



*the 10
Commandments
of co-parenting*

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First edition

for those who are trying

*If you bungle raising your children,
I don't think whatever else you do
matters very much.*

-Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis



Stop! Please Read

The contents of this e-book are for informational purposes only. They are suggestions, opinions and thoughts-not hard and fast rules that apply to each and every situation. In all of my e-books I seek to provide a basic understanding of the legalities of a particular issue. Clearly the issues are usually much more complex and often times wrought with emotion.

I often write with humor and reference to pop culture. I don't do this because I think these issues are funny or because I'm cavalier. I do it under the old adage that "laughter is good for the soul."

I recognize there is a world of pain encompassing the lives of people who seek legal assistance for

their families and I hope the e-books I offer help as a starting place to gain understanding and perspective.

The truth is every family is different. Therefore, none of these e-books should be used in lieu of seeking legal advice for your situation. Moreover, none of these e-books are complete in legal advice and are more like highlights to legal issues that arise.

This e-book is based on California Law only.

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-Candace

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if you didn't know...
CO-PARENTING IS HARD

Co-Parenting has to be the most challenging endeavors known to man. In 90% of our relationships we can decide to disengage. We don't like the boss? Quit. We don't like our neighbor? Move. Don't have the money to move? Close the blinds and leave 10 minutes earlier in the morning so you don't have to engage. Don't like your brother? Don't call him. In most relationships we can limit time spent and words exchanged.

But with co-parenting you can't disengage. A relationship has ended and that in and of itself may have devastated you. But you can't cut them out of your life and never see them again. You can't block the phone call.

What happens if this one time, he calls is because your child is sick or hurt. You have to see her to exchange your child. Every two days. Once a week. Doesn't matter when. That day is coming

and you can't do anything about it but stomach the tension, get your child buckled in as soon as possible and drive away.

Indeed, I dare say that in the most effective co-parenting relationships you have to arrive at the point where you respect the other parent and can work together with the other parent BETTER than you did when you were in a relationship. You have to trust the other person MORE than you did when you were in a relationship. It's counter intuitive and every fiber in your being will reject the process. You may even want to throw away your smartphone or tablet as you read that sentence. But I do my very best to only speak the truth.

So here's the deal; I don't expect to solve your problems in 10 commandments. I don't expect that in the next 10 to 15 minutes after you read this, you will suddenly have an amazing co-parenting situation. But I do hope to share some insights that will help you begin to make headway in one of the

messiest endeavors anyone can undertake.

As my law school professor always said, “Thousands have done it before you; thousands will do it after you.” You will make it. It will be okay. And it may not be as bad as you think.

Commandment #1

thou shalt **RAISE PRODUCTIVE, WELL-ADJUSTED CITIZENS IN SOCIETY**

A Productive human being is defined as an adult able to manage his or her own emotional, spiritual, relational and financial development in a way that is not harmful to himself/herself or others.



Isn't that the goal? It has to be your number one goal, at a minimum it has to be in your top 3 goals as a parent.

It's amazing to me that everyone has goals. Weight goals. Career goals. Relationship

goals. What about Parental goals? Why don't I see #coparentgoals on social media more often? Let's change that. If you find this e-book helpful, post it on social media with #coparentgoals. Start a new trend.

Where are the incentives and rewards for good parenting? It's easily the toughest job. The bosses are demanding, requiring 24-hour care. You're always on the clock or at least on call. There's all kinds of social pressure for your kids to look perfect and be perfect; but you know they aren't and you're just waiting for the day everyone finds out the truth... your family isn't perfect.

But I wrote this commandment strategically, because I am concerned that in a Facebook happy society we forget that for every "cheese!" there is a "for the love of God stop hitting your brother!" The pressure builds and the goal becomes to create a perfect production rather than to produce authentic character.



There are a lot of people hurting. The picture you posted on Facebook is during your custodial time. You don't post the pictures of how your kids cry when they leave.

