

Holding the line on stability

Equal shared time is not the same as a child's stability. These scripts help you respond when grandparents, friends or community pressure you to split a child's life in half.

Each situation has two responses: a calm version for low-stakes moments, and a firm version for when the pressure is repeated, public, or starting to harm the child. Use whichever fits the room. You owe no one a debate about your child.

1. Grandparents who say '50/50 is only fair'

CALM

I know you love them. Fair for the grown-ups isn't always safe for the child. Right now they need one steady home, and visits with the other parent. We'll keep watching what they need as they grow.

FIRM

This isn't open for debate. The arrangement is what's working for the child. If you want to support us, please don't bring this up in front of them — it makes them anxious. Thank you.

2. Friends who compare you to other separated parents

CALM

Every family is different. What works for theirs may not work for ours. I'm taking my lead from my child, not from a template.

FIRM

I'm not interested in comparing. My child is not a project, and I won't change what's keeping them stable to match what someone else is doing.

3. Community elders / aunts / uncles who invoke culture or faith

CALM

I respect what you're saying, and I'm holding our values too. The way I'm doing this — one steady home, regular contact with the other parent — is how I keep the child safe and the family honoured. That is the priority of a parent in our faith.

FIRM

With respect, this is the parents' decision, not the community's. Please don't repeat this in front of the child. If you'd like to support us, you can pray for us — that's the help we need.

4. The other parent's family pushing for 'equal' time

CALM

We will keep contact regular and warm. Equal time on a calendar isn't the same as a settled child. Let's focus on the time you do have and make it count for them.

FIRM

Time with the child is not negotiated through pressure. If we need to revisit arrangements, that happens between the two parents — calmly, in writing, and with the child's needs at the centre.

5. People who say 'a child needs both parents equally'

CALM

A child needs both parents — yes. Equally split between two homes — that's a separate question, and the evidence is mixed. We're choosing what gives this child a secure base.

FIRM

Please don't tell me what my child needs. I'm the one up at night with them. We have an arrangement that works. I'm not changing it because of a slogan.

6. When the pressure is in front of the child

CALM

(To the adult, gently) Let's not have this conversation here. (To the child) You don't have to listen to grown-up planning — go and play / go and finish your book.

FIRM

We don't talk about custody in front of the children. If you do it again, we'll need to leave. That's not a threat — it's how I keep them safe.

7. When someone calls you selfish or controlling

CALM

I understand it might look that way from outside. From inside this home, I'm doing what a parent is supposed to do — keeping the child steady. I can live with being misunderstood.

FIRM

Calling me names doesn't change the arrangement. The conversation ends here.

8. The 'but he/she has rights too' argument

CALM

Both parents have responsibilities, and the child has rights too — including the right to a settled home. We are honouring all of those. The arrangement reflects that.

FIRM

Rights are not the same as equal time. The law puts the child's welfare first. So do I.

A QUIET REMINDER

You do not have to win these conversations. You only have to end them, and keep the child's life steady. Repeat the same line. Walk away. Hang up. Block if needed.

Stability is love made visible. Symmetry is a grown-up's comfort, not a child's safety.