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Our Agreed Commitments to Bonnie

A.	Date I first read these Agreed Commitments all the way through (and started regularly referring to them):	_____.
B.	Date I gave a copy of these Commitments to at least one other important person in this process (for example, a counselor, mediator, attorney, or key family member):	_____.
C.	Date we as parents read and discussed these Commitments with each other, if necessary with the help of a counselor, clergy person, mediator, or other trusted person:	_____.
D.	Name of the supportive person I have asked to be my "coach" in observing these Commitments:	_____.

Section I - CONFLICT BETWEEN US PUTS BONNIE IN DANGER

Section II - PROTECTING BONNIE IS UP TO US

Section III - WE'LL WIN TOGETHER, OR WE'LL LOSE TOGETHER

Section IV - HELPING BONNIE WILL HELP US

Section V - SOME TIMES BELONG TOTALLY TO BONNIE

Section VI - SUPPORTING BONNIE'S RELATIONSHIPS WITH BOTH OF US

Section VII - OUR PARENTING PARTNERSHIP IS THE KEY

Section VIII - WE SOLVE ISSUES IN WAYS THAT PROTECT BONNIE

Section IX - BETTER PLACES FOR OUR ENERGY

Section X - PUTTING OUR COMMITMENTS INTO ACTION TODAY

We, *Charlie* and *Diana*, agree to make protecting *Bonnie* our highest priority by observing the following:



Section I - CONFLICT BETWEEN US PUTS BONNIE IN DANGER

1 We'll remember this is Bonnie's one and only childhood.

Never will a time come when the most marvelous recent invention is as marvelous as a newborn baby.

--Carl Sandburg

2 We know that Bonnie's one and only childhood is forming many of the gifts and problems she will carry into adulthood.

3 Bonnie will experience any attack between us as an attack on her.

Click [HERE](#) to see some devastating thoughts of children caught in conflict.

Children have no defense against their parents' anger.

--Dr. Ross Campbell

4 We realize conflict between us (her parents) can bring many bad things into Bonnie's life. Here are just a few:

- *blaming herself*
- *fear* and *depression*
- *hiding her feelings*
- *failure in school*
- *drugs* and *alcohol*
- *dangerous relationships.*

The studies are absolutely clear on one point: Conflict between parents is the best predictor of a child's later maladjustment.

--Dr. Anthony L. Berardi

5 Parent conflict is so dangerous to Bonnie that each of us must disengage from any conflict the other parent creates. Our daughter doesn't need someone to win a fight; **she needs someone to stop a fight.**

6 We know that often children of divorce don't say everything about their hurt. We put ourselves in Bonnie's shoes and fill out **Exercise A** asking about her and how she's doing.



Section II - PROTECTING BONNIE IS UP TO US

7 We notice and care about Bonnie's deep losses from this divorce, including:

- losing the hope of growing up in one home with both parents,
- feeling that there was something she was supposed to fix,
- living a "life of leaving," leaving behind one of us each time she's reunited with the other, and

- wondering what else in her life can go wrong.

These losses are enough--we don't add parent conflict to her burdens.

One hundred years from now it will not matter what my bank account was, how big my house was, or what kind of car I drove. But the world may be a little better because I was important in the life of a child.
--Forest Witcraft

8 We know that our cooperative relationship as her parents is Bonnie's best protection from the hurt and dangers in her life. ***It's peace and cooperation between us, her parents, that she cares deeply about.***

9 Bonnie's only job is to be a child. And she can't be a child unless we're adults.

- She's not our witness or ally in any of our disagreements; it's ***our responsibility*** to reach good agreements ***for her***.
- She's not our spy to find out about each other's personal life.
- She's not our whipping post; it's not her job to listen to us criticize each other.
- She's not our messenger to deliver checks, bills, messages, or anything else.
- She's not our counselor or confidant to help us with our hurt.

10 When Bonnie tries to take on any of these responsibilities, we tell her:

"Mom and Dad have that all taken care of. You just get back to being a great kid--you do it so well."

Children of divorce are like kids bobbing facedown in a river. What a tragedy that some of their parents stand on the riverbank arguing how the children got there, why their swimsuits don't match, or who is going to pay for the hospital bill if a rescue is ever mounted.
--Dr. Timothy A. Onkka

11 It will be up to us:

- to make it clear to Bonnie that the divorce had ***absolutely nothing*** to do with her;
- to shield her completely from the legal and financial details of the divorce;
- to show her that while we're not together, we'll always be her parents, we'll always love and support her, and ***we'll do so together***.