How your kids say how much they miss you and want to stay with you. And how it hurts on multiple levels. Not just the pain of them leaving. But the pain of them going to him. The pain of them going to her. Why can't they stay with you longer? It's almost enough to start singing the Big Red commercial... "longer with Big Red..."

And then you begin to remember how it's not fair. How he or she has been cruel to you. How the other parent lies and manipulates. How the other parent is winning; and you are losing. And it hurts.

Not the kind of pain that is felt for a moment but then begins healing. The kind of pain that comes and ebbs every time you let them go. Every. Single. Time.

And if that is you-first, you are not alone. There are hundreds of thousands of people walking in your shoes and feeling your pain.

Second, you are not to be judged. I know attorneys and courts in general don't have a lot of time for the sentimentality because we have to focus on "the law." But let me take one moment to tell you that what you are feeling or have felt is valid. It is real, and your feelings should not be buried, disregarded or pushed aside.

However, your feelings must be managed appropriately. You do your child and society as a whole a disservice when your feelings dictate the manner in which you engage the other parent. You lose. **Your child loses.**

That's the bottom line.

The goal is to produce a productive human.

Not a friend who sees how you have been wronged. Not a pawn with which to make the other parent suffer. A productive human being. That means that your child's needs, come before your own. That means your child's need to love your ex and even his or her significant other, takes precedence over your desire for your pain to be compensated.

If you want a friend, get a dog. Your child will grow up. He or she will leave you and transition into independent living. That is a part of the goal. That means it's finally time for you to find the support system that you need. It's time to stop the bleeding and find a healthy way to cope with the uncomfortable dance of co-parenting.

Commandment #2

thou shalt **FORGIVE**

If the goal is to raise a productive human being, then you have to find a way to stop the pain. Stop the anger. Stop the rage. Stop the emotions that cloud your judgement. Stop the tit for tat games.



You may even need to stop talking about your situation to friends and family. They love you too much. It's paradoxical but it's the truth. You keep feeding them all the ways your have been wronged and they get amped up because "nobody puts baby in the corner!" (*Dirty Dancing*, original version).

You tell them how much the other person is evil and then they reinforce that the other person is evil. There is no way to even

begin to have a healthy perspective in that type of negativity.

I know you've heard it before. But it's not a cliché. It's truth. You forgive other people to free yourself. Do you know how many heart diseases and sicknesses are related to stress?

Do you know how much your hatred is shortening your life span? It's not worth it. You want them to suffer? Outlive them in health and happiness. There's an old proverb that says:

