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# Peaceful Parenting: Christopher Castellano of Joseph Greenwald Laake on 5 Essential Tips for Successfully Sharing Custody



Authority Magazine Editorial Staff

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Put your child's best interests above all else. Post divorce will offer many opportunities to reevaluate your priorities. Make sure that each decision you make is focused on how it will impact your child. Such as where you relocate and how you decide to communicate with your former spouse.

**C**o-parenting after a separation or divorce can be challenging, but it is possible to create a peaceful, cooperative arrangement that prioritizes the well-being of the child. What are the key strategies that help parents navigate shared custody with respect, communication, and stability?

Christopher R. Castellano is a Principal with Joseph, Greenwald & Laake, PA and has practiced family law since 2013. Since that time, Christopher has assisted Maryland and D.C. clients on a wide array of issues, ranging from divorce, custody, child support, alimony, pre and post nuptial agreements, to domestic and international relocation disputes, high asset property disputes, and retirement distribution disputes. Mr. Castellano encourages his clients to approach their cases with a focus on understanding foreseeable risks, determining how to mitigate those risks, and then performing a risk/reward analysis to find the most beneficial outcome of their case.

**Thank you so much for doing this with us! Can you tell us a little about yourself?**

**P**rofessionally, I am a Principal at Joseph, Greenwald & Laake, PA in the Family Law Department. I have practiced family law for over a decade. Personally, I am a husband and a father to three wonderful children, with whom I enjoy hiking, sailing, and traveling.

**Thank you for sharing that. Let's jump into our main topic. What are the biggest challenges parents face when trying to co-parent peacefully after separation or divorce?**

Post divorce can be one of the most difficult times in a person's life. When you add the need to co-parent in this new normal, things can be exponentially more challenging. While specific challenges vary from family to family, generally, I have found four main concepts to be the most significant difficulties faced by newly divorced parents:

- Communication
- Reconciling different parenting styles
- Lingering emotions
- Differing perspectives

### **How can parents effectively communicate and resolve conflicts while sharing custody?**

In my experience, miscommunication is the cause of a significant proportion of divorces, so co-parenting with flawed communication skills can be difficult. I encourage clients to keep communication in writing and prior to sending communication on a heated topic, really think about what really needs to be said in a way that can help your child.

### **What strategies help parents maintain consistency and stability for their children across two households?**

Maintaining consistency and stability for your children is an absolute necessity in order to reduce the strain, pressure and anxiety felt by children of a divorce. A few practical strategies to ensure this include:

- Really study your custody agreement. Understanding the terms and nuances of your agreement can help you to avoid disagreements.

- Don't assume or guess about the requirements of your custody order or agreement. If you have hesitation or questions, seek out the assistance of a professional. It is OK to have a misunderstanding about the language of a custody order or agreement. These documents can be long and complicated. But acting on that misunderstanding is likely something that is hard to come back from. Therefore, it is always a good idea to ask before you act.
- Establish rules and routines for your household. It would be helpful if the "bigger" rules are in common with the other household, such as schoolwork expectations, grooming routines, and bedtimes.
- Maintain proper communication. Effective communication has come up several times here and for good reason. Proper communication can be the most beneficial factor in helping a child of divorce thrive. If you have trouble maintaining appropriate levels of communication, look to the use of shared communication apps, like OurFamilyWizard, Cozi, or 2Houses.
- Model respectful behavior. This can be a tough concept to get behind but can pay dividends in the long run. Your child will recognize the respect you give, and that type of modeling will prove invaluable.

### **How can parents manage their own emotions and personal differences to prioritize their child's well-being?**

Going through a divorce can be a traumatic experience that causes someone to experience a full range of emotions. One of the biggest challenges faced by post-divorce individuals is that they hold onto lingering emotions. This is a very logical response to the dissolution of a marriage, particularly one that resulted in children. However, many people are unable to recognize that their emotions are having an adverse impact 'in the now.' I always encourage

my clients to seek professional assistance, such as from an experienced therapist. Allowing emotions and long-standing differences to impact your current disposition to your former-spouse creates an environment of hostility and one that is *always* recognized by your child.