If you can spare five minutes, click [HERE](#) to listen to three amazing sisters talk about their parents' conflict. Or, you can access this audio from our "Parents Corner" when you're finished.



Section III - WE'LL WIN TOGETHER, OR WE'LL LOSE TOGETHER

12 No one wins in divorce, and any crusade for "victory" just damages parents and children more.

The most important measure of how good a game I played was how much better I helped my teammates play.
--Bill Russell

13 We remember that we have the same child--and that we'll win together if we give her a good childhood, or we'll lose together if parent conflict poisons her childhood.

*Our task now is not to fix the blame for the past,
but to fix the course for the future.
--John F. Kennedy*

14 We avoid Divorce Myths that could hurt us. For example:

- We know this isn't a competition; it's a time to cooperate for Bonnie's sake.
- We know judges can't give us a good divorce; that's entirely up to us.
- We know that building peace for Bonnie won't hurt us; building peace for her will save us.

You can click [HERE](#) to watch a 6-minute video on *The 9 Myths of Separation and Divorce*--or you can watch this video from the "Parents Corner" link of *UpToParents*.



Section IV - HELPING BONNIE WILL HELP US

15 While the worst tragedy of parent conflict is that children are so badly hurt, parents become victims of their own conflict as well.

16 Parents who build peace and cooperation for their children get to:

- Live in a better future rather than being stuck in the past,
- Put their money to good use, and
- Protect their children and themselves.

*Those who bring sunshine to the lives
of others cannot keep it from themselves.
--James Barrie*

17 Our own future depends on how well we focus on Bonnie and the future, instead of our disagreements and the past.



Section V - SOME TIMES BELONG TOTALLY TO BONNIE

18 Separated and divorced parents have dozens of chances each week to talk when their children aren't around. There's no excuse for them to argue around their children.

19 Any and all times that Bonnie sees us together or hears us speaking **belong to Bonnie**. They are for exchanging Bonnie, other "child tasks," **and showing her that her world is safe**. We read and sign the *Child Safety Zone Pledge*.

For parents with more than one child together, click [HERE](#).

For parents with a daughter together, click [HERE](#).

For parents with a son together, click [HERE](#).

20 In truth, we very much want to protect Bonnie. We complete **Exercise B** for ideas on how to best handle all times Bonnie sees us together.



Section VI - SUPPORTING BONNIE'S RELATIONSHIPS WITH BOTH OF US

21 Our daughter has an absolute right to good relationships **with both of us**. The best mom still isn't a dad, and the best dad still isn't a mom.

*We don't see things as they are,
we see them as we are.
--Anais Nin*

22 We look at all possible ways--large and small--to support Bonnie's good relationships with both of us. We start today by:

- Stopping all criticism of each other.
- Using respect and courtesy, regardless of how we feel we've been treated.
- Celebrating things she gets to do with each of us.
- Regularly--**at least every other day**--encouraging Bonnie to call her other parent when she's with us.

23 To Bonnie, we call each other "Mom," "Dad," "Mommy," or "Daddy," not "your mom," "your dad," "your mother," or "your father."

24 We complete **Exercise C** by making a list of 10 specific compliments and good memories about each other to share with Bonnie. When we speak to Bonnie about each other, these are the things we talk about.



Section VII - OUR PARENTING PARTNERSHIP IS THE KEY

25 To Bonnie, we will always be family; when she thinks of her family, she'll think of us.

26 We stop wasting energy blaming each other or having old arguments. To move forward, we accept each other as we are and build a partnership based on our mutual love for Bonnie and our parenting strengths.

*The weak can never forgive.
Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong.
--Mahatma Gandhi*

27 We communicate and decide together the important questions in Bonnie's life. We **never** decide alone any important matter in Bonnie's life. This includes decisions about:

- Education
- Religion
- Medical care
- Counseling
- Schedules
- Discipline
- Anything that either of us thinks calls for discussion and decision.

Click [HERE](#) to read about "joint legal custody."

*Being brave is the hardest thing.
--Annie Rose, age 6*

28 If we are still married and believe our marriage is worth saving, we get some good counseling to help us start over.

29 If our marriage can't be saved, we peaceably make room for the new relationships that come into each other's lives. But in all circumstances, we build a peaceful world for Bonnie.



Section VIII - WE SOLVE ISSUES IN WAYS THAT PROTECT BONNIE

30 We will have thousands of decisions to make to protect Bonnie--everything from schedules to how we'll support her relationships with both of us. The only sensible way to make these thousands of decisions is with

- ***openmindedness***,
- ***courteous discussion***, and
- ***cooperation***.

