

Distrusted Cooperation: Practices, Influences, and Tensions in AI-Mediated Co-Parenting

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Post-separation co-parenting requires former partners to continue coordinating shared parenting responsibilities across households and relational boundaries. As generative AI enters general-purpose systems and dedicated co-parenting platforms, little is known about how parents incorporate AI into these arrangements or how it shapes co-parenting practice. We interviewed 10 divorced parents in Canada and the United States who used AI in co-parenting. Our thematic analysis examines how AI enters existing technological, procedural, and human support arrangements; how parents organize its use through context management, judgment, and private or shared participation; how it reshapes the demands and dynamics of co-parenting; and what ethical boundaries and expectations emerge. We discuss AI's place within an existing co-parenting ecology, its influence beyond message production, and the boundaries of legitimate assistance. We derive design implications for organizing participation in AI assistance, supporting assessment of its contributions, and enabling accountability for AI-assisted actions.

CCS Concepts: • **Human-centered computing** → **Human computer interaction (HCI)**; **Empirical studies in collaborative and social computing**.

Additional Key Words and Phrases: Post-separation Co-parenting, Divorce, Generative AI, AI-mediated Communication, Coordination

1 Introduction

Separation or divorce may end a couple relationship, but it does not end the practical interdependence involved in raising shared children [2, 38]. Parents may continue to exchange information and make decisions across households about children's schedules, schooling, health care, transportation, expenses, and other recurring responsibilities [8, 11]. This continuing co-parenting relationship can take very different forms, from collaborative coordination to more limited, independent, or conflictual arrangements [28, 54]. Post-separation co-parenting is therefore an ongoing coordination context even when the former couple relationship has ended.

Post-separation co-parenting is often organized through a combination of formal agreements, professional intermediaries, communication practices, and digital technologies. Parenting plans structure recurring responsibilities and decision-making, while mediators or parenting coordinators help manage disputes [1, 12]. Communication itself may also be deliberately bounded or proceduralized in difficult relationships [16]. Digital technologies further support

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information exchange and coordination across households [15, 47], with dedicated parenting applications consolidating functions such as messaging, scheduling, expense management, and persistent records [3, 43]. These arrangements form an existing ecology through which post-separation co-parenting is carried out.

Generative AI introduces a new form of computational support into this already mediated setting. AI-enabled features are beginning to appear directly in purpose-built co-parenting platforms. One visible entry point is co-parent communication. OurFamilyWizard introduced ToneMeter AI in 2025 to identify potentially negative language in draft co-parent messages and offer more neutral rewrites [42]. AppClose similarly offers Co-Parent Assist, an integrated AI feature that reviews draft messages and provides optional suggestions intended to reduce escalatory language [3]. Beyond purpose-built platforms, recent reporting has also documented separated parents incorporating general-purpose systems such as ChatGPT into co-parenting practices [37].

Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) and Computer-Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW) research has examined how digital technologies shape communication, scheduling, information sharing, documentation, and coordination in post-separation co-parenting [14, 26, 47]. However, this work has largely focused on conventional digital tools and dedicated co-parenting systems rather than examining AI as part of ongoing co-parenting practice. We therefore have limited understanding of how AI becomes incorporated into ongoing post-separation co-parenting and how its involvement may shape co-parenting practice.

To investigate this emerging form of AI involvement, we ask:

RQ1 How do parents incorporate AI into their post-separation co-parenting practices?

RQ2 In what ways, if any, does AI involvement affect how post-separation co-parenting is carried out?

RQ3 What challenges, boundaries, and opportunities emerge through AI-mediated co-parenting?

To address these questions, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 10 divorced parents in Canada and the United States who had used AI in post-separation co-parenting. Through thematic analysis, we identified themes concerning AI's incorporation into existing co-parenting infrastructure and parents' practices for organizing its assistance. Our findings also describe how AI shaped the handling of difficult communication, practical coordination, and interpersonal negotiation, including how its contributions could facilitate exchanges or become points of disagreement. We further examine parents' boundaries around information use, disclosure, and responsibility, alongside their expectations for additional support. These findings inform our discussion of AI's place within an existing co-parenting ecology, its influence beyond message production, and the boundaries of legitimate AI assistance. We then derive design implications for organizing participation in AI assistance, supporting assessment of its contributions, and enabling accountability for AI-assisted actions.

This work makes three contributions. First, we provide an empirical account of how divorced parents incorporate and shape AI assistance in co-parenting, the changes they report, and the challenges and expectations that emerge through use. Second, we extend research on technology-mediated co-parenting, AI-mediated communication, and domestic AI by showing how AI becomes part of a co-parenting ecology spanning households, where existing arrangements and parents' practices shape its role in ongoing communication and coordination. Third, we derive design implications for accommodating private and shared AI assistance, supporting assessment without excessive review burden, and enabling accountability without unrestricted visibility into private preparation.

2 Background and Related Work

2.1 Social Context: Post-Separation Co-Parenting

Separation or divorce ends a couple relationship, but parents who share children may remain interdependent in everyday parenting. For example, official guidance in Canada and California describes post-separation parenting arrangements as encompassing children’s residence, parenting time, schooling, health care, holidays, and other everyday decisions [8, 11]. This continuing relationship is commonly described as *co-parenting*: how two parents coordinate, divide, and negotiate responsibilities for raising a child, whether or not they remain partners or live together. Ahrons’ “binuclear family” similarly frames divorce as a reorganization of family life across households rather than a dissolution of parental ties [2], while empirical work documents continuing interaction, responsibility, and coordination between former partners [29, 38].