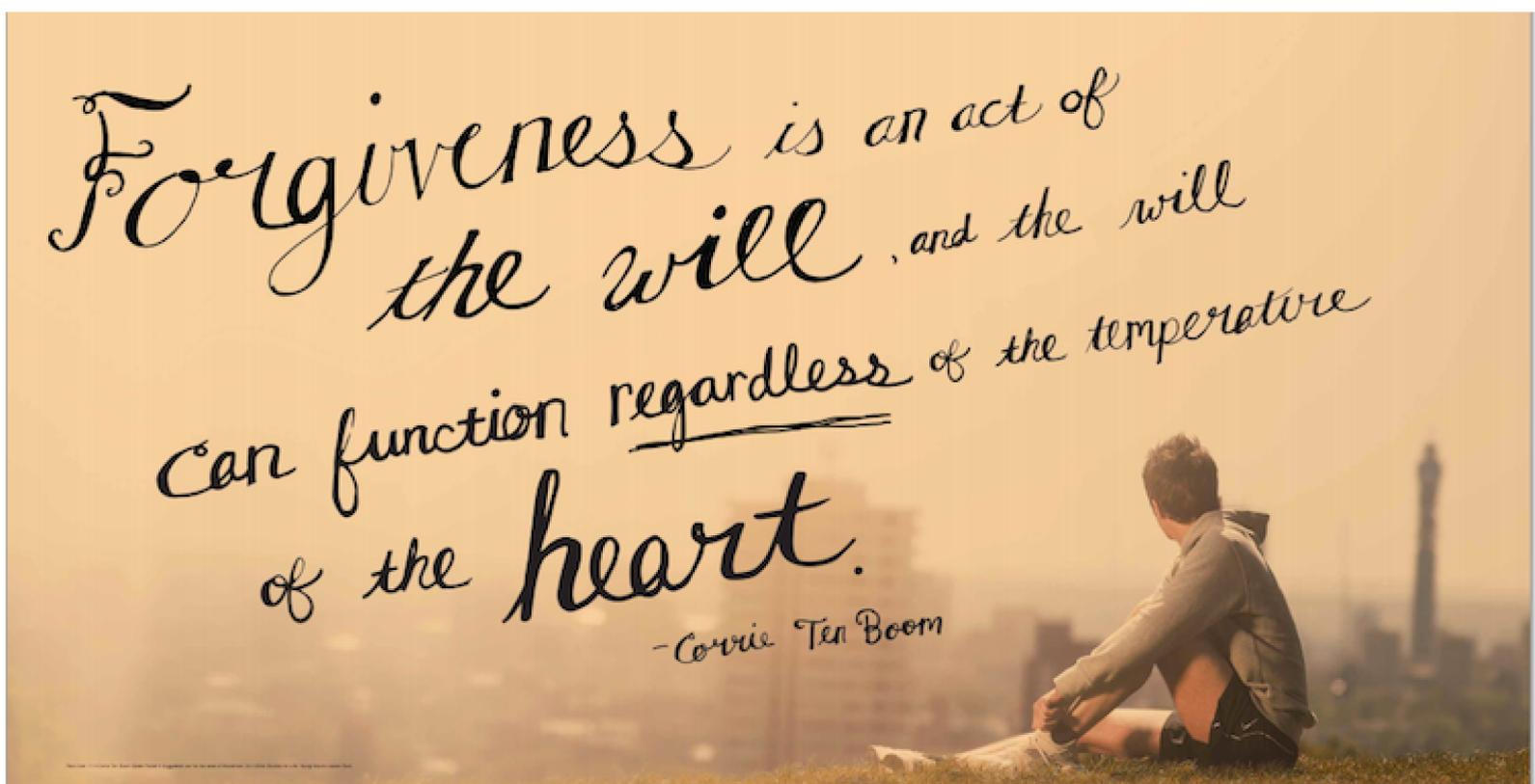
If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink.

In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head...

