

Ep #32: Co-parenting Apps: Tools for More Peaceful Post-divorce Communication



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With Your Host

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You're listening to *The Sensible Split* podcast, Episode 32. Today we're talking about a modern tool you can use to help manage your co-parenting dynamic: co-parenting apps. Today's episode will walk you through what co-parenting apps are, what they do, and how they can reduce conflict while promoting a more peaceful post-divorce life.

The Sensible Split is a podcast for smart but overwhelmed women in search of a roadmap to a successful separation and divorce. If you are looking for guidance in navigating the practical, legal, and emotional aspects of divorce with confidence, this is the show for you. Here's your host, Master Certified Life and Divorce Coach, Divorce Attorney, and Mediator, Lauren Fair.

Hi there. Welcome to episode 32. How are you? I hope you're doing well. I have some pretty exciting things going on with my family as of late. I'll share one of them with you today and another one on an upcoming episode. So for today's update, my oldest stepdaughter and her husband had a baby. So I'm kind of, sort of a grandmother now. She had a beautiful, healthy little baby girl. We got to meet her and love on her shortly after she was born, and it feels like a new exciting chapter in the family.

I am really grateful to get to witness my husband becoming a grandfather. He is actually taking it very well, adjusting to that stage of life. He's absolutely thrilled and enchanted with his new granddaughter, you can tell. So, I'm excited to have a baby in the family again. My kids are also just super amazed that they get to be an aunt and an uncle so young, and they have so many fun plans for their niece. There is just no doubt she will be, and already is, loved by so many.

Alright, so that's my personal update for today. Let's get into today's topic. I want to talk to you about co-parenting apps and how they can help you create a more functional co-parenting dynamic and peaceful post-divorce life by promoting the reduction of conflict and improving communication. I had a client recently who was unfamiliar with co-parenting apps and initially resistant when someone was suggesting that she use one. But once I was able to explain to her what they are, she was all on board and thought it might actually help her to have a

Ep #32: Co-parenting Apps: Tools for More Peaceful Post-divorce Communication

co-parenting app versus not having one. So, I want to break down for you today the highlights of what co-parenting apps can do for you so you can decide if you may find value in using one yourself.

Let's start with the basics. Co-parenting apps are mobile or web-based platforms designed to help separated or divorced parents manage the logistics of raising kids together. So think of them as a digital command center. They're designed to organize and streamline communications between parents, minimize miscommunication, curb inappropriate communication styles, provide transparency, and even serve as evidence in high-conflict situations.

Well, they're more than just calendars. They're not just a way to share information about the kids' events. Now, that is one aspect of them, but there's so much more to them than that. The apps often combine messaging capabilities, scheduling, expense tracking, and document storage into one secure platform. So it can really help to have one central repository of information where you're keeping all of the communications regarding the children organized.

So here are some of the common features that you will find in co-parenting apps, with a little more detail. So, the first is shared calendars. You can coordinate custody schedules, school events, sports practices, and vacations all in one place. Some even let you request trades or swaps, for example, say you want to trade time for some other time that they have, and you can actually make that request within the shared calendar, which is kind of convenient. It can be helpful sometimes to have a visual of the parenting plan and the parenting schedule so that you can see where the kids are supposed to be when and be able to visualize what a swap of some of those dates might look like.

Another feature is the messaging. So, in-app messaging, messaging that you're sending within the app, is time-stamped and uneditable. That's a big one in terms of a difference between co-parenting apps and texts, and why a co-parenting app can be so valuable for some, right? Especially those of you who are dealing with a problematic co-parent. The fact that the messages are

Ep #32: Co-parenting Apps: Tools for More Peaceful Post-divorce Communication

time-stamped and uneditable is super helpful. It can keep communication more managed, respectful, civil, and just keep people honest about when they've received messages, when they were sent, and what they actually said.

So, unlike regular text messages, you can't turn off the read receipts or go back and edit or delete previous messages. Messages are also often characterized by topic. You can open a thread and give it a name. Say we want to coordinate a dentist appointment for our child. We can just start a thread that says 'Dentist Appointment,' right? And then all the communications about that topic can go under that heading. So that feature can be helpful not only for organizing yourself and being able to find communications pertaining to one particular topic easily, but also it can be helpful if you are in a high-conflict situation and you need organized presentation of evidence for court. Because then, instead of going through a very long line of text messages about various different topics, you can just pull up the problematic topics and submit those for review by attorneys or the court.

Alright, another helpful feature of the app is expense tracking. So you can log shared expenses like medical bills or school supplies and keep a running tally of who paid what. So that can be really helpful too, when you're buying different expenses that may be reimbursable by the other parent, or you're buying supplies, rather. So being able to have a central place where you are tracking all of those expenses together is really helpful versus them being in different places, like email, text messages, or maybe some of them are in paper. It could be helpful to have one place where you can see all of the expenses that have been incurred and what you've requested reimbursement for. Have you received reimbursement for those expenses yet? Et cetera.

