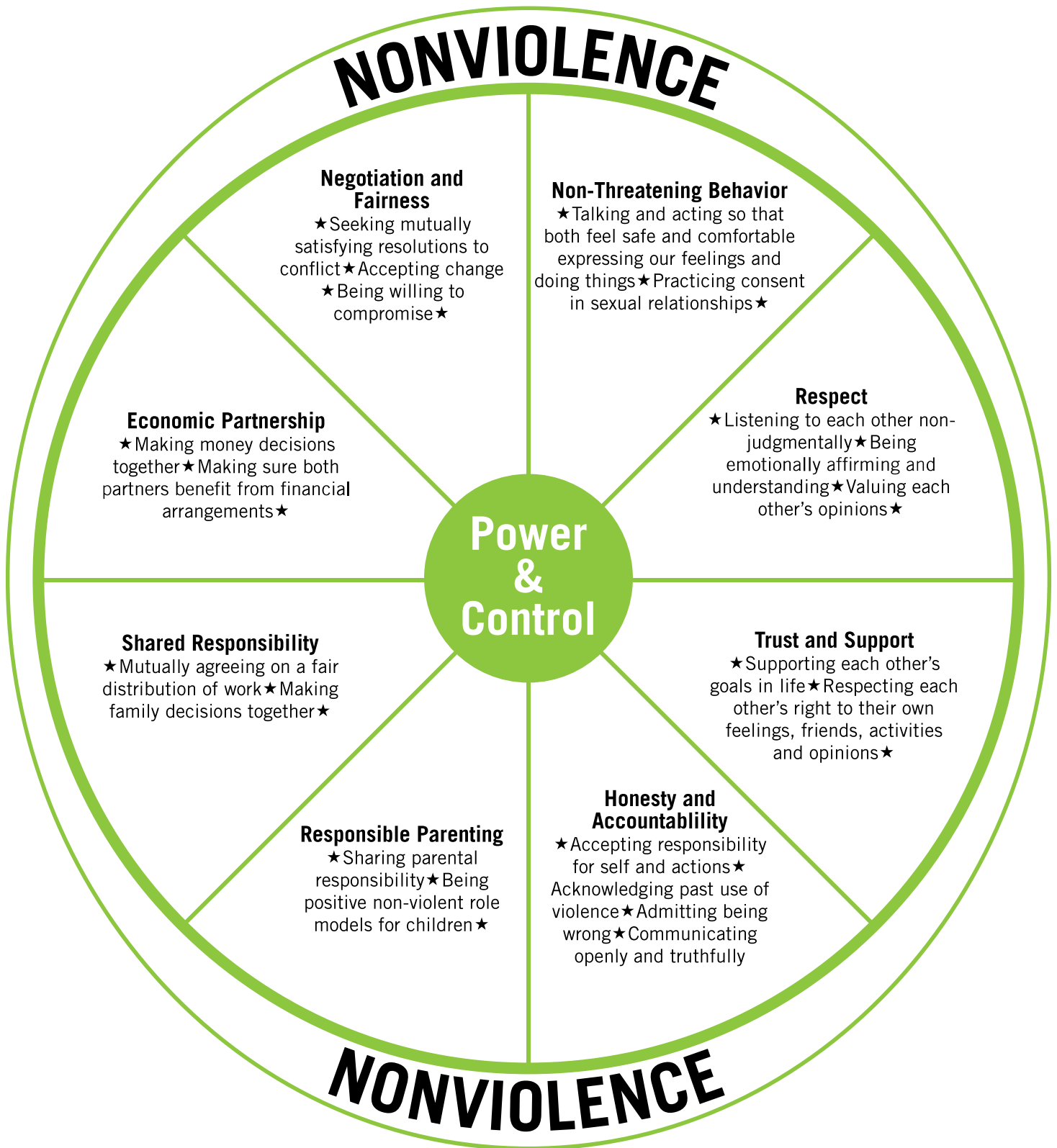
RED FLAGS

- If your partner is an addict and not in recovery.
- If your partner physically or verbally abuses you or your children.
- If your partner is very controlling and you are fearful of him.
- If your partner demands that you drop all your friends and not see your family.
- If your partner gets angry easily and can't control his or her temper.
- If your partner takes money that is needed to buy food and other necessities.

To help avoid marrying someone with these problems, consider:

1. Recognizing these problems in yourself or your partner, and getting help. Marriage does not cure personal problems. It only makes them worse.
2. Waiting to get married until you are older or work through these problems.
3. Getting to know your partner better before you get married.

Equality Wheel



*Adapted from the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project
Duluth, Minnesota*