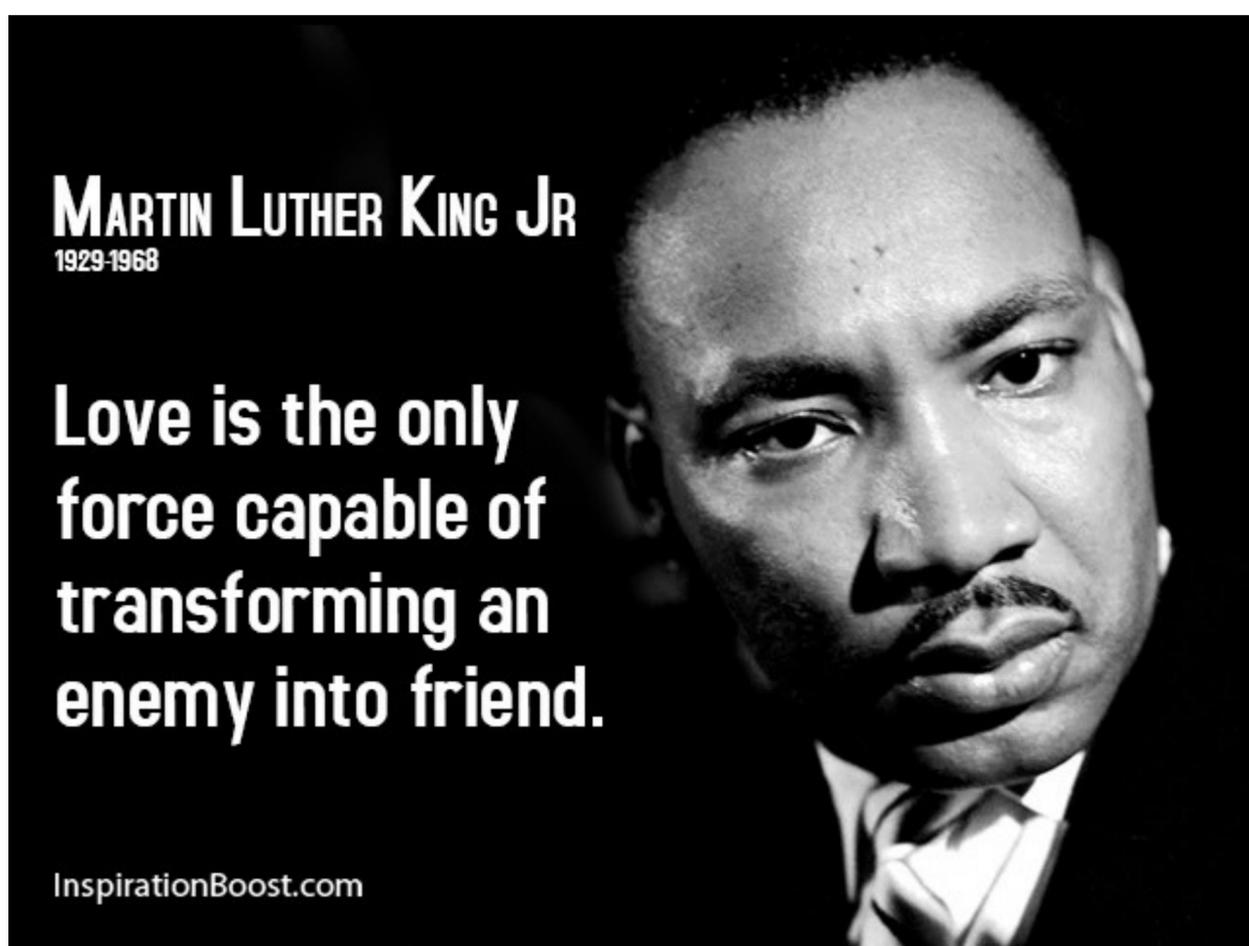
How is this possible? It's possible because when you are truly free, no one can control you. Even better-freedom is contagious. If you are free, the other person is then freed to forgive themselves. It sounds trite. Brady Bunch even. But the principle is true enough.

Think about it logically. If you know you've done wrong-aren't you more defensive and angry? Especially if people are constantly pointing out your wrong? It becomes cyclical: You do wrong. You're angry and scapegoated so you do more wrong.

In the alternative: You do wrong. You are treated with kindness and forgiveness. You are motivated to do right instead of wrong. Again, I'm not going to solve your life in 10 commandments. But I am offering principles that you should consider.



The thing is, I know it's bad. I know it hurts. But I just think if Martin Luther King, Jr. can preach love to those who hated him; if Corrie Ten Boom can preach forgiveness for the Nazis; if people, everyday, through restorative justice programs are forgiving the murderers of their loved ones. Surely, there is hope for you to forgive your ex?