Document storage is another feature of some of the apps. Those include things like securely sharing report cards, medical information, or parenting plans. Calls are another more recently added feature to some of the apps. And what that is, is you can actually call the other parent or do virtual visitation through the app. So that there is clear documentation in the app of when a call was made, whether it was answered, how long it was, etc.

Ep #32: Co-parenting Apps: Tools for More Peaceful Post-divorce Communication

There is also another interesting feature that has been added to some of the apps in recent times: things like check-ins and GPS features. So some apps allow for location check-ins, which can provide reassurance without needing direct communication about it. Let me explain what I mean. Anytime that you want to confirm you are where you said you would be, you can create a check-in in the app.

So if you're showing up to an exchange location where the other parent is supposed to be, and perhaps you've had a history of there being difficulty and that parent not showing up, and you want to make sure it's clear that you are there at that location at the time you're supposed to be so that there's not a different version of events suggested, you can actually check yourself in the app to a particular location. So again, this can show that you're on time at an exchange, that you attended a child event, or something similar.

It's important for a feature like this, before using it, to also consider getting some legal advice in your jurisdiction regarding tracking of anyone other than yourself. You can always track yourself if you want, but you wouldn't want to use that for tracking someone else without discussing that with an attorney, because there could be implications to doing that. But this is an interesting feature, and if you use it permissibly and properly, it really could be a value-add as well.

So if you have ever had some difficulty in phrasing communication to your co-parent in a way that you want to because they've just pushed your buttons, then another feature called Tone Meter, which is available through one of the apps, particularly Our Family Wizard, and other apps have similar tools, can help you commit to keeping your communication positive and productive. And even if you're on the receiving end of those types of negative texts, maybe even, this could be helpful to have in the app to maybe have your co-parent check themselves before they're sending you communication that is not positive or productive. And what tools like Tone Meter do is you can actually put in a draft message and have it check you for your tone and work on improving the tone so that it is more likely to get the outcome that you're looking for in sending it.

Ep #32: Co-parenting Apps: Tools for More Peaceful Post-divorce Communication

Professional access is another feature of co-parenting apps. And what that is, some platforms allow lawyers, therapists, mediators, or even judges to view the communication directly on the platform. So they can actually get their own login if you provide it to them. And that can be especially useful in ongoing litigation or sometimes in mediation. This is something that allows real-time access to the messages that are going between co-parents, which in certain circumstances can be useful.

There are a variety of co-parenting apps on the market, but I'm going to give you the names of the most popular ones so you have somewhere to start your research into one to determine if any of them might be right for you. So, one is, and I mentioned it a moment ago, Our Family Wizard. That's probably the most well-known co-parenting app, at least where I am in California. It's court-approved in many states and comes with all the major features that we just talked about. This is one of the most commonly used ones in San Diego, and it's one that I find in talking with co-parents that they really enjoy the scope of features that are offered within the app.

Talking Parents is another option, also popular here where I am. AppClose is another one. My understanding is, as of the time of this recording, there is a free option for AppClose. So Our Family Wizard and Talking Parents, there is a cost to utilize. AppClose, there is a free option with robust features, including calendar, expenses, and communication features, so it could be something to check out. I think they also have paid versions with more expanded features, but they're one of the ones that, at least as of now, have some free option available.

Cozi is another co-parenting app. And although it's not exclusively a co-parenting app, it's really more a family organizer app, if you will. So it's not limited to co-parenting applications, but it can be utilized for that. It's great for families looking for a shared calendar and to-do list with a simpler interface. So each of these has a slightly different vibe. Some are more user-friendly, others are more litigation-focused. It depends on what you need and what price point you're comfortable with.

Ep #32: Co-parenting Apps: Tools for More Peaceful Post-divorce Communication

There are a lot of benefits of using a co-parenting app beyond just the features that we just went over. So the benefits, really, I think, can be boiled down to the following. First, it reduces direct conflict. By keeping communication organized, concise, in writing, and maybe even with the benefit of it being run through a tone filter first, you avoid the emotional minefields of texting or phone calls when you're in an emotionally activated state or your co-parent is. When you remove ambiguity from schedules, expenses, and communication, you may remove many of the triggers that cause arguments in the first place.

By using a co-parenting app, you're not debating whether someone was supposed to pick up someone on Thursday based on some agreement that you thought you had that's not documented anywhere, and it actually seems like you're not on the same page with your co-parent. And so, you're not having the debate about who is right about that, it's in the calendar. If you've made that change in the shared calendar, it's there, and it's not left up to memory. You're not arguing over whether the text message chain being presented to the court is complete or whether messages have been deleted or edited by a party.