### **What role does flexibility play in successful co-parenting, and how can parents balance structure with adaptability?**

Flexibility in a post-divorce custody life can be important as long as that flexibility is relied upon appropriately. A key to successfully navigating post-divorce custody is understanding your custody order or agreement. Rigidly applying the terms of your arrangement is likely not an appropriate way to co-parent with your former spouse. Similarly, being too willing to be flexible on particular items can lead to a lack of structure and reliability and even encourage an expectation that you will *always* be flexible. It is important to recognize when you should be flexible and when you should stand up for the terms of your custody arrangement. As before, consulting with an experienced professional when you have a question about flexibility versus rigidity is likely the best path forward.

### **How can parents support their child's emotional needs and sense of security while navigating a shared custody arrangement?**

A child of divorce *will* have emotional needs. Whether those are outwardly apparent or not, they will be there. At a basic level, as with parents themselves, I always encourage my clients to seek out counseling for their child. Unfortunately, children recognize that their parents are no longer a cohesive unit and consequently, they can see you and your former spouse as two different teams which they don't want to disappoint. As a result, children

may not be forthcoming with their emotional needs to you, but an independent professional can serve this role.

**From your experience, what are “5 Essential Tips for Successfully Sharing Custody”? If possible, please share an example for each one.**

1 . Put your child’s best interests above all else.

Post divorce will offer many opportunities to reevaluate your priorities. Make sure that each decision you make is focused on how it will impact your child. Such as where you relocate and how you decide to communicate with your former spouse.

2 . Communicate Professionally.

Communication is key to successfully navigating post-divorce custody. Try to always communicate in writing. This allows for a paper trail but also the opportunity to really think about your words before they are sent.

3 . Maintain Consistency.

Flexibility and adaptability is important, but routines and consistency create the bedrock for your child to thrive.

4 . Maintain Respect.

Whether apparent or not, your child *will* pick up on disrespect aimed at your former spouse.

5 . Don’t Assume, Just Ask for Help.

There is no reason why you have to navigate post-divorce custody on your own. Whether you have a custody order or an Agreement, you don't have to assume your interpretation of the requirements are correct. Simply ask a professional for advice to avoid conflict.

**None of us are able to achieve success without some help along the way. Who has been the inspiration or model for you? Can you share a story about that?**

My wife. We have been together since my college years, and she has been a source of stability and calm. As a therapist, she has taught me invaluable skills essential not just to the practice of domestic law but also with how to balance my personal life, values, and sanity with such challenging work.

**How have you used your success to bring goodness to the world?**

I am a firm believer that any positive impact can lead to a significant betterment of one's life. Representing clients through the most tumultuous time of their life is challenging and providing them with positive moments along the way can change their entire outlook. Chaos theory tells us that these positive moments can bring about unexpected changes, and I like to think that positivity begets positivity.

**If you could inspire a movement that would bring the most amount of good to the most amount of people, what would that be?**

Gaining or learning perspective. So many of the issues present in divorce and custody cases can boil down to a lack (or refusal) of perspective. This deficiency does not appear to be localized to people struggling with divorce/custody cases but instead is endemic. Granted, a movement to instill



a recalibrated sense of perspective seems lofty, but no one makes progress without thinking ‘big.’

**We are very blessed that some of the biggest names in Business, VC funding, Sports, and Entertainment read this column. Is there a person in the world, or in the US with whom you would love to have a private breakfast or lunch with, and why?**

While the list would not be short, from the perspective of a Maryland resident and attorney, perhaps a meal with the Maryland Supreme Court Chief Justice, Matthew Fader. The reason being that I could gain the ever-valuable deeper understanding of the Judiciary’s perspective on issues impacting my clients.

**How can our readers follow your work online?**

I can be found online at [Joseph, Greenwald & Laake, PA](#) and [my LinkedIn page](#), where I post monthly articles as well as podcasts.

**Thank you so much for joining us. This was very inspirational.**

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