How post-separation co-parenting is organized varies considerably. Maccoby and Mnookin distinguish cooperative, conflicted, and disengaged patterns of post-divorce parenting, showing that reduced interaction can itself be a stable arrangement [38]. Other work similarly documents persistent conflict and divergent post-separation trajectories [28, 54]. Practice-oriented accounts distinguish collaborative co-parenting from more bounded forms such as parallel parenting, in which former partners reduce direct negotiation and manage responsibilities more independently [46, 52]. These distinctions matter because workable co-parenting does not necessarily require frequent or emotionally close communication. At the same time, “high conflict” should not be assumed to describe a symmetric dispute: coercive control and post-separation abuse may involve substantial differences in power and freedom to disengage [51, 53].

Post-separation parenting may also be organized through formal plans and third-party procedures rather than through ad hoc negotiation alone. A *parenting plan*, for example, can formalize recurring arrangements around children’s residence, exchanges, holidays, expenses, and decision-making [20]. In more contentious cases, courts or family-law professionals may also involve a *parenting coordinator*: a neutral third party who helps parents interpret agreements, manage recurring disputes, and keep day-to-day decisions from repeatedly escalating into legal conflict [1]. Communication itself may also become proceduralized. The BIFF approach, for instance, encourages responses that are brief, informative, friendly, and firm in difficult co-parenting exchanges [16]. These examples show that post-separation co-parenting may already rely on rules, templates, and intermediaries that structure communication and coordination before AI enters the relationship.

2.2 Technology-mediated Co-parenting in HCI

HCI has long treated divorced and post-separation families as a distinctive design context. Odom et al. argued that interactive systems often assume stable, unified households, an assumption that breaks down when family relationships and responsibilities span multiple homes [41]. Early work frequently focused on maintaining parent–child relationships across divorced households. Yarosh et al., for example, examined communication needs in divorced families and developed systems such as ShareTable to support richer remote parent–child interaction [58–60]. This work established divorced households as an important HCI design context, while much of the early attention largely remained centered on children or parent–child interaction rather than interaction between separated parents.

More recent HCI and CSCW research has turned more directly toward *co-parenting* as a form of coordination and relational work. Studying new parents, Lin et al. describe co-parenting as involving the negotiation of responsibilities, parenting roles, and shared expectations between adults raising a child together [36]. Post-separation co-parenting complicates this design space because parents may continue sharing responsibilities without sharing a household

or a cooperative interpersonal relationship. Dumarú et al. identified cooperative, conflicted, parallel, and uninvolved configurations among divorced co-parents [14], showing that technologies cannot assume synchronized participation, extensive information sharing, or close collaboration. In some arrangements, supporting boundaries and more independent management of parenting responsibilities may be as important as supporting joint activity.

Post-separation parents already rely on a range of communication technologies and dedicated parenting applications. Prior work shows that digital communication can support information exchange and coordination while reducing the need for face-to-face interaction, with patterns of use varying across different co-parenting relationships [15, 47]. Dedicated parenting applications extend this mediation by combining messaging, calendars, expense tracking, information sharing, and persistent records within a shared system. Irving et al., interviewing family-law practitioners, show that these applications can help contain communication, organize information, and produce documentation useful in professional or legal processes [26]. Irving and Boxall further show that such applications can support boundaries and resistance to unwanted interaction while also becoming channels for monitoring, pressure, or control [25]. Related work on blended-family coordination likewise illustrates that cross-household information sharing may remain selective and constrained by relationships between adults [34].

Much of this prior work examines technologies that are explicit and relatively stable parts of the co-parenting arrangement. AI may instead be embedded in dedicated systems or independently appropriated through general-purpose tools. Existing research on technology-mediated co-parenting therefore provides limited insight into how these forms of AI involvement become incorporated into ongoing post-separation co-parenting practice.

2.3 AI-mediated Communication in HCI

Research on AI-mediated communication (AIMC) examines interpersonal communication where an intelligent system modifies, augments, or generates messages on behalf of a human communicator [19]. Prior work shows that AI can shape both language and interpersonal perception. Mieczkowski et al., for example, found that AI-generated reply suggestions introduced systematic linguistic tendencies, including greater positivity, that affected interpersonal evaluations [40], while Hohenstein et al. similarly showed that AI assistance can alter both language use and evaluations of conversational partners [22]. In peer-support and contentious-discussion settings, AI-generated feedback has also been shown to scaffold more empathic responses and encourage users to revise potentially contentious messages [48, 50].

More recent work moves beyond assistance with individual messages to examine how people use AI around difficult or consequential interpersonal situations. Vowels et al. studied people using ChatGPT for relationship counselling, while related work examined the reliability and consistency of AI-generated relationship advice [23, 56]. Maheshka et al. found that chatbot-based preparation increased participants' likelihood of initiating a difficult real-world conversation [39]. Jiang et al. designed a chatbot to scaffold reciprocal self-disclosure and responsiveness between romantic partners, while Chen and Zhang explored LLM-supported nonviolent communication in intimate relationships [9, 27]. A recent systematic review similarly characterizes generative AI as emerging as a "third voice" in couple relationships through advice, emotional support, and communication facilitation [35].

This relationship-centered literature brings AI close to the kinds of consequential interpersonal situations relevant to post-separation co-parenting. However, the relationships and interactional settings studied to date differ in important ways. Much of this work concerns romantic couples, relationship counselling, bounded difficult conversations, or systems designed to support intimacy, disclosure, and mutual understanding. Post-separation co-parenting instead involves former partners who remain connected through continuing parenting responsibilities after the intimate relationship has ended, while communication may be limited, contested, or deliberately bounded. Prior AIMC and

relationship-centered AI research therefore provides important insight into how AI shapes interpersonal communication and difficult relational interaction, but does not yet explain how AI becomes incorporated into ongoing post-separation co-parenting across different relational arrangements.

