

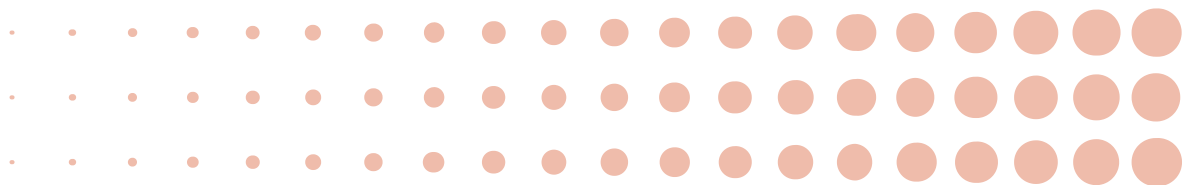


# Extricate

## Co-Parenting **WITH A TOXIC, ANGRY FORMER PARTNER**

Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man, lest you learn his ways and entangle yourself in a snare.

**PROVERBS 22:24-25**



# PULL AWAY FROM THE *Chaos*



Dealing with a toxic ex can be one of the most exhausting and emotionally draining aspects of blending a family. While navigating the challenges of a blended family, toxic behaviors from a former spouse, or HCBM/HCBD, can escalate conflict, cause confusion, and impact the children. However, we are called to respond not from a place of bitterness, but from a foundation of faith, wisdom, and God's grace.

Scripture speaks clearly about how we should handle conflict. Ephesians 4:31-32 instructs us, “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” This doesn’t mean ignoring toxic behavior or allowing ourselves to be mistreated. Instead, it reminds us that we can choose kindness, forgiveness, and grace—while still maintaining healthy boundaries to protect ourselves and our families.

Romans 12:18 says, “If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.” This emphasizes that we should make every effort to foster peace, but it also acknowledges that peace may not always be possible, especially when dealing with someone who thrives on conflict. What’s important is that we do our part in seeking peace, while understanding that we cannot control the actions of a toxic ex. God calls us to act wisely and without malice, entrusting the outcome to Him. When dealing with a toxic ex feels overwhelming, remember that God is with you, offering His peace in the midst of turmoil.

This handout is designed to offer biblical wisdom and practical tools to help you handle the challenges of dealing with a toxic ex, protect your family’s well-being, develop a parenting plan, and maintain your peace. Through God's strength, you can face this difficult situation with confidence, grace, and wisdom. You are not alone—God is with you every step of the way.

# Hidden Traits of a Toxic-Ex



Often, toxic people are expert gas-lighters, making you doubt your perceptions regarding interactions with them. The goal is to take up real estate in your life by sucking you into cycles of confusion, conflict, and anger. While it's true that not every ex is toxic, nor is every encounter with a toxic ex combative, there are patterns of behavior that can help you identify whether your former partner is someone who is struggling in the moment or someone who is out to destroy your relationship with your children.

A toxic ex thrives on chaos, manipulates emotions, and often weaponizes communication to maintain control. They shift blame, refuse accountability, and distort reality to cast themselves as the victim. Using guilt, shame, or even the children, they create conflict, keeping the co-parenting dynamic in constant turmoil. Boundaries feel impossible, as they push, pull, and disrupt peace at every turn. Their need for power fuels an unrelenting cycle of drama, making it difficult to foster a healthy, stable environment for the children. Dealing with them feels like navigating an emotional minefield.

You don't have to do guess work to determine if the person you co-parent with is toxic or struggling. Below are 10 character traits of a toxic ex. If, after reading through them, you notice a pattern emerging in the way your ex interacts with you, you are dealing with a toxic ex.



## MANIPULATION

- **Definition:** Using deceit, guilt, or emotional pressure to control or influence your decisions.
- **Example:** They may guilt-trip you into changing the visitation schedule by saying things like, "If you cared about our child, you'd do this for me."

## GASLIGHTING

- **Definition:** Causing you to question your own reality, memory, or perceptions by denying facts or events.
- **Example:** They may deny having agreed to a specific custody arrangement even though it was discussed and documented, saying, "I never agreed to that. You must be imagining it."