*The first rule of holes:
if you are in one, stop digging.*

31 Legal battles in divorce make sense in very few cases, usually only ones involving violence in the family. In fact, most of our issues (like how we'll give Bonnie quality time with both of us) aren't even legal issues.

*Your children are not your children. They are
the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.
You may give them your love but not your thoughts,
for they may have their own thoughts. You may house
their bodies but not their souls, for their souls
dwell in the house of tomorrow, a place you
cannot visit, not even in your dreams.
Kahlil Gibran, **The Prophet***

32 We recognize that ***very little good*** can be expected from most legal battles.

- A judge can only pick from the bad choices left in the midst of parents' conflict, while parents can actually create better choices by ending conflict.
- Resolutions aren't available from courts; instead, legal battles tend to lead to more legal battles.
- Healing isn't available from courts; in fact, legal battles almost always create more resentment, hurt, and distrust.

*I think we saved our children the day
we realized we couldn't raise them
in a lawsuit, only in a family.
--33-year-old father of two*

33 We recognize that ***a great deal of harm*** can be expected from most legal battles.

- Legal battles encourage parents to see each other as enemies--the last thing families need.
- The scars left to families--and particularly children--from legal battles are often permanent.
- Legal battles drain finances and energy parents need for other things.

*I was never ruined but twice,
once when I lost a lawsuit and
once when I won one.
--Voltaire*



Section IX - BETTER PLACES FOR OUR ENERGY

34 We relate to Bonnie with even more joy, closeness, and admiration.

*Parents' highest obligation
is to enjoy their children.
--Dr. Timothy A. Onkka*

35 No matter how long our grieving takes, we are honest in facing our own losses from our divorce. And we never use anger as a way of trying to deny those losses. Click [HERE](#) to see *Finishing the Grieving*.

*No one ever told me that grief felt so much like fear.
--C. S. Lewis*

36 When we are finished choosing our **Commitments**, we can visit the "Parents Corner" on this website for short interactive and video articles on:

- Understanding Your True Challenge
- Putting That Understanding to Work Today
- Inviting In Your Co-Parent
- Using Excellent Resources to Succeed.

37 We complete **Exercise D** to describe how we wish to be relating two years from now.

*If a child is to keep his inborn sense of wonder,
he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can
share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement,
and mystery of the world we live in.
--Rachel Carson*



Section X - PUTTING OUR COMMITMENTS INTO ACTION TODAY

38 We save Bonnie--and ourselves--by permanently setting the example of two parents who have moved from competitive parenting to cooperative parenting.

SHIFT FROM COMPETITIVE TO COOPERATIVE PARENTING	
COMPETITIVE PARENTING	COOPERATIVE PARENTING
• Servicing adults' anger and fear	• Protecting children
• Arguing the past	• Building the future
• Giving decision-making to others	• Re-assuming decision-making
• Chasing win-lose competition	• Building win-win cooperation

39 We ask those close to us (all of the adults in Bonnie's life) to also work together for the sake of Bonnie.

*Things didn't really get better until we insisted our families respect our decision to move forward. Things improved so much then. I think they wanted to do better, but they needed to hear it from us.
--37-year-old mother of two*

40 Mistakes and slips happen. When our co-parent is discourteous or angry, we do not join in with our own discourtesy and anger. Those are just the times that Bonnie will need one parent to be heroic, self-controlled, and focused on her needs.

For a while when my spouse was pouring conflict into our children's lives, I used that as an excuse to fight, too. I finally realized that the worse my co-parent was doing, the better I had to do. Not only did my kids love me for being the bigger person, but my spouse started doing better too. --32-year-old parent of three

41 Every day we do something to grow a little stronger:

- ***Time with good friends,***
- ***Time with a healthy group,***
- ***Time with people with good divorces,***
- ***Volunteer work, a hobby, or a class,***
- ***Having some fun,***
- ***Counseling,***
- ***Exercise,***

and, of course,

- ***Enjoying and celebrating Bonnie!***

42 We use our 8 Hidden Keys to immediately make our lives better.

- Living by the Child Safety Zone.
- Keeping Bonnie out of adult roles.
- Sharing 10 good things about her other parent.
- Celebrating what she gets to do with her other parent.
- Cheerfully encouraging calls to her other parent.
- Promptly sharing child-related information.
- Staying out of legal combat.
- Enjoying and admiring Bonnie.