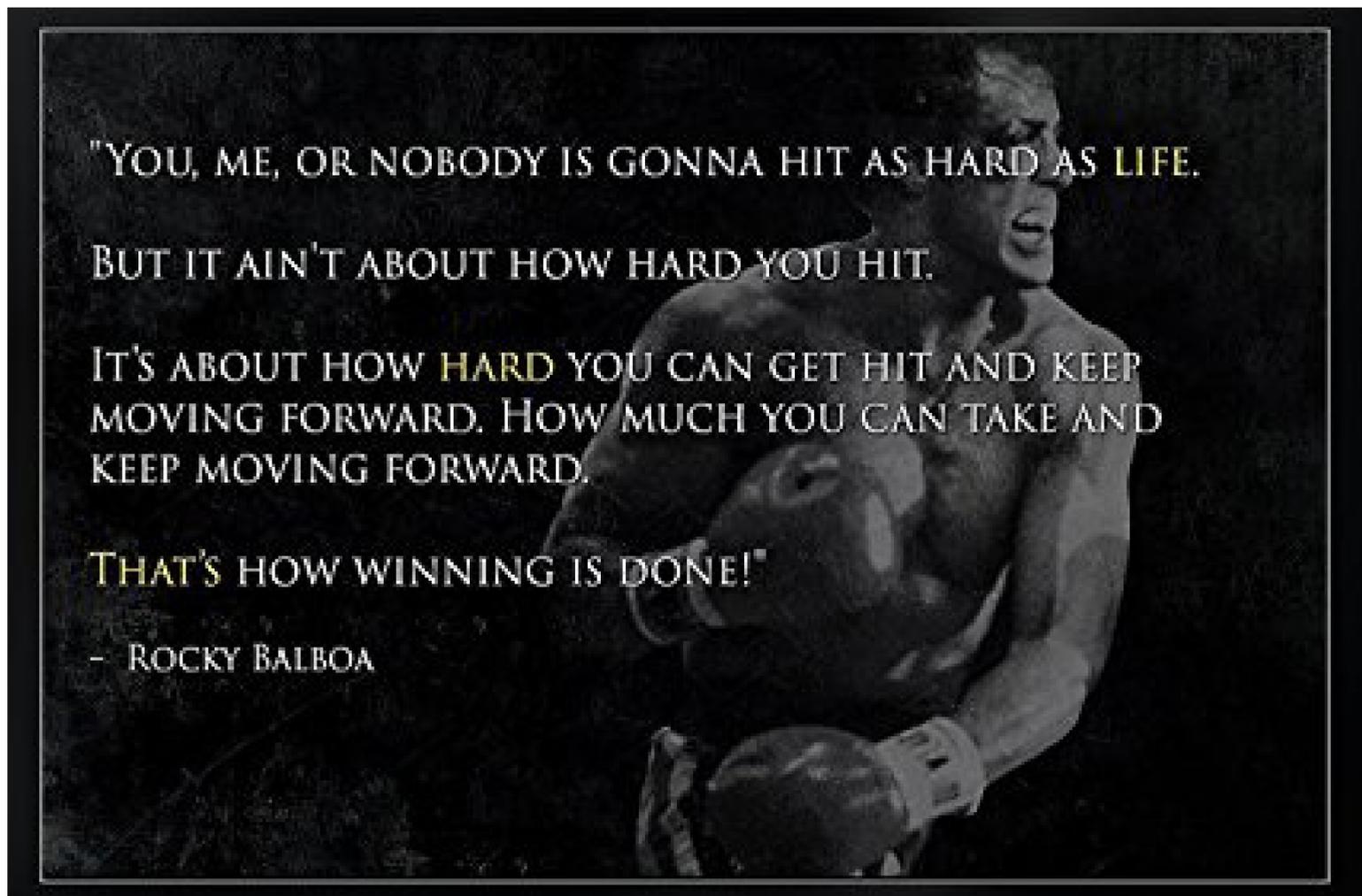
Commandment #3

thou shalt **NOT USE THE CHILD AS A COMPANION**



I know she's cute and you just sit there for days watching her. She farts and its hilarious. She gurgles and your world stops. But she was not born to satiate your loneliness. She was born to make an impact on the world and it is your mandate to prepare her. It is your mandate to do everything possible to ensure she has the emotional, mental, financial and spiritual stability she needs to change the world. You fail when through your co-parenting habits, you cripple her with anxiety, fear and stress, making her a target for the world to run her over.