## LACK OF ACCOUNTABILITY

- **Definition:** Refusing to take responsibility for their actions, always shifting blame to others.
- **Example:** If they miss an important school event, they blame you, saying, "You didn't remind me, so it's your fault I wasn't there."

## USING THE CHILDREN AS PAWNS

- **Definition:** Involving the children in adult conflicts or using them to manipulate the other parent.
- **Example:** They may tell the children negative things about you to turn them against you, or withhold visitation to punish you.

## BOUNDARY VIOLATIONS

- **Definition:** Disregarding agreed-upon boundaries, invading your personal space, or ignoring limits set for healthy communication.
- **Example:** They may show up unannounced at your house or call late at night, even after agreeing to only communicate through a co-parenting app.





## PLAYING THE VICTIM

- **Definition:** Constantly portraying themselves as the injured party, regardless of the actual situation, to gain sympathy or avoid accountability.
- **Example:** They may say, "You've always tried to make me look like the bad guy," even when the conflict is a result of their own actions.

## PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVENESS

- **Definition:** Expressing hostility or resistance indirectly rather than addressing issues openly.
- **Example:** They may agree to a custody arrangement but then "accidentally" forget to follow through, like neglecting to pick up the kids on time.

## CONTROL THROUGH CHAOS

- **Definition:** Creating confusion or disorder to maintain control over situations, causing constant unpredictability.
- **Example:** Frequently changing plans last minute or refusing to follow a consistent schedule, leaving you scrambling to make adjustments.

## EMOTIONAL EXPLOITATION

- **Definition:** Taking advantage of your emotions, vulnerabilities, or past mistakes to manipulate or control.
- **Example:** They might remind you of past relationship failures or mistakes to undermine your confidence as a parent, saying things like, "You've always been a bad decision-maker."

## NARCISSISM

- **Definition:** Being excessively focused on their own needs, desires, or feelings, with little regard for others, including the children.
- **Example:** They may prioritize their own social or personal life over the children's needs, missing important events because "I needed a break, too."

Toxicity comes in degrees. Anyone can display one or more of these characteristics at any given time. If, however, your former spouse/partner displays some, or all, of these, to some degree, in most of their interactions with you, then you are dealing with a...

*Toxic Ex*

# Co-parenting

## commandments



You've examined the traits of a toxic ex and have determined that you have one... unfortunately. How do you protect your heart, guard your family, and stand firm in your faith when a co-parent is determined to create conflict?

God's Word gives us clear guidance on how to deal with conflict and strife in a way that honors Him and preserves our peace. These **"10 Commandments for Managing a Toxic Co-Parent"** are designed to provide practical, biblically-rooted steps to help you navigate the storm. Think of them as your guide to maintaining boundaries, responding with grace, and keeping your child's well-being front and center.

Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:44 to "pray for those who persecute you," but He also calls us to walk in wisdom, setting boundaries that guard our hearts and protect our children. The Bible encourages us to respond with a soft word (Proverbs 15:1), but never to shy away from creating healthy distance when needed (Matthew 5:37). These commandments are designed to help you find balance—trusting God's strength (Philippians 4:13) while making decisions that reflect His love and protect your family.

It's time to reclaim your peace and embrace a strategy that combines faith, wisdom, and action. You are empowered by the grace of God to navigate this well.

## THOU SHALT PROTECT YOUR BOUNDARIES

**Scripture:** "Let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.'" (Matthew 5:37)  
Set firm, clear boundaries to prevent manipulative behavior, and guard your heart, mind, and your family.

## THOU SHALT STICK TO THE CUSTODY ORDER

**Scripture:** "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God." (Romans 13:1)  
The custody order protects you, as long as you follow it. Don't make trades or deals outside of the custody order unless it's a real emergency.