2.4 Domestic AI in HCI

HCI interest in AI within family life predates contemporary generative AI. Research on domestic intelligent assistants showed that systems such as Alexa could become entangled with parenting practices, family communication, and access within the home [5], while Druga et al. conceptualized the family as a shared setting in which parents and children learn about and make sense of AI together [13]. Generative AI has broadened the ways such systems may enter everyday parenting. Studies document parents and families using systems such as ChatGPT for information seeking, parenting guidance, routines, learning, activities, and other forms of everyday support [18, 31, 32, 45, 61, 62]. Wen et al. further show that families imagine generative-AI agents occupying broader household roles such as household manager, tutor, or source of emotional support [57].

AI has also been designed to participate directly in shared family activities and interaction. Shen et al. developed an AI-mediated system to support social-emotional learning and parent-child discussion [49], while Ho et al. explored AI-supported educational interaction with explicit attention to parental involvement [21]. Kim et al. used AI-mediated collaborative drawing to support parent-child reflection, positioning AI as a scaffold within shared family interaction [30]. Related work on smart voice assistants further shows that AI use within families is shaped by household relationships, including children's agency, family roles, and potentially competing goals among family members [24].

This emerging domestic-AI literature shows that AI can become involved in both everyday parenting practices and shared family interaction. However, the family arrangements examined to date are predominantly parent-child relationships or co-resident households, often organized around shared household routines, learning, or child-development goals. Post-separation co-parenting presents a different relational and organizational structure: former partners remain interdependent as parents while living across households and may coordinate selectively or through deliberately bounded arrangements. Existing domestic-AI research therefore does not yet explain how AI becomes incorporated into family practices when former partners' parenting responsibilities persist despite separation.

3 Method

3.1 Participants: Inclusion Criteria and Recruitment

We sought divorced parents who had experience using AI in their post-separation co-parenting. We intentionally kept the eligibility criteria broad because our goal was to understand how AI may become incorporated into co-parenting across different relational arrangements and forms of use, rather than focusing on a particular AI system, level of conflict, or type of parenting arrangement.

Participants were recruited through study advertisements posted in relevant Reddit communities with moderator approval. The recruitment post introduced the study as an investigation of how AI was becoming part of co-parenting after divorce and invited divorced parents with relevant experience to complete a short interest form. We did not require participants to have used any particular AI tool or to have used AI in co-parenting for a specific duration.

Recruitment in this context was challenging because post-separation co-parenting can involve sensitive interpersonal, family, and legal circumstances, and discussing AI use may require participants to reflect on private interactions with a former partner. We therefore relied on voluntary, opt-in participation through public recruitment posts.

Table 1. Demographic and co-parenting characteristics of participants. “AI position” indicates whether participants primarily described their own use of AI (Self-use) or AI use by both co-parents (Both).

ID	Gender	Age	Child(ren)	Region	Divorce	AI co-parenting	AI position	Relationship context
P1	Male	35–44	1 (age 6)	USA	<1 year	Since 2026	Both	Mostly cooperative
P2	Female	25–34	1 (age 4)	Canada	3–5 years	Since 2024	Both	Mostly cooperative
P3	Male	35–44	1 (age 11)	Canada	1–2 years	Since 2024	Both	Mixed
P4	Male	35–44	1 (age 10)	USA	3–5 years	Not reported	Self-use	Generally cooperative
P5	Female	45–54	1 (age 5)	USA	>5 years	Since 2024	Self-use	Parallel / limited contact
P6	Male	35–44	1 (age 7)	USA	3–5 years	Since 2024	Both	Mostly cooperative
P7	Female	25–34	1 (age 8)	USA	3–5 years	Since 2025	Self-use	Frequently difficult
P8	Male	25–34	2 (ages unknown)	Canada	3–5 years	Since 2023	Self-use	Mixed
P9	Male	25–34	2 (ages 8, 11)	Canada	3–5 years	Since 2023	Self-use	Mostly cooperative
P10	Male	55+	1 (age 10)	Canada	>5 years	Since 2024	Self-use	Frequently difficult

We ultimately interviewed 10 divorced parents whose demographic and co-parenting characteristics are summarized in Table 1. Seven participants identified as male and three as female, with ages ranging from 25–34 to 55 years and above. Participants were located in Canada and the United States. They had been living post-divorce for periods ranging from less than one year to more than five years and had incorporated AI into co-parenting for varying lengths of time. Their relationship contexts also varied, including mostly cooperative, mixed, parallel or limited-contact, and frequently difficult arrangements. In some cases, participants primarily described their own use of AI, while in others both co-parents used AI.

Most participants used general-purpose AI tools such as ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, and Perplexity. Some also used co-parenting or related tools, including OurFamilyWizard (P4–P5), AppClose (P10), AImee Says (P5), and Granola (P1).

3.2 Data Collection: Semi-structured Interviews

We conducted semi-structured interviews to elicit participants’ lived experiences of incorporating AI into post-separation co-parenting. Guided by our research questions, the protocol was flexible and followed participants’ own accounts, with particular attention to concrete co-parenting incidents.

The interview protocol covered four broad areas. We first asked about participants’ co-parenting arrangements, practices, tools, and how AI entered their co-parenting. We then elicited concrete situations to understand the issue, AI involvement, the context provided to AI, AI outputs, participants’ judgment and adaptation, subsequent actions, and perceived outcomes. The interview further explored broader patterns of AI use over time, tensions and failures, boundaries and acceptable use, AI use by the other co-parent, remaining support needs, and participants’ overall reflections. The complete interview questions are provided in Appendix A.