You're almost finished with your Commitment work! Click [HERE](#) to watch the 5-minute video *The 8 Hidden Keys*--or you can find this video later on the "Parents Corner" link.

**We, *Charlie* and *Diana*, have each signed onto these *Commitments*
(1) because we see them as important to *Bonnie* and
(2) because we have pledged to observe them from now on for her sake.**



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Your Responses to the Exercises, Charlie

Exercise A. BONNIE'S PERSPECTIVE

Even parents who care deeply about their children often can fail to view divorce through the eyes of the children. And, children of divorce rarely give complete accounts of their deepest fears and confusions. Seeing things through their eyes, however, is obviously critical to helping them.



I just felt bad all the time. I used to cry a lot, and when I wasn't crying I would feel like crying. . . . [I]t was just a terrible time in my life. My older sister seemed to deal with it better than I did, and my younger sister didn't deal with it at all until just last year, when she started getting stomach aches all the time.

--Meredith, age 14

Don't ask Bonnie. Instead, spend time seeing things through her eyes, and write what you know from your good heart.

Every time my mother came to fetch me, she and my father would get into some terrible argument, and forget it, goodbye, everyone would just go crazy.

--Jimmy, age 10

1. Describe (1) the three most positive things Bonnie has seen lately in your interaction with her other parent and (2) how you think you can build on that positive interaction.

The three most reassuring things she has seen or heard in your interaction as her parents:

1. We went to a school conference together and told her about it afterwards.
2. We handle pickups well (but not all of them).
3. Sadly, I can't think of anything else that was reassuring. Sometimes we can speak without fighting, I guess.

Three specific suggestions for building on your positive interaction for her sake:

1. We need to stop all arguments in front of her.
2. We need to stop putting her in the middle or in a situation where she would have to choose or even hear us argue.

3. I could listen better.

But the worst thing by far about my parents' divorce is that it's still going on. I mean, my parents don't talk. If they have to talk, it's like screaming. I thought that once the divorce was over, my Mom and Dad could just get on with their lives, but it hasn't worked out that way. I think that the fighting will never stop.
--Tracy, age 16

2. Describe Bonnie. Write all you wish to about her strengths, interests, and goals, along with anything else you'd like to share.

Bonnie

1. Bonnie is a smart, quick-witted little girl. She has a great sense of humor. She has a variety of interests and loves sports. She plays soccer and basketball. She works hard at practice and tries very hard to master each sport's skills. She is extremely sweet and sensitive. She cares a lot about others' feelings.

It would be nice if there could be a special house for divorced families. It would be like two houses, side by side, with a place in the middle where the kids could live. Then when parents had arguments, they could each go to their own place and get away from the other and think things out by themselves. That way, they could realize how dumb they were behaving.
--Heather, age 11

3. What have her reactions and problems been from any conflict and tension between you (her parents)--and what changes do you think she would want in the way her parents relate?

Bonnie

Bonnie's reactions to parent conflict and tension:

She has heard us fight and argue. I know that it upsets her. She gets very quiet and looks scared, or she tries to stand in between us and yells at us to stop.

Changes you think Bonnie would like to see in the parents' interaction:

Bonnie would like for us to stop fighting. She would like her Mommy to move home again. She wants to know if we still love each other.

Exercise B. WAYS WE MAKE PICK-UPS AND DROP-OFFS AS GOOD AS POSSIBLE

To complete this **Exercise**, we encourage you (if you haven't done so already) to make a copy now of the Child Safety Zone Pledge.

For parents with more than one child, click [HERE](#).

For parents with a daughter, click [HERE](#).

For parents with a son, click [HERE](#).

Few things are as important to children of divorce as what they see of their parents' interaction. Again, without faultfinding, describe here what Bonnie has seen lately when she sees her parents together.

Too much fighting. Too much sarcasm. Way too much anger and hatefulness. This probably pulls the rug out from under her because I think she wants to know that it's possible to spend time with Mom and Dad and have a nice carefree time. I can see in her face that she hurts every time we fight.

Would it be helpful to think of any times when Bonnie sees her parents together-- as belonging to her?

These little scraps of time will say so much to her about how safe her world is.

And given all her other losses, doesn't she deserve for these times to be 100 percent peaceful?



*I hurt so bad; it just seems like I'm always leaving something.
--Kylea, age 5*



Please check the ideas you think can make pick-ups and drop-offs better for Bonnie. There are also spaces for you to add your own ideas.