She is Rocky and you are Mickey (Rocky's trainer). Train and grow her so that when you're gone-as Mickey died in *Rocky III*- she can still be a champion. She can still fight.



I feel the need to explain to some of you that beginning 1976 and continuing all the way to *Creed II* in 2018, Sylvester Stallone starred in a series of movies called Rocky in which he was an underestimated boxer that rose to become the heavy weight champion of the world through hard work and courage and against all odds. They are amazing movies.

If you haven't seen them, start with *Rocky IV* and then go to the original *Rocky*, moving onto *Rocky II*, then *Rocky III*. Re-watch *Rocky IV*, skip *Rocky V* and then go to *Rocky Balboa*, then *Creed* and *Creed II*.
You're welcome.

Commandment #4

thou shalt **SHOW RESPECT**



It's not to the person, it's to the office.

I'm going to tell you a secret. At this point in my career, I've been to almost every courthouse in LA County that deals with Family Law or Dependency. I've been to various courthouses in Riverside County, Ventura County and Orange County as well. The truth is, every judge or bench officer I

have appeared before is not my favorite.

Most of them, I don't have a problem. But there are one or two courtrooms out there that I would prefer not to revisit. But I will ALWAYS say "Your Honor." And I will ALWAYS show him or her the respect they deserve even when I disagree with his or her decision.

Reason #1: He or she has worked really hard to obtain that position. The chair of a judge is a tough seat to claim.

But reason #2-it is ultimately their function that I respect. These men and women have tall orders-very difficult jobs. Judges have to bring structure to your mess. They have to find boundaries that are both not too restrictive and yet protective. They have to create order where chaos may very well reside. And I respect that. No matter who is sitting in the seat.

Similarly, you have to respect the job of the other parent. They have the same job as



you: to raise productive human beings. And they may be struggling. They may be flat out failing. But you have to respect the job and give honor to the role. Because no matter who it is, they have a job that needs to be done. No matter who it is, that parent plays a pivotal role in your child's psyche and development whether he or she is present in your child's life or not.

So when you are challenged to dishonor the other parent because you do not like the

decisions he or she is making, remember to respect their role, even if you dislike their decisions.

Commandment #5

thou shalt **NOT RETALIATE OR BE VINDICTIVE**



This one is probably easy to miss. I think most people's gut reaction to this is: "I don't do that." Vindictiveness hides when we look ourselves in the mirror. We see ourselves as the victim and usually think the other person "deserved" it. Or we are justified in treating the other person the way he or she treated us. But that's retaliation and thou shalt not do it.

Point blank, if your decision to take an action or to refrain from taking an action is based

on what the other person has done for you or what they can do for you-the decision is rooted in vindictiveness. It sounds harsh. It is harsh. But it is also truth.

Commandment #6

thou shalt **COMMUNICATE**



I don't know that I need to spend time on this.

If you would want to know, tell him. If you would want to know, tell her. That includes the school play and the Easter egg hunt at Aunt Sally's. It definitely includes

appointments to the doctor and report cards.

If she doesn't ask-provide it. If you told him once and he asks for the same thing again, send it.

It's not like we live in the day of the carbon copy where you have to re-type or re-write

something all over again. It's not like you actually have to dial the phone number anymore. You may not even have to call. It will cost you all of 8 seconds to comply with the request. Pick any of the following or combinations thereof: scan it, e-mail it, forward it, re-send it, tape it, copy and paste it. See? You're done. And...it didn't hurt.

Oh, and don't use your child to communicate the message. That's painful to them. Use your words.

Commandment #7

thou shalt **NOT JUMP TO CONCLUSIONS**



Can I tell you another secret? Kids really like attention. And they are masters at learning how to get your attention. It is how you interact with them that determines if they will seek negative attention or positive attention.