Corralling a difficult communication dynamic into a managed space where you can decide what kind of notification you receive when a message is sent in the platform, such as a push notification, an email, a text message, and whether that happens each time there is action in the app, or whether you receive a daily digest of actions that have been taken. It can be really helpful. So what I mean there is, when you're communicating over text message, you're getting messages, typically getting notifications as those messages are coming through.

And when you have someone who's not respectful of the cadence at which they're sending those messages, then moving to a co-parenting app could be helpful because you can actually change the notification settings based on your preferences. So you can decide: Do I get an email? Do I get a push notification? Do I get a text message? What happens when someone sends me a message in the app? And how often do I want that to happen? Do I want to receive all of those individually when they come through, or do I want there to be a daily digest, once a day, sent to me with a summary of what's been sent to me that

Ep #32: Co-parenting Apps: Tools for More Peaceful Post-divorce Communication

day? So that ability to control notifications on certain apps can be a relief when you have an unhealthy text communication dynamic going on, or calls too.

You're not texting in real time when emotions are running high without the benefit of a tone check or a pause, because you know you can't go back and edit it. It might be reviewed by others, etc. In-app messaging encourages more measured, thoughtful communication. Accountability is another benefit. Everything is time-stamped and often cannot be edited, so it keeps everybody honest on when a communication was made, when it was read, and what actually was said in it. There's also clear documentation. This is especially helpful if you ever need to show a record of your interactions in court or with professionals. You can use different communication threads to organize communication regarding different topics, and that can be easily printed for attorneys, other professionals involved, or the court.

And also, there's just less stress for kids when parents are on the same page about the communications. When parents are more organized and they're less reactive, kids benefit. This is a big 'why' for me in what I do. If we can reduce conflict even a little bit, the negative impact of the conflict on kids is lessened, and they do better during and after divorce and have less long-lasting impacts that follow them into adulthood. This is really important work to co-parent better.

So what are the cons of using a co-parenting app if there are all these benefits? Why not just do it? There aren't many cons, I have to say, from my point of view, but here are some. One, the cost. Some of the best apps, like Our Family Wizard, require a subscription, and that's usually around \$100 to \$150 a year per parent. So there is a downside in that sense that there's a cost to the app. However, in many situations, it's a cost that's well worth it in the long run, based on the benefits that you're getting in return. And the other con is just that there's a learning curve. You've got to learn a new app. It's another app to learn how to use. Some are more user-friendly than others. But really, how many new apps are many of us trying all the time? You can figure it out. I believe in you.

Ep #32: Co-parenting Apps: Tools for More Peaceful Post-divorce Communication

Personally, I think the benefits outweigh the drawbacks, especially when used with the right intention.

So, if you're considering using a co-parenting app, I hope that this was helpful for you to learn more about what those may look like. And now I want to share with you three steps you could take today to help you determine whether one is right for you, and if so, which one. So first, you want to identify your needs. Do you need basic scheduling, or do you need something that can track expenses and store court documents? Write down your must-haves from a co-parenting app, and then go app shopping based on what your needs are.

Two, try before you commit. Sometimes you can get free trials or even just be able to pay for one month at a time as part of a subscription, but you can pay on a monthly basis versus annually. So, try a couple out to see which feel most intuitive for you. And you might also involve your co-parent in the decision. It's a win if you both have buy-in to it. But you can research first. Sometimes you've got to be the one to go first and to try out the apps and see which ones you like, which ones that you would like to suggest.

And three, set expectations with your co-parent. So decide together how you'll use the app. Are you going to check messages daily? Are you going to log expenses weekly? Are you going to use it for all communication or just for scheduling? The clearer the expectations, the better it will work for both of you. What do you do if your co-parent will not agree? There may be the ability for the court to order non-emergency communication occur through a co-parenting app. So you want to check with an attorney in your jurisdiction, where your case is, to determine whether this may be possible for you if your co-parent won't agree to use a co-parenting app cooperatively.

I will say, in my experience, the court favors co-parenting apps for the reasons that I just went through with you. And in sum, they work to get parents on a better page in terms of communication and therefore reduce conflict and therefore benefit kids. Co-parenting apps are one of the best modern tools we have to ease the daily friction that can come with co-parenting. They bring

Ep #32: Co-parenting Apps: Tools for More Peaceful Post-divorce Communication

structure, clarity, and maybe most importantly, a little emotional distance to a situation that's often charged with emotion.

I hope you found today's episode helpful. Remember, the less conflict between parents, the better kids do in divorce. And I want you to be able to live a peaceful post-divorce life. And co-parenting apps are one tool you can use to make that happen. I'll see you in the next episode. Take care until then. Bye.

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