NOTE: If Bonnie is past the age to be picked up and dropped off, use the spaces below to describe what you could do to show her good interaction between her parents when you are together.

- A smile for our daughter **and** one for each other.
- At least a couple of friendly sentences between us.
- Some words of consideration or thanks (or, heaven forbid, both) between us (for example, "I'm sorry we're a little late"; "No problem, it just means I'm happier yet to see them"; "Thanks for the great looking haircuts").
- Having the parent who is getting Bonnie come to pick her up. rather than having the parent giving up Bonnie

taking her on a melancholy drive back to the other parent.

- Sharing a brief account of something positive that happened since Bonnie was last traded and a pleasant reaction to that news (for example, "They had such a great time swimming at Grandma's"; "That had to be the best time!")
- Leaving all difficult discussions for another time.

Exercise C. TEN GOOD MEMORIES AND COMPLIMENTS TO SHARE WITH BONNIE

For the sake of Bonnie, make a list here of ten good memories and compliments that you can share with her about her other parent. These can be recent things or even things long before she was born.

Quick hints:

- a. Make these specific. "Daddy is nice" is not nearly as effective as, "I'll never forget the time when Daddy was in high school and helped a family that was in an accident; he was so brave."
- b. Try not saying "your." "Daddy was so brave when he put out the fire in the garage" is much better than, "Your dad . . ."

If you need help getting started, click [HERE](#) to read some of the best things we've seen parents write about each other.

The other thing Dad will do that will hurt my feelings is he'll say something like, "You're just like your mother," when he's being negative. That hurts a lot.
--Tracy, age 16, from
How It Feels When Parents Divorce



1. When you were a tiny baby and would wake up at 2:30 a.m. to be fed, Mommy and I would get up together because we both wanted to feed and hold you.
2. Before you were born, Mommy was so scared about giving birth. As a matter of fact, she was so sure she couldn't do it that she decided she was just going to carry you forever. But when the time came, guess who the brave one was. (I'll give you a hint. It wasn't me.)
3. Both Mommy and I helped you carve your first pumpkin when you were 2 years old. We have a picture of you grabbing the pumpkin guts out and making a really gross face.
4. Your feet are shaped just like Mom's--thank goodness because she has nice feet. I have webbed toes. Yuck!
5. When you were 2 1/2, you started to swing by yourself on your swing set. I remember Mommy panicking about it. I told her to relax and see if you could do it, and you did. You were very proud of that. Mommy has always been so

protective of you.

6. Remember when you helped Mommy make breakfast in bed for me on Father's Day? That was really nice.
7. My favorite vacation was when we took you to Sea World. Remember that show with the walrus? You thought it was so funny when the performer threw a bucket of water into the crowd.
8. Mommy loves going biking with you.
9. Mommy often tells me what a beautiful young lady you are growing up to be. She says that you look just like me, but I think you look a little like both of us.
10. I remember when Mommy spent hours teaching you how to ride your bike. You were almost 6, and she was determined to get you riding without training wheels before your birthday. It took about a week, but you did it. She was exhausted from running after you to make sure that you didn't fall.

Exercise D. MAPPING OUR FUTURE

We congratulate you on what you are doing in focusing on Bonnie's needs. One additional step is for you to picture how you hope you as parents will be getting along two years from now. Please write that description here.

- That we will be able to be friends and talk about other things in our life aside from our daughter.

As you move toward that way of relating, what will Bonnie first notice?

- How relaxed we are in each other's presence and that we can share a laugh or smile with each other.

How will you yourself be better off when these changes occur?

- I will feel good knowing that we are creating the best atmosphere possible for our daughter and that we are both moving on to a more positive place in our own lives.

Ideally Bonnie should hear about how you are going to make things better.

Write some ideas about what you can tell her. Click next to any you think would be good for her to hear.



- Bonnie, both of us will always love you, and we want you to love both of us.
- No one is breaking any connections with you. No one ever will.
- You caused nothing about any breakup or conflict.
- You could not have prevented the divorce.
- You cannot get Mom and Dad back together, but we can all share and talk about your feelings about everything.

- We want you to tell us what you're feeling and what you need.
- Everybody will be okay, and things will be better in the future.
- You will have plenty of regular contact with both of us.
- Bonnie, we're sorry about what you've been put through. It's very important to us that you know this had nothing to do with you, and it was unfair for you to be affected by this in any way.
- We will be the parents and make sure things are good.
- Above all, your job is to get back to the great job you do of being a great kid.