All interviews were conducted remotely in English by the first author via Google Meet and typically lasted approximately 60 minutes. Participants received a \$20 USD honorarium. With participants’ consent, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed using Google’s automated speech-to-text functionality, after which the transcripts were manually reviewed for accuracy.

3.3 Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis

We applied thematic analysis [6] to analyze all the interview data using an inductive approach [55]. This method allowed us to explore emerging themes organically while maintaining flexibility and alignment with research objectives. Given

the diversity of participants' relational contexts and experiences, our analysis focused on identifying cross-cutting themes rather than making subgroup comparisons, in order to avoid over-interpretation from a relatively small sample.

Data collection and analysis proceeded iteratively. Two authors independently reviewed and manually coded the interview transcripts in Google Documents, generating initial codes related to our research questions as well as concepts emerging from participants' accounts. Initial codes captured, for example, AI-assisted message drafting, emotional support, shared and private AI use, context management, checking AI advice, disclosure concerns, and parental responsibility. We met regularly to discuss and reconcile these codes, establishing a consensus to apply consistent codes to conceptually similar passages [10]. This process enhanced coding consistency among researchers while maintaining alignment with the study objectives.

We continuously assessed thematic saturation throughout the interview process. Saturation was considered reached when interviews in the later stage of recruitment no longer generated substantively new themes relevant to our research questions [17]. After finalizing the initial code list, we refocused our analysis at a broader thematic level, synthesizing related codes into overarching categories and themes. Through several rounds of discussion and refinement, we developed a thematic map that captured the major patterns across participants' experiences. The resulting themes organize the findings presented in Section 4.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

We obtained ethical approval from the Ethics Committee of the authors' institution for all procedures involving human participants. Prior to each interview, participants received a detailed overview of the study's aims and procedures and provided informed consent. Participants were informed that their data would be used solely for research purposes and that they could decline to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time without losing compensation.

We took deliberate steps to safeguard participants' autonomy, emotional comfort, and privacy. Because post-separation co-parenting can involve sensitive interpersonal, family, and potentially legal experiences, participants were reminded not to disclose identifying information about their co-parent, children, or other people involved in the situations they described. We also did not require participants to provide private messages, screenshots, legal records, AI conversation histories, or other personal documents.

All study data were anonymized, with participants referred to using identifiers P1–P10. Personally identifying information was removed, and details concerning participants, co-parents, children, locations, and specific family or legal circumstances were generalized where necessary in analysis and reporting.

4 Results

Our results describe how parents incorporated AI into existing co-parenting arrangements and organized its use. We then examine how AI affected the work and dynamics of co-parenting. Finally, we consider the boundaries parents negotiated and their expectations for further assistance.

4.1 Bringing AI into Existing Co-parenting Infrastructure

AI became part of the existing technological, procedural, and human support infrastructure of co-parenting. Parents connected AI to communication tools, situated its assistance within established procedures and records, and incorporated it alongside professional and informal support.

4.1.1 *Connecting AI to established communication technologies.* Parents connected AI to their existing communication tools by using separately accessed assistance to prepare messages and by using AI features embedded within co-parenting platforms. When accessed separately, AI became part of composing and revising messages for the co-parent (P8-10). P8 used AI to help formulate messages, while P9 reviewed suggested wording and adjusted it to fit what he wanted to say. P10 described moving material between AI and a parenting app: he pasted incoming messages into AI, edited the generated reply, and sent it through the app. He explained: *“I want to respond, and I don’t want it to be emotional ... You know, we have a court order. AI writes it for me. ... I edit what I want, and then I send it.”* (P10)

AI assistance was also embedded within dedicated co-parenting platforms. P4, for example, described OurFamilyWizard flagging potentially negative wording and offering optional AI rewrites while he composed a message. He could therefore access assistance directly within the tool used to communicate with the co-parent. Embedded and separately accessed assistance also overlapped in his practice: when he was dissatisfied with the app’s suggestions, he turned to ChatGPT or Claude to prepare the wording. His use combined the parenting platform’s built-in assistance with external AI tools within the same messaging workflow.

4.1.2 *Working within established procedures and records.* AI assistance drew on the procedures and records through which parents organized co-parenting, such as court orders, agreed parenting principles, and records of earlier discussions (P1, P4, P10). For example, during an incident in which he feared police involvement, P10 supplied his court order to AI to check his understanding of the parenting time it specified.

P1 and the co-parent had jointly developed a parenting-principles document to guide their co-parenting decisions. He described supplying these principles as context when seeking AI advice on specific issues. They also held periodic meetings organized around a shared agenda and task board. After these meetings, P1 used AI to summarize the discussions and assess the reasonableness of their assumptions and proposed arrangements based on principles, keeping transcripts and summaries in a linked archive. He explained why this support mattered:

“I think AI is more of an enabler in this process. I may have some ideas and know what to do, but when it comes to putting them into practice, there may not be enough time, right? We have to record things, align, and so on. Without AI, because there isn’t enough bandwidth, things might only get halfway done, or the outcome might not be as good because we’ve forgotten what we discussed. With AI, I think we can better implement some of our principles.” (P1)

P4 used earlier messages to prepare a new proposal. Unable to recall how he and the co-parent had divided birthday-party tasks the previous year, he asked AI to reconstruct their responsibilities from those messages. He then rewrote the summary in his own words to propose the same division for the current year.

4.1.3 *Using AI alongside professional and informal support.* Parents drew on professional and informal support for co-parenting, such as legal advice and help from friends. AI became incorporated into these support arrangements, supplementing human assistance and sometimes taking over particular tasks previously handled by others. Financial and time constraints were among the reasons for this shift (P4-5). P5 had paid a paralegal to handle communication with the co-parent but could no longer afford it; she subsequently turned to specialized AI support and then Claude for that work. P4 did not want to ask a friend to stay on the phone while he worked through a message draft. He used AI for drafting while continuing to discuss difficulties involving the children or the co-parent with friends.

