



CO-PARENTING WHEN YOU'RE IN A RUT: HOW TO GET UNSTUCK

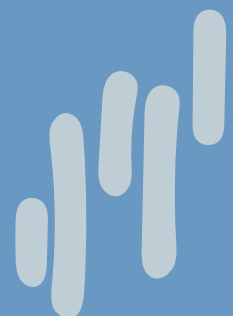
We're one month into 2023; is your co-parenting relationship where you'd like it to be, or do you feel like you're both stuck in the same old cycle? Maybe it's the winter weather, or perhaps it's the letdown when resolutions have crashed and burned. Whatever the cause, by this time of year many people feel like characters in the Groundhog Day movie, reliving the same unsatisfying experiences day after day. If you too are finding yourself in a rut, this article is here to help! Koh-Parenting has some fresh ideas that will get you unstuck and back on the right track.

The Gist

By this time of the year, the winter blahs set in for many people, resulting in setbacks in their journey to achieve their goals. Humans are creatures of habit, and it takes great effort for us to step outside of our comfort zone; thus it's not unusual for us to fall into a rut. In co-parenting, we may find ourselves stuck in negative patterns in our relationship with our parenting partner, which can impact our relationship with our child. We can work through this by acknowledging that we're stuck, outlining what we want to change and identifying what holds us back, taking accountability for our part in the cycle, trying new things, and seeking support and inspiration from others whom we admire.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The Gist
- The Power of the "Rut"
- Ruts With Your Co-Parent
- Ruts With Your Child
- The Side Effects of the Rut
- How to get Unstuck



The Power of the “Rut”

Humans are creatures of habit.

Our brain aims to maximize efficiency. It seeks patterns in our activity so that it can predict what will happen and shift to autopilot mode. Because of this, we often repeat behaviors without even thinking about them. This has its benefits for neutral, everyday tasks- for example, it helps us not to have to think too hard every time we drive a car or tie our shoes- but it can become a hindrance when it comes to negative thoughts or actions. For example, let's say that dropping your child off for visitations is stressful for you, and each time, you find yourself driving through a fast food restaurant and mindlessly eating in the car on the ride home, without being aware of what you're consuming or whether you're even hungry. These sorts of behavior loops can become ingrained in our subconscious and we repeat them even when they're harming us.

Familiarity breeds comfort.

Along those same lines, our emotional system feels comfortable, even secure, with familiar habits, places, people, items, and ideas- even if those things are negative. For example, imagine that you and your co-parent have agreed to a visitation schedule that does not work for you. Still, you go along with it anyway because this feels easier than speaking up and risking confrontation. Our natural desire to maintain the status quo can keep us from moving forward even when doing so would be better for us.

If you've read our newsletter on [Your Co-Parenting Resolutions](#) you've learned many reasons why our goals sometimes fall flat, and why intention alone isn't enough to make things happen.



The Power of the “Rut” (continued)



*Your actions don't align with your goals
AND/OR your goals don't suit your true needs.*

Maybe you've aimed for the unattainable- like deciding you're going to start working out at the gym 7 days a week after years of no exercise. Or maybe you're trying to force yourself to do something that isn't really in your best interest- like befriending your ex on social media to show that you've "moved on" when in truth continually triggered by his/her posts. This misalignment between expectation and reality impedes any real progress and makes you feel "stuck."

You're in survival mode.

It takes lots of energy and brainpower to try new things or make changes. These resources are hard to come by if you're already dealing with other stressors related to physical or mental health, separation/divorce from your parenting partner or other relationship issues, relocation, financial or work difficulties, or any other major life transitions. In those situations, you've likely had to press pause on any other endeavors and instead divert all your energy to functioning day to day.

**BUT WHY IS
IT SO HARD
TO GET OUT
OF A RUT?
WHY DO WE
GET SO STUCK
IN OUR
NEGATIVE
PATTERNS?**



Ruts With Your Co-Parent

Nearly everyone feels “stuck” at one point or another, especially when the winter blahs set in. This phenomenon can impact any area of your life and sometimes strikes more than one at once.

Here are some examples of potential ruts you may experience in your co-parenting:

- Re-hashing the same arguments over and over
- Repeating negative communication patterns: negative tone, yelling or name-calling, criticism, passive or aggressive approaches, etc.
- Habitually speaking badly of the other parent to others or in front of your child or on social media pages
- Spending excessive time debating over small matters or “nitpicking”
- Getting caught up in power struggles or “one-upmanship”
- Relying on your child to be the “go-between” to communicate between you both
- Withholding time with the child from the parenting partner due to child support payments not being made
- Allowing relationships with “new” romantic partners to impact interactions with your child





Ruts With Your Child

*The above habits may, in turn, impact your parenting.
Some ruts you may fall into with your child include:*

- Repeating negative communication patterns: negative tone, yelling, using language inappropriate for children, etc.
- “Checking out”: disengaging during day-to-day activities and going through the motions rather than being present
- Relying on screen time or other literal or figurative “babysitters”
- Getting caught up with other activities (hobbies, work, socializing, etc.) or with your own thoughts/feelings at the expense of quality time with your child
- Focusing on the negative: criticizing or “punishing” your child for what he/she has done wrong, rather than giving most of your attention to what he/she is doing well
- Using reactive approaches rather than preventative; in other words, being a step behind what your child is doing or needing from you and instead handling things impulsively, in the moment
- Relying on ineffective parenting techniques (authoritarian or permissive parenting) that work in the moment but not in the long-term
- Failing to respond to your child’s needs
- Denying your child opportunities to voice opinions/feelings and/or make age-appropriate decisions
- Doing everything for your child rather than coaching him/her to learn independence

The Side Effects Of The Rut

When you're stuck, you may also experience the following side effects:

- Lack of enjoyment in activities
- Brain fog, difficulty concentration or thinking clearly
- Lack of motivation, decrease in productivity or efficiency
- Decrease in overall satisfaction, lower mood
- Lower energy levels
- Lack of creativity
- Feeling defeated or hopeless
- Engaging in negative self-talk



HOW TO GET UNSTUCK



You don't need to settle for the status quo. You, your parenting partner, and your child deserve more. Read on for some ideas for stepping out of the rut and into the life you really want.



- [SELF-REFLECTION SERIES](#)
- [EXERCISE ON FEELING STUCK](#)



Acknowledge where you are, and accept it without judgment.

In order to change, you must be truthful with yourself about the impasse that you've reached. Give yourself permission to fully experience the frustration, boredom, anger, or whatever other emotions come over you. However, try to avoid negative self-talk; making yourself feel bad about being in a rut won't help you find the strength to pull yourself out of it.



Identify what's holding you back, and identify where you can assert yourself.

Do what you can to minimize or rid yourself of barriers whenever you have the power to do so. Strategize ways to work around whatever other obstacles are beyond your control.



Choose your attitude.

Feeling "stuck" is a state of mind, not a diagnosis. Rather than letting it define you, choose to believe that you can, and will, rise above your current challenges. Cultivating an aura of positivity will lend itself to progress.



Take accountability.

It's likely that you have found yourself stuck in a negative behavior cycle because you are perpetuating it in some way. Owning your part in the "rut" isn't a means to make yourself feel guilty; rather, it helps you to be more aware of your own behavior, and that awareness gives you the power to stop the cycle in its tracks and change course.



Find inspiration from those around you.

Surround yourself with people who bring out the best in you. Look around you: do you see people who hold you back, or enable you to stay stuck in your comfort zone? Try to spend more time with friends, family, colleagues, etc. who build you up, who challenge you to reach your goals, and who support you along the way. Or, intentionally seek out mentors who have achieved what you're looking to do and see if they can coach you to find similar success.



Do something, anything.

Accomplishing tasks, however menial, boosts mood and motivation levels. If you're struggling to figure out where to begin, diving into the easiest, nearest, or most accessible task can get the ball rolling. Or, force yourself to finally attack something you've been avoiding or putting off. Completing this will prove to you that you can push through other roadblocks that may be keeping you stuck.



Declare your intent to others, so that they can hold you to it.

Talking to others can be a way to release your pent-up frustration, and opens you up to their empathy and support. More importantly, though, sharing your plan for change makes it feel “official” to you and to your loved ones and increases the likelihood that you’ll follow through.



Focus on what you can do, not what you can't / shouldn't do.

Sometimes when we think of behavior patterns that we’d like to change, we focus on what we don’t want. We tell ourselves, “I shouldn’t,” “I won’t,” “Don’t,” etc. But this doesn’t give our brain something positive to give its attention to, and so we often end up repeating those same negative behaviors. Instead, if we define what we want to see happen, then we train our minds to learn positive replacements.

Shake things up. Do something novel.

As we mentioned previously, our brains like to go on autopilot mode. Doing something new or different shakes us awake and forces us to be more aware of what’s happening. Rather than responding robotically in the same old way, this presence of mind allows us to be creative and make conscious decisions. This strategy can be effective even if the new activity seems unrelated to your goals. For example, perhaps you want to use a more positive tone when communicating with your co-parent, but you haven’t yet managed to do so. Taking a new art class, going to a new restaurant, or striking up a friendship with someone new don’t require you yet to change your pattern with your parenting partner, but these activities could

The Other Side of the Rut



Your evolution as a co-parent won't always follow a straight path. You'll have moments when you're flying high, moments where you've hit a speed bump and moments where you're standing still. But through it all, you have the power to persevere through any obstacle in your path. We hope these tips inspire you to pull yourself onward, for on the other side of your rut lies a more satisfying life for your entire family.



*Still feeling stuck?
Koh-Parenting can
help!*



<https://www.kohparenting.com>



When it's more than a Rut

Life, and progress, are not always linear, and it's normal to have moments of standing still. However, if your habits are impeding your ability to survive and thrive, or are harming you or anyone else, you may need to seek more intensive, specialized support. Persistent repetitive behaviors, low mood, lack of motivation, and/or hopelessness can sometimes be indicators of trauma or mental health issues.

Resources

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/seasonal-affective-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20364651>

<https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline>

<https://screening.mhanational.org/screening-tools/depression/>