## THOU SHALT SEEK WISDOM AND COUNSEL

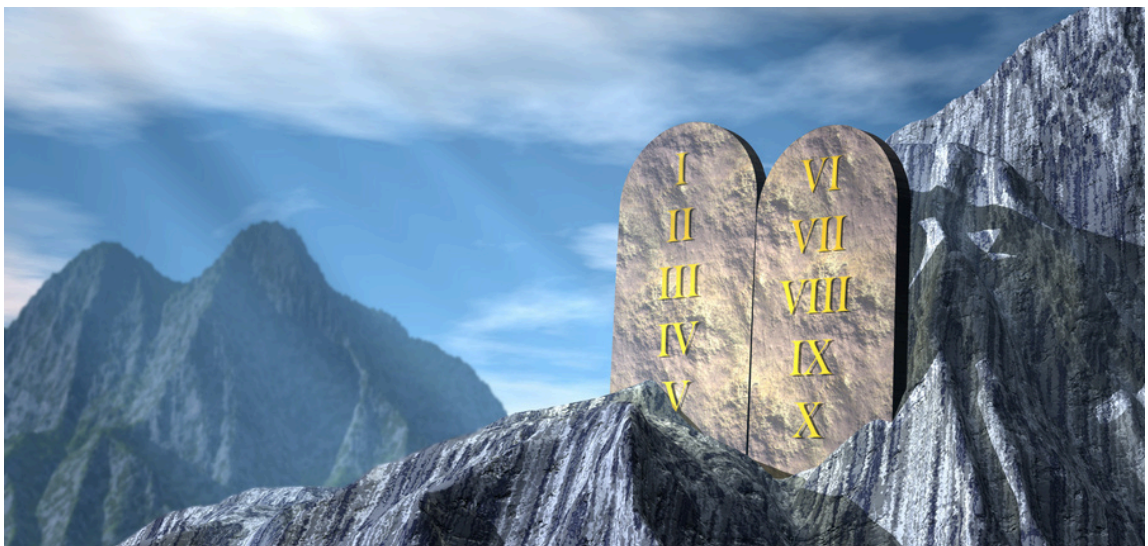
**Scripture:** "Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety." (Proverbs 11:14)  
Surround yourself with wise counsel, including a therapist, attorney, and trusted pastor or divorce recovery leader.

## THOU SHALT PRAY FOR THEM

**Scripture:** "But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." (Matthew 5:44)  
Lift your co-parent in prayer, asking God to work in their heart and your relationship.

## THOU SHALT NOT FEED THE FIRE

**Scripture:** "Set a guard over my mouth, Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips." (Psalm 141:3)  
Don't let their provocations cause you to react emotionally. Respond calmly and with purpose. Speak with wisdom and restraint, even when they try to provoke you.



## THOU SHALT FORGIVE AND REMEMBER

**Scripture:** “Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” (Colossians 3:13)  
Forgiveness is essential to your peace and freedom. But, forgiveness doesn’t mean continually subjecting yourself to mistreatment. Unless repentance is demonstrated by changed behavior, forgive, but do not let down your guard.

## THOU SHALT WALK IN INTEGRITY

**Scripture:** “The integrity of the upright guides them.” (Proverbs 11:3)  
Your children deserve at least one parent who will model godly behavior for them. Model integrity for your children, even when the other parent behaves poorly.

## THOU SHALT FOCUS ON YOUR CHILD

**Scripture:** “See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 18:10)  
Always prioritize your child’s emotional and spiritual health over the conflict.

## THOU SHALT STAY IN THY LANE

**Scripture:** “And to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed” (1 Thessalonians 4:11)  
If you are the stepparent, support your spouse without jumping in to the conflict. They need your steady advocacy. If you are the parent - practice parallel parenting: other parent’s house, other parent’s rules.

## THOU SHALT RELY ON GOD’S STRENGTH

**Scripture:** “Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you; He will never permit the righteous to be moved.” (Psalm 55:22)  
The Lord has promised to carry you through every circumstance. Rely on Him. Trust in God’s strength to guide you through difficult interactions.







# Parallel

# Parenting Plan



Co-parenting with someone who is determined to create conflict can feel like walking through a battlefield. When healthy cooperation seems impossible, it may be time to shift from co-parenting to **parallel parenting**—a strategy designed to minimize conflict while keeping the focus on the well-being of your children. Parallel Parenting is, in a nutshell: your house, your rules. Other parent's house, other parent's rules. Parallel Parenting allows both parents to remain involved, but with firm boundaries that limit direct interaction, providing the structure and peace needed to protect yourself and your children from unnecessary stress.