In preparing for professional consultation or seeking help with disagreements, parents used AI to prepare material for review and consider when to seek further assistance (P1, P3, P5, P10). P5 prepared briefs, filings, and exhibits with

AI, followed by her own revisions and usually review from an attorney friend and her retained lawyer. P1 likewise cross-checked information obtained from AI with lawyers. P10 used AI to consider whether to pursue enforcement of a court order, forming a view that he could then discuss with a lawyer. P3 and the co-parent had agreed that, when they could not resolve a disagreement themselves, they would first ask AI to analyze it and then turn to a friend or paid mediator if it remained unresolved.

For emotional support, parents differed in what they wanted from AI and from other people (P3-5, P10). P3 and P10 consulted AI about difficulties they also discussed with friends or family. P5 valued its emotional support and said she would prefer talking with Claude about her situation to talking with her therapist. P4, by contrast, trusted people more for emotional support. He explained why being able to check AI's work mattered to him:

"I can verify the output, right? As far as feelings and emotions go, I can't really. ... I still trust people more. ... I think people still understand emotions a lot better than AI does." (P4)

For P4, he could review generated text, but found it harder to judge whether AI's advice about feelings and emotions was sound. This distinction explained why he used AI for drafting while preferring people for emotional guidance.

4.2 Shaping AI Assistance around Co-parenting Needs

Parents actively shaped AI assistance to fit their co-parenting needs. They managed the context available to the system and evaluated its responses. They also decided whether to use AI privately or involve the co-parent.

4.2.1 Grounding AI assistance in co-parenting context. Parents managed which parts of co-parenting history informed AI assistance, involving preserving useful context and limiting the influence of earlier exchanges. Some parents organized and maintained relevant co-parenting history for continuity in AI assistance (P3, P5). P3 maintained a project containing agreements and previous exchanges. When changing platforms, he exported his wider AI history into a database and used another tool to organize it. He described why keeping that history mattered and what retaining it required:

"You put a lot of effort into them, and then you want to leave those things. ... It's kind of difficult, and so I had to get very, very nerdy and get into ... coding and stuff that I've never done before. ... It's hard to remember everything that we agreed to sometimes. ... The more you use an AI, the more effort you put into it. It's hard to keep ownership of that memory unless you get very involved in figuring out how to build your own database or memory outside of the platforms themselves." (P3)

The accumulated context he relied on required substantial effort to carry beyond the platform. P5 likewise maintained project documents and separate conversations for messages, medical information, and travel expenses.

Making assistance relevant could also involve limiting the influence of earlier interactions. P7 started a new chat for a different issue because she did not want the response to be shaped by an earlier discussion, while returning to an existing chat when following up on the same matter. For her, a continuing record was useful when returning to the same issue, but unwelcome when it brought an earlier disagreement into a different question. She chose to repeat context through long messages or voice notes rather than let the earlier exchange shape every subsequent response.

4.2.2 Exercising judgment over AI advice. Parents assessed whether AI advice was accurate and appropriate for their situation, while also considered whose perspective it supported and used further review to challenge or revise its responses. Parents exercised judgment over both the accuracy of AI responses and the kind of intervention AI proposed (P3, P10). P10 used AI for reassurance when faced with a threatened police call, but reported it misquoted court orders or introduced details that were not there. He edited responses and compared tools. P3 encountered a different problem:

AI repeatedly treated interpersonal difficulties as reasons to seek legal intervention. He contrasted his knowledge of a former partner after a ten-year relationship with the system’s limited understanding of that person. He described repeatedly adjusting its instructions when it suggested lawyers or court procedures:

“That was really frustrating because I constantly had to be like, you know, ‘The situation isn’t that dire or that serious.’ ... I mean, you’re dealing with emotions and complicated human interactions, and large language models don’t necessarily really understand or appreciate those things.” (P3)

His corrections concerned the seriousness and character of the situation, not simply a wrong detail. An answer could propose a recognizable course of action while still being inappropriate to the relationship he was trying to manage.

Advice that felt supportive could also appear overly aligned with the person supplying the account (P2, P5, P10). P2 worried that AI found ways to support her even when she thought she might be wrong. P5 described a change within longer-running conversations: *“as time goes on with it, it gets more and more biased towards me”* (P5). P10 also recalled responses that validated him while using disparaging language about the co-parent. These accounts raised questions about whether supportive advice adequately considered perspectives beyond the user’s account. Yet support for one side was not always unwanted. P1 distinguished requests for a neutral assessment from occasions when he explicitly asked AI to support his position or justify a decision.

Parents evaluated and revised AI advice through several forms of review (P2-3, P5). P2 selected useful words from AI drafts and rewrote them in her own voice. P5 sometimes challenged responses that she found too protective or optimistic. She also assigned separate AI roles to build and challenge an argument, then brought in a fresh model to look for what the earlier roles had missed. This made disagreement part of her preparation rather than relying on reassurance from a single ongoing conversation. She revised the material herself and usually obtained human legal review. P3 submitted the same account to several models and asked a further model to synthesize their responses, but increasingly reserved this process for serious issues or a sense that an initial answer was missing something.

4.2.3 Private preparation and shared coordination. AI use could remain within a parent’s own preparation or become part of coordination with the co-parent. In private use, parents consulted AI independently to prepare for communication or decide how to engage (P3, P9-10). P9 regarded AI as a personal tool for organizing thoughts when a message was sensitive or when he thought he might respond emotionally. He kept his use private, and did not know if the co-parent used it. P10 used AI personally to decide whether an exchange required a response as part of keeping contact focused on necessary child-related matters. Private preparation also extended to initiating discussions. P3 used AI to think through how to tell the co-parent about a job-related relocation before raising it with her.

