

Corrective Thinking

How Changing What You Think Can Improve Co-Parenting Communication

When you are trying to resolve a situation where you have strong feelings about something it can be helpful to take a look at what you are thinking. This is called the **Think, Feel, Do Cycle** which states what we think affects how we feel which in turn influences how we act. In order to modify a behavior it is necessary to identify what you are thinking and make appropriate changes in those thoughts to yield the desired behavior.

This is adapted from the work of Dr. Stanton Samenow whose original work looked at criminal behavior. After decades of studying and working with criminals, Samenow argued that factors such as poverty, divorce, and media violence do not cause criminal behavior. He believes rather that a criminal chooses crime, and values people only to the extent that he can use them for his own self-serving needs. Dr. Samenow identified 10 thinking errors commonly made by criminals. He named the process Criminal Thinking. Further work led him to realize that these thinking errors are common to a much wider population than criminals, and he revised the name to Corrective Thinking.

At Divorce Transitions, we have adapted this model to illustrate how divorced parents can improve their co-parenting relationship with their child's other parent by changing how they communicate with each other. Each of the 10 thinking errors has been illustrated with divorce-specific scenarios. These are only beginning examples. To really make the most of this process, apply it to your own co-parenting interactions. Use the accompanying worksheet to identify your own thinking errors and ways to re-write them into more productive communication.

Divorce Thinking Errors and Suggested Corrections

Thinking Error	Responsible Thought	Divorce Thinking Error	Responsible Thought
<p>Closed Thinking Not receptive; good at pointing out other's faults; lies by omission</p>	<p>Open Channels Receptive to others; good at evaluating own behavior, truthful</p>	<p>What happens at my house is none of your business. We're divorced and I never have to talk to you again.</p>	<p>Ongoing parental communication is good for our children. When I tell you what our children experience at my home, I am creating a safety net for them.</p>
<p>Victim Role Sees self as a victim; blames social conditions, family, past, others for problems</p>	<p>Personal Responsibility Takes ownership for choices and actions; accountable, prompt and prepared.</p>	<p>It's your fault that the kids don't want to be with me. I never wanted this divorce in the first place. You have ruined my life and theirs too.</p>	<p>I am not happy about the divorce and yet I know that I must accept that it is a reality. It is my responsibility to build a good relationship with our children.</p>
<p>Superior Self Image Lopsided view of self – only seeing the good and not acknowledging destructive or inappropriate behavior.</p>	<p>Self Respect Ability to see self honestly, both strengths and weaknesses. Sees self as capable, dependable and honest.</p>	<p>I never do anything wrong when it comes to parenting. If our kids are having problems with the divorce it is your fault. They love being with me.</p>	<p>I can see how the kids aren't as comfortable at my house because I don't have any of their toys and familiar belongings here. I will start to make a home for them here too.</p>
<p>Lack of time Perspective Doesn't learn from past experiences; unable to use long-term planning; expects others to act immediately on demand; makes impulsive decisions based on assumptions rather than facts.</p>	<p>Proactive Living Sets goals; chooses behavior and feelings rather than allowing people/events to dictate responses; decisions made based on facts; sees things in stages of accomplishment that build toward the future.</p>	<p>When we were together you had an anger problem. I don't believe that you are any better and I won't let our children be with you except in supervised visitation.</p>	<p>I can see that your anger management classes have paid off and that you are a much less angry person. I know our kids want to see you and need you in their lives. I'm willing to gradually increase parenting time.</p>
<p>Reckless Attitude Belief that being responsible is unexciting and unsatisfying (boring); "I forgot" replaces a sense of obligation; responds only if there is an immediate payoff.</p>	<p>Commitment to Positive Performance Continues with healthy activities; grows in commitment to family, friends, job, and society; empathy for others; associates with healthy positive people.</p>	<p>It's none of your business how much money I make/have. I'm going to hide it from you because you're just out to take me to the cleaners. I don't even have a job. How can I be expected to pay child support?</p>	<p>I have a financial responsibility to my children. We brought them into the world and I want to do my part to take good care of them. When I am not honest about my income, it hurts my children.</p>

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<p>Lack of Effort Unwilling to do anything that seems boring or disagreeable; “I can’t” really means “I won’t.”</p>	<p>Daily Effort Does whatever it takes to improve; organizes time and work to meet expectations; meets appointments promptly.</p>	<p>I only have the kids with me a short amount of time, so I want them to have a good time. I don’t want to make them do homework or do chores. When they are with me, we just hang out.</p>	<p>I teach my children by example. If I want them to become competent, responsible adults, it is my task to help them learn to contribute to our family by meeting their obligations and pitching in to help.</p>
<p>Fear of Fear Possesses irrational fears, but may refuse to acknowledge them; has a very “thin skin”; fundamental fear of injury or death; profound fear of put-downs; when held accountable, feels worthless.</p>	<p>Courage over Fear Meets challenges and fears head on; doesn’t make excuses or avoid obstacles; asks for feedback, expects to be accountable to others – doesn’t feel put down; has realistic expectations of self and others; trusts others for help.</p>	<p>If I don’t have this marriage and my children with me, I will die. I have no reason to keep on living. What will people think of me?</p>	<p>I have been telling myself that if I don’t have the kids with me, then I am a worthless parent. I know this isn’t true. I can find ways for both of us to be actively involved parents which is best for our children.</p>
<p>Power/Control Compelling need to be in charge of every situation; uses manipulation and deceit to gain control; refuses to be dependent unless it works to their advantage.</p>	<p>Power through Interdependent Relationships Can ask for/accept help; able to cooperate for group and personal achievement; does not engage in power struggles; uses “I language”; lives interdependently working toward mutual benefit where both win.</p>	<p>I am the only parent who knows what our children need. If you don’t do things my way you won’t be allowed to spend time alone with the children.</p>	<p>I know that our children want to spend time with you and that it is good for them to be with you. Past events have left me feeling a bit nervous about this, but I am willing to deal with my feelings in order to meet our children’s needs. I am learning that there is more than one right way to be a good parent.</p>
<p>Egocentric Attitude “I am different and better than everyone else.” Expects others to do things that he/she won’t do; “If I think it, it must be so;” quits at the first sign of failure.</p>	<p>Humility Sees self as a valuable person – no better and no worse than anyone else; genuine concern for others.</p>	<p>If you don’t do things my way, then you can’t see the kids. Actually I think they are better off with me anyway because you are such a loser.</p>	<p>I know that I am a good parent and I recognize that you are too. I know you miss the kids.</p>
<p>Attitude of Ownership Sees people and things merely as objects to possess; no concept of ownership or rights of others; won’t back down on little points; may use sex for power and control rather than intimacy.</p>	<p>Interdependent Relationships Acknowledges and respects other’s feelings, rights and property; able to negotiate and compromise; able to work interdependently with others to achieve worthwhile goals.</p>	<p>No one will ever take my son away from me. He is mine. What you want doesn’t matter.</p>	<p>I know that our son needs both of us in his life. It is hard for me to be away from him, so I know that when he is with me it must be hard for you too. Maybe we can set up phone calls to connect when he’s with each of us.</p>

Thinking Errors Worksheet for Divorced Parents

Identify which of these thinking errors you may be using and spend some time coming up with a responsible thought to replace the divorce thinking error. Focus on the errors you may be making even though it may be tempting to identify the thinking errors the other parent is making. You can only change your own thinking – not someone else’s. If you need more room, work on a separate sheet of paper.

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