As Christ-followers, we are called to be peacemakers (Matthew 5:9), but peace doesn't always mean direct collaboration. Romans 12:18 reminds us, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all." Parallel parenting embraces this principle by recognizing that sometimes, the best way to live peaceably is through creating clear, respectful distance.

On the next couple pages you will find guidelines to help you create a parallel parenting plan—one that honors your role as a parent while keeping boundaries that shield your family from the chaos a toxic co-parent can bring. Through setting strict guidelines for communication, decision-making, and scheduling, you can reclaim your peace and allow your children to thrive in a stable environment.

Remember, you don't have to sacrifice your peace or your faith in this journey. God gives us wisdom and strength to navigate even the hardest relationships. By applying these principles, you can honor God, protect your heart, and provide the best for your children.

## STRUCTURED PARENTING TIME SCHEDULE

**Scripture:** "But all things should be done decently and in order." (1 Corinthians 14:40)

**Incorporate:** A clear, structured schedule for visitation, holidays, and special occasions minimizes conflict. Detail pick-up and drop-off times, and be specific to avoid miscommunication.

## CLEAR AND DETAILED COMMUNICATION

**Scripture:** "Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone." (Colossians 4:6)

**Incorporate:** Use neutral communication platforms like co-parenting apps to manage interactions. Set limits on when, where, and how communication happens, keeping it child-focused and respectful.

## CONFLICT RESOLUTION PROCESS

**Scripture:** "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." (Romans 12:18)

**Incorporate:** Establish a clear method for resolving disagreements, such as mediation or consulting a family counselor. Ensure both parents agree to this process before escalating conflicts.

## MENTAL HEALTH CONSIDERATION FOR CHILD

**Scripture:** "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." (Ephesians 6:4)

**Incorporate:** Ensure the parenting plan protects the child from being involved in parental conflicts. Agree not to use the child as a messenger or emotional pawn, keeping their well-being at the center.

## DECISION MAKING AUTHORITY

**Scripture:** "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given to him." (James 1:5)

**Incorporate:** Define which decisions are joint (e.g., education, health) and which can be made independently during each parent's time with the child. Having this clarity reduces power struggles.



## PROVISION FOR EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

**Scripture:** "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." (Galatians 6:2)

**Incorporate:** Include an agreement that both parents will support the child's emotional health by seeking counseling for the child if needed.

## HANDLING EMERGENCIES

**Scripture:** "The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty." (Proverbs 22:3)

**Incorporate:** Create a clear emergency plan, outlining how both parents will be notified and involved in urgent situations (medical emergencies, accidents). Ensure both have access to important contacts.

## PARENTAL CONDUCT GUIDELINES

**Scripture:** "Do to others as you would have them do to you." (Luke 6:31)

**Incorporate:** Commit to refraining from speaking negatively about the other parent in front of the children and set a standard for how each parent will handle difficult conversations with the kids

## DOCUMENTATION AND RECORD KEEPING

**Scripture:** "Let your eyes look directly forward, and your gaze be straight before you." (Proverbs 4:25)

**Incorporate:** Keep thorough records of all communication, decisions, and interactions, especially regarding scheduling, medical issues, and important decisions. This can be useful in case of disputes or legal issues.

## FLEXIBILITY ADJUSTMENT CLAUSE

**Scripture:** "Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand." (Philippians 4:5)

**Incorporate:** While having a structured plan is vital, include a clause allowing for reasonable flexibility for unforeseen events, with a process for requesting and documenting changes to the schedule.







These elements form the foundation of a strong, biblically-guided parenting plan that balances practical measures with a heart for peace, protection, and the spiritual well-being of your children. By embedding principles of love, wisdom, and healthy boundaries into your co-parenting approach, you can help foster an environment where your children feel safe and nurtured, even in the midst of conflict. Rely on God's wisdom and grace to guide you through this challenging season, trusting that He will give you the strength to lead your family well (Philippians 4:13).





EXTRICATE: CO-PARENTING WITH A TOXIC, ONERY FORMER PARTNER

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