

## A TIP SHEET FOR MANAGING EMAIL WITH AN ABUSIVE EX-PARTNER

Many abusive men use email in their attempts to maintain power and control over their former partner. If this is something your ex-partner is doing, it may feel overwhelming. Here are some tips to help you manage this kind of harassment.

### Your communication to him:

You can try to set the tone for the style of communication you want to have with him by the way you communicate. For example:

- Only communicate with your ex-partner when necessary
- Don't be tempted to engage in casual email correspondence with him because this will encourage him to think you welcome ongoing conversations with him. If you have a cute picture of one of the children that you want him to have, send it via a third party or send it in a communications book or as part of a business email
- Be professional and polite. Write every email as though it will be read by the judge. Not only is this a real possibility, but it will encourage you to communicate with your ex-partner in a respectful manner, regardless of how he is communicating with you
- Be concise and direct
- Set out the reason for your email and what response you are looking for clearly. Indicate whether time is a factor. (For example: I am writing because Sally's class is going on a field trip in two weeks. She will be leaving from your house. Can you please make sure you send her with extra clothes and snacks? Please let me know by the weekend that you have received this email. Thanks!)

- Avoid letting your frustration or anger show in your communication with your former partner, no matter how justifiable these feelings are. If taken out of context, emails in which you express anger can make you look like the bad guy
- BCC yourself every time you write to your ex-partner, then save these emails in a special folder so you can find them and, if necessary, print them later as part of your evidence

### Managing his communication with you:

Many abusers can be very sophisticated and manipulative in their use of email. It is very challenging to manage this, but there are some ways you can minimize your former partner's ability to get under your skin:

- Consider opening an email account just for his email, so you can continue to check for other emails without having to be afraid you will come upon an abusive email from him
- Turn off your phone notifications so you do not get notified every time your former partner sends you an email. This will reduce the extent to which you feel overwhelmed and upset
- Make a plan for how often you will check your email. Arrange this to be at a time when you are not distracted; for example, in the evening after the children are in bed or early in the morning before you leave for work
- Let your former partner know how often you will check and respond to your email
- Let your former partner know that you expect him to keep his emails focused on the children and court-related matters
- Tell him that you will not respond to other matters
- Let him know that you are keeping a record of all email communication
- Hard as it is, stick to your rule not to get drawn into unnecessary communication with him

- With extremely rare exception, you never have to respond to your former partner's emails right away. Use the 24-hour rule: wait 24 hours before answering any email so your emotions have time to settle and your response will be more professional
- Resist his attempts to pull you into arguments. Every response from you encourages him to write to you again
- Have a friend on call as a sounding board and to assist you in deciding which emails require a response and which don't. Vent your frustrations to this friend rather than in emails to your former partner
- Never use the reply button when responding to your former partner's emails. Save the original email, then create a new email titled "reply to your email of [date]." This makes it much easier, should you need to produce your emails in the future, for the reader (eg: the judge) to see each email in succession
- By saving all of your emails individually, you can protect yourself in the event your former partner makes changes to your original email content when he replies to you to try to make you look bad

### Use of a communication book

If, despite all your efforts, your former partner refuses to control his email communication with you, you may want to ask the court to make an order that all communication take place through a communication book.

This can be passed between you and your former partner at access exchanges. It can be put in a locked pouch so the children cannot see what is written in it. You should photocopy the book regularly in case your former partner withholds it at some point.

Using a communication book can reduce stress for you because you will not be receiving emails from him on a constant basis.



## Emergency communication

Whether you are setting limits on how often you read your former partner's emails or you are using a communication book, you should make a plan for communicating in the event of an emergency situation. You could come up with a third party to act as a communication go-between. Or, you might be willing to agree to receive a text message or phone call in such a situation.