AI involvement could be organized jointly, with both parents able to engage with its output (P1, P6). P1 shared both his prompt and complete response, while the co-parent could consult her own tools. P6 described sharing a conversation after asking follow-up questions, allowing the co-parent to continue the exchange with AI and send it back. In P6’s account, sharing the whole conversation let the co-parent see the questions he had already asked and continue from that point. The shared material included how a suggestion had been developed, not only the resulting answer.

Private preparation and shared coordination could also coexist, with parents choosing which parts of an AI exchange to share. P6 opened a separate conversation for material he intended to share, explaining, *“I have one consistent window that is just mine that I don’t really share it out”* (P6). He could let the co-parent continue a particular exchange while keeping his main chat for ongoing personal use.

4.3 Reworking the Demands and Dynamics of Co-parenting

Participants described changes in the work of communicating and coordinating with the co-parent. AI helped them manage difficult exchanges and develop arrangements suited to their circumstances. Its involvement also shaped how parents introduced and received each other's contributions. This assistance did not remove the need to negotiate differences. AI outputs could themselves become a source of disagreement or be used to defend opposing positions.

4.3.1 Creating space to interpret and respond. AI assistance changed how parents approached difficult exchanges with the co-parent. AI helped some parents identify what required a response and consider how to reply (P7, P9). For example, P9 described a tense message about summer-camp expenses that combined amounts already paid, outstanding payments, and other questions. He asked AI to extract the practical details, including amounts and deadlines, and used them as a checklist for replying point by point. He felt this helped him focus on the issues requiring a response instead of reacting primarily to the message's tone. P7 similarly described becoming more deliberate about pausing and considering how her wording might affect a conversation.

AI could also change how much of the original message a parent read. P5 relied on its summaries and proposed replies to handle communication without reading the language she found distressing. Describing the difference this made, she connected her confidence in this assistance to her experience of abuse:

"I literally don't look at my daughter's father's messages. He [AI] translates it for me, like he takes all of the toxic language out of it, and he tells me the gist. And then he has, like, a proposed answer. ... You know, this is a situation where I have been abused by the person for 18 years, right? ... And again, I have periodic checks on this ... I have found him [AI] with the messages to be 100% trustworthy." (P5)

AI also helped parents express difficult feelings in their replies. P2 had made her own plans around an agreed weekend pickup, which the co-parent then cancelled at the last minute. She could not simply cancel her plans in response. She wanted to communicate her anger without sounding disrespectful, explaining:

"And I was really mad during that period. I was so angry, right? And I wanted to speak to him, but I didn't want to come off as being disrespectful or being too rude, right?" (P2)

She described the AI-assisted message as *"asserting my feelings respectfully"* (P2) and attributed a subsequent calmer conversation and resolution partly to that message.

Over time, parents also reported changes in their own approach to handling exchanges (P1, P8). P8 reported becoming more deliberate in his wording and more confident about handling conversations himself. He used AI less for personal communication while continuing to use it substantially for practical scheduling. P1, however, felt that continued AI use had made him cognitively lazier, saying, *"Definitely a little. I think I've become a little cognitively lazier than before."* (P1).

4.3.2 Turning constraints into negotiable options. AI helped parents develop or revise arrangements when plans changed or needed to fit different household circumstances (P6, P8). P8 described having to change a planned trip with children and being unsure how to reorganize the holiday. He supplied the changed circumstances to AI to formulate a new plan.

For P6, developing an arrangement also required working through different preferences with the co-parent. Shift work and different views about how strictly to follow a bedtime routine had made bedtime inconsistent across households. He asked AI for practical suggestions and initially liked a proposal with a set sequence and timing. The co-parent, however, found it too rigid for her working day and the time she had with the child. P6 shared the AI conversation with her, and she asked follow-up questions to obtain a less structured suggestion. They continued discussing and adapting the routine. Reflecting on AI's role and whether they could have resolved the issue without it, he explained:

“Sometimes we use it for instructions, but mostly we have a bit of a starting point. You will see if you have to make some compromises with us. ... I think we could have worked it out [without AI], but it would probably have taken more back-and-forth.” (P6)

4.3.3 *Bringing a third voice into co-parenting exchanges.* AI became a third voice when parents brought its suggestions or wording into exchanges with the co-parent. Its involvement could affect how a contribution was introduced and received, and how parents used it to support a position. Attributing a suggestion or criticism to AI could make it easier to raise with the co-parent (P1, P6). P6 found it easier to introduce a suggestion as something AI had proposed rather than as his own idea. P1 described sharing AI feedback about the co-parent’s response to the child’s behavior. He explained why having AI raise the criticism mattered:

“I hadn’t challenged the child’s mother about labeling the child, but AI actually pointed out that she had been a little too quick to judge. I think this is also part of how AI helps our communication, because if I directly told her she was labeling too quickly, the reaction might not be as good as if AI told her. That’s also why I share my prompt with her. I didn’t give it a biased prompt. I asked it, as a fair third party, what it thought of our ideas. So I share both my prompt and the answer with her.” (P1)

He shared the complete analysis without highlighting the criticism of her. It also identified problems in his own approach, giving both parents feedback to consider.

From the recipient’s perspective, apparent AI assistance could signal care in preparing a message. P3 welcomed messages that he believed the co-parent had drafted with AI. He explained what he valued about this additional step:

“Using an AI to process something is just quite simply along the same lines as taking a walk or thinking about it a lot longer or talking to a friend about it beforehand. ... It’s just knowing that she’s actually taking the extra step to think about things ... instead of just reacting. ... I wouldn’t fault anybody for trying to use something to make a situation better.” (P3)

The place given to AI’s voice could itself become a point of disagreement. In shared coordination, P6 regarded an AI recommendation as one possible option, but described the co-parent treating it as evidence that her approach was better. He explained, “So that is now where it creates a disagreement.” (P6).

In an ongoing legal dispute, AI-generated material became a resource for defending opposing positions. P5 had used AI to prepare her own legal materials, but felt frustrated when the co-parent used it to respond to the evidence she had presented. She reported that, during a court proceeding, he used a two-hour break to generate material with AI and returned reading from his screen. She described her frustration:

“Like, for me, I was able to have the element of surprise in court, and really, with evidence, you know, I have all the evidence behind me. But then, for him to be able to rally because of AI and, in five minutes, just have this whole long thing—that was very frustrating. ... It’s very frustrating that he can come up with a bunch of content in no time whatsoever.” (P5)

4.4 Negotiating the Ethical Stakes of AI Assistance

Parents negotiated the boundaries of AI assistance in light of the support they needed and the risks they anticipated. Their choices about providing information and disclosing AI use reflected concerns about privacy and possible consequences for themselves and others. They also identified responsibilities they wanted to retain as parents. Alongside requests for more suitable assistance, they described co-parenting difficulties they felt AI could not resolve.

4.4.1 *Balancing useful context with privacy across households.* Providing context to AI could mean sharing information about children and the co-parent as well as the user. Parents differed in how much they were willing to provide to obtain assistance (P4-5). P4 used invented names and avoided medication details because he worried that companies might later use identifiable information. He described giving AI only what it needed for a task, comparing it to a neighbor: “If you’re trying to get something from it, you give it the information it needs to know. Try not to give it more than that.” (P4).

P5 uploaded communication and financial records to prepare her parenting case despite concerns about sharing personal information. She explained how the stakes of the case shaped that choice:

“Do I love uploading all that personal information? No, I don’t. Do I want to lose my daughter to a crazy person? No, I don’t, and that takes higher precedence than my own personal [information]. Like, whatever Anthropic is gonna do with my data, I guess they can just do it.” (P5)

Her confidence in Claude’s message handling did not extend to the company providing it. Elsewhere in the interview, she stated, “I do not trust Anthropic.” (P5). P10 similarly continued to value AI assistance while worrying that the detailed information he had supplied about his life would remain stored somewhere.

4.4.2 *Deciding when to disclose AI involvement.* Parents made selective decisions about whether and how to disclose AI involvement to the co-parent and their children. In relation to the co-parent, these choices reflected AI’s role and the anticipated consequences of disclosure (P3-5, P9-10). P9 did not think every private use needed to be disclosed, but would expect more transparency if AI were involved in major parenting decisions. P10 did not want to discuss his use with the co-parent and was unconcerned whether she knew.

Some parents worried about how the co-parent would interpret visible AI assistance (P3-4). P4 did not want AI-generated messages to suggest that he did not care about the children. He expected the co-parent to recognize wording that was not his own, explaining:

“We were together for 13 years. She knows how I write. She knows how I talk. If I were to copy and paste messages from ChatGPT, she would immediately go, ‘Uh, you didn’t write that’. Like, ‘Wait, why are you? Why are you just copying and pasting your messages?’ ... Kind of thing.” (P4)

He also worried that copying AI messages could become something the co-parent criticized later, so he tried to ensure that messages he sent did not look AI-generated. P3 sometimes acknowledged AI assistance but usually did not explain how he prepared a message, saying, “I don’t want to add another layer of conflict or complexity to the situation” (P3).

P5 worried that disclosing her use could lead the co-parent to seek access to her AI history. She described his previous attempts to obtain medical records and feared that AI conversations could become another target:

“This is really extreme, so he always tries to subpoena all my medical records, everything about me. ... I mean, I know it’s not likely, but I can see it’s possible that he would try to subpoena all of my AI records, right?” (P5)

Parents also made different choices about what to tell children (P1, P5, P8). P1 said his child knew he frequently used AI, but he did not proactively explain its analysis of their interactions. P8 did not consider it necessary to tell his children that AI had helped prepare a holiday plan. P5 avoided discussing her co-parenting use with her child because she worried the child might repeat it to others and face negative judgments.

4.4.3 *Retaining parental responsibility alongside AI assistance.* Parents set boundaries around AI's role in decisions and direct communication. They also retained responsibility for adapting its advice to their children. Parents wanted AI assistance without committing to follow its decisions (P4, P9). P9 rejected AI communicating directly with the co-parent without his review or replacing his judgment on major parenting matters. P4 was interested in the possibility of chatbots exchanging less hostile messages between parents, but would not agree in advance to accept an AI decision on a consequential disagreement.

Parents also retained responsibility for adapting advice to their children (P1, P8). P8 sought AI help when children asked why their parents were no longer together and he was unsure how to explain it. He needed language suited to different ages while managing his own emotions. AI's wording was not always suitable: *"Sometimes it could be too formal for my children."* (P8). He rarely repeated a response exactly, instead deciding what to tell each child and changing the wording individually. P1 used AI after important conversations, including the parents' explanation of their separation, to review how they had communicated. He emphasized that parents still had to conduct the interaction and learn from the feedback themselves.

Accepting advice for themselves did not mean parents wanted AI to speak directly with children (P3, P5). P3 was concerned about inconsistent answers and how much understanding a child would need to use the system. He explained:

"I can't expect a child to use such a complex thing without any ability to really appreciate what's happening. And to educate a kid to the point of being mindful of what's happening would require a considerable amount of education." (P3)

P5 likewise avoided direct co-parenting-related exchanges between Claude and her child because she had not thought through that use carefully enough. She did allow the child to ask it to create games, treating this as a separate activity from involving AI in their relationships.

4.4.4 *Seeking assistance attuned to co-parenting circumstances.* Parents identified both improvements they wanted from AI and co-parenting difficulties they felt it could not resolve. Parents wanted AI to understand their situation better before offering advice (P7, P9). P7 found some suggestions too general or unsuitable for personal and emotional issues. She wanted AI to ask more thoughtful questions and offer options suited to the particular co-parenting situation. P9 wanted it to understand the background without requiring him to explain the whole situation repeatedly.

Other difficulties remained even when AI could suggest an arrangement (P1, P4, P8). P4 described the limits of applying rules across households:

"The problem with co-parenting is you can only control whatever time you have. So, in my case, I have half the time with kids, right? ... I can't make my ex-wife implement the same rules that I can ... AI doesn't have authority over us as far as what we do." (P4)

P1 similarly felt that shared review depended on basic trust and broadly compatible parenting principles; even holding a meeting could be difficult when parents did not want to speak. P8 continued to identify expense as a difficulty beyond communication support. Not everyone sought additional AI capabilities: P2 did not identify a new feature she wanted and felt the existing assistance was useful.

5 Discussion

Building on the findings, we discuss AI as part of an existing co-parenting ecology and examine its influence beyond message production. We then consider the boundaries of legitimate AI assistance. Finally, we develop design implications for organizing participation, supporting assessment of AI contributions, and enabling accountability.

5.1 AI as Part of an Existing Co-parenting Ecology

AI entered an existing ecology of co-parenting technologies and support arrangements. Prior research describes how communication platforms, parenting plans, and professional intermediaries help organize post-separation co-parenting [1, 16, 20, 26, 47]. Our findings show that these arrangements also shaped what parents asked AI to do and how they used its output (Section 4.1). Communication platforms provided a place for embedded AI assistance or a channel for messages prepared with another system. Earlier records supplied material for analysis, while parenting agreements provided a reference for considering proposed arrangements. AI also took on tasks previously performed by other people, with some outputs subsequently undergoing professional review. These connections help explain AI's role within the ecology: assistance drew on existing resources, and its use continued through established channels and support arrangements.

Parents shaped how AI assistance entered their existing communication practices. Prior research shows how co-parenting applications structure exchanges and preserve records that may become consequential in professional or legal processes [25, 26]. Our findings highlight parents' role in preparing what entered these channels (Sections 4.1 and 4.2). When using an external AI system, they moved material between that system and the communication tool. They also supplied background beyond the immediate message and evaluated proposed replies before sending them.

How parents organized this assistance also depended on the surrounding co-parenting relationship. Prior HCI research cautions against assuming that post-separation co-parenting involves synchronized participation or extensive collaboration [14]. Our findings show AI supporting joint discussion, but also helping parents prepare for communication they wanted to keep limited. In disputes, parents could use AI separately to prepare material supporting opposing positions (Sections 4.2 and 4.3). AI could therefore help parents work within an existing relationship without necessarily making that relationship more collaborative. These purposes did not correspond to a single form of participation: parents could share a particular AI conversation while keeping other preparation private. The relationship shaped the purposes AI served, while leaving room for parents to organize its use differently across situations.

This ecology also involved shared parenting responsibilities without necessarily shared control over AI assistance. Domestic-AI research has examined how AI becomes part of everyday parenting and shared family practices [5, 13, 24]. Our findings show how one parent could organize AI assistance for matters involving both households. That parent could determine which history the system received and which outputs entered co-parenting exchanges (Section 4.2). The other parent could encounter the resulting advice without having contributed to its context. This highlights a distinction between who shapes AI assistance and whose parenting responsibilities it concerns. AI could thus become part of co-parenting across households while drawing primarily on one parent's account.

5.2 AI-Mediated Co-parenting Beyond Message Production

AIMC research shows that AI can shape how messages are written and how people perceive their conversational partners [19, 22, 40, 48, 50]. Relationship-centered research also examines AI advice and preparation for difficult interpersonal conversations [9, 23, 27, 39, 56]. Our findings situate these forms of assistance within an ongoing

relationship organized around parenting responsibilities. In this setting, parents could seek help with communication and coordination without necessarily seeking greater closeness. Its influence extended from handling difficult messages to developing arrangements and introducing contributions into negotiation.

First, AI affected how parents received messages and prepared to respond. Parents used it to identify practical matters in incoming messages and limit their exposure to distressing wording (Section 4.3). These practices connect AIMC's attention to message formulation with the work involved in engaging with a message in the first place. AI assistance could also help parents express anger or dissatisfaction in a form they felt able to send. Emotional regulation therefore did not always mean removing difficult feelings from communication. It could help parents raise a concern while managing how they expressed it. The value of assistance lay partly in making necessary exchanges more manageable, even when the underlying difficulty remained.

Second, AI helped parents develop the arrangements they would discuss. This extended its role beyond expressing an intention that had already been settled. Parents used AI to formulate or revise plans in response to changed circumstances and different household needs (Section 4.3). The resulting proposal could give them something concrete to consider and revise. However, a plan that suited one parent could still be difficult for the other to accommodate. AI could help generate an option without resolving the differences that made coordination difficult.

Third, AI affected how contributions were introduced, received, and used in negotiation. Research on generative AI as a third voice examines its role in advice and communication support [35], while AIMC research shows that perceived AI involvement can affect evaluations of communication [