Now that that is out there, if your kid knows you and the other parent can't stand each other; and every time someone dares to speak the other parent's name, your eyes light on fire and steam comes out of your nostril... your kid is aware. Thus, it is not outside the realm of possibility that they use your

Achilles' heel to get your attention. Perhaps a bit exaggeration or even fabrication.

So do some due diligence if you hear a negative report from the "other house." Not every molehill is a mountain. Sometimes it's just a bunch of ants.

Commandment #8

thou shalt **MEDIATE & ARBITRATE**

the Attorney
NEXT DOOR



So if even the twenty-five year happily married couples have arguments, do you think you as ex-spouses and former significant others would be exempt? As expected, *au contraire, mon ami* (on the contrary, my friend). You have even more things to argue about and less things that will pull you back together.

So just like we plan for emergencies. You need to plan for disagreements. They will come. So pick that one rare spring day in which you explain pleasantries without spewing venom and plot out a way to handle the arguments.

Might I suggest having a Mediator/Arbitrator on call? A mediator will help you agree. An arbitrator will decide for you when you can't agree. You can pick a professional (might I recommend myself? [Click here](#) to talk to us about Mediation/Arbitration).

But you can also pick Great Aunt Sally who loves both of you to pieces. You can even create a Kid Committee. Are they still called God parents?

Whatever you want to call them. Build a community of people who love your child to pieces and have them help you make tough calls. Don't manipulate and bias them in your favor. It's for your child. Seek counsel and save yourself attorney's fees and save your child years of therapy.

Commandment #9

thou shalt

**REMEMBER THAT
ADULTHOOD IS 4X AS LONG
AS CHILDHOOD**



According to Google as I write, the average life expectancy in North America is 80 years for males and 84 years for females.

So remember how the goal of parenting is to...?? That's right-**raise a productive human being.**

Well you have about 18 years give or take to accomplish your goal. Then for about 72-74 years they are going to either implement all the valuable, wise teaching you provided over the years or they will spend 72-74 years trying to dump and re-wire themselves from all the chaos you have ingrained into them. Worse yet, they will duplicate your foolishness and infect the rest of society for the next 72-74 years.

All that to say, the 18 years is but a drop in the bucket. The 18 years can't be about you- it has to be about them. Your goal is for your child to like and respect you when he or she is a matured adult somewhere around 30, not when he or she is a child at age 3.

Commandment #10

thou shalt **GO TO COUNSELING AND SEEK EDUCATION**



I'm standing in the halls of the courthouse or sitting in my office the words "co-parenting counseling" crosses my lips. The party I'm talking to looks at me as if I've just spoken a foreign language. His brows furrow. Her

eyes glaze in confusion. Yes. Co-Parenting counseling. It is the best use of your money. You can solve problems from the past; create plans for the future. You can actually be productive. And take it one step beyond.

Take a parenting class. Take the initiative and learn more about how to manage difficult relationships. Read a book on high conflict divorce.

I mean, you researched your car. You spent hours hunting for the right vehicle. You spent days considering your next hair style.

You watched a YouTube video before you made the cake. You researched. You studied hours so you could get the certificate or degree. Why not educate yourself on the relationships that impact your daily life?

I know I'm an attorney and I'm not supposed to say this. But do people realize that when they hire attorneys to "fight for them" and not "collaborate on behalf of their family" they,

in essence, shut down communication with the other party and pay people to argue?

You can argue on your own for free and you'll end up in the exact same place-in front of a judge. In front of the man or woman with a black robe who you've decided to hand the life of you and your child. I mean that's fine, if that's what you want. But...is that what you want?

Thank you for reading.

Please remember this e-book does not constitute legal advice.

If you need legal assistance feel free to call us at 661-622-3000 or visit us at www.theAttorneyNextDoor.com.

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- an online community of Legal Guides to walk you through the court process;
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