

Please don't make me do your dirty work

Often in the case of parent separation, parents use their child to convey messages between themselves and the other parent so they don't actually have to speak directly with them. A young child will be willing to do this because they want to please the parent and it can make them feel important.

However, more often than not, a child doesn't like being the messenger. They would rather their parents talked to each other so that the messages are communicated in a clear way and can't be misinterpreted. It is a big responsibility for children to remember the correct and whole message and Chinese whispers should be kept as a game for children.

Parents must take responsibility to talk directly with each other, especially if the topic is likely to anger the other parent. It is unfair to make children carry messages to your "ex" because you find it too awkward or aggravating to do so yourself. It can also suggest to them that the other parent is such a monster that you cannot speak or be civil with them.

It is also not fair on the child to carry a message that is derogatory about the other parent and slates them. For example, a mum may say to their child, 'tell your dad that he needs to give you some money for your school trip as he has not paid a penny for any of your extra curricular activities, and he needs to because you are his child too'. It's showing your anger and resentment to the child. Something you don't need to hear or see.

You do not want your child having communication issues as they grow up and take these into relationships with them. As a parent you need to show them the right way to talk to someone – it is one of the most important life skills that we can teach our children.

You need to be showing them that effective communication is:

1. Picking up the telephone and speaking to them
2. Speaking face to face
3. Writing an email
4. Writing a letter

By using these four methods the message cannot be misinterpreted.

Wherever possible, communicate directly with the other parent about matters relevant to the children, such as when they are going to see them, health issues and school matters. If you cannot speak with them directly in the right tone then write to them as suggested above. You did communicate with them well in the past so try and do this again for the children's sake.