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DIPLOMAT

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IT TAKES TWO, BABY: PARENTING APART

Marcie Shaoul, Director of Rolling Stone Coaching, runs a bespoke coaching service for parents who find themselves on opposite sides of the world

Travelling and living abroad as a diplomat can be exciting and exacting, rewarding and disheartening all at the same time. For those who live in one country while their spouse and children are in another, these conflicting emotions can be magnified to an even greater level.

As parents, it's our responsibility to ensure that our children are raised in a safe and secure way, keeping them inside an intact parental 'bubble' where they can grow, flourish and thrive. Often, however, due to the challenges of long distance relationships within diplomatic and government services, it's easier said than done. Strain on the relationship can often show when one parent is living abroad and the other is at home juggling the house, work and children. With relationship strain, comes parenting strain. In extremis, the pressures of a long-distance relationship may bring about the end of the relationship.

Rolling Stone Coaching is the UK's only private practice dedicated to helping parents with 'parenting apart coaching' and 'co-parent coaching' (for parents who end their relationship and wish to prioritise the interest and wellbeing of their children during and after separation). We work with parents, either individually or together depending on their needs, and take them through bespoke modular programmes that take into account a client's exact situation. We work on the phone, Skype or face-to-face in North London.

In 'parenting apart' we work together with parents to identify destructive trends that we then address through coaching. We work with the 'lone parent' (the parent that is left at home with the children) and equip them with the emotional resources they need to hold the parental bubble on their own. During this process we stress the inclusion and honouring of the 'away parent', who should be an active presence in the family home, even though they are not physically there. We tackle the resentment of the perceived freedom enjoyed by the away parent, and embed practical tools into the daily routines of the lone parent that allow them to remain focussed on what is actual and real.

From the Away Parent's perspective, we look at the effects of detachment, how to re-attach, and how to flex the muscle of remaining involved, albeit from a distance.

We then turn this work into practical active parenting, ensuring that systems are in place to make both parents feel supported and included in decision-making and boundary setting.

When long distance relationships have irreparably

broken down and led to a divorce or separation, we offer co-parent coaching, where ex-partners learn to put aside their personal animosities and learn to communicate with each other using a 'transactional' style in order to put the children front and centre of everything they do. This is often a powerful challenge when they are trying to find their feet following a break-up.

The guiding principle underpinning the coaching practice is to ensure that children are raised in as secure a way as possible, even when their environments do not feel fully secure to them. As former Head of Stakeholder Engagement and Communications at the Commonwealth Foundation, I set up the practice after I divorced and co-parented my son with his father. I noticed that there was very little support available, and realised other parents also needed help to navigate these unfamiliar and often choppy waters. Today, Rolling Stone Coaching works with diplomats, government agencies and army families, as well as being closely linked with the legal profession through its co-parenting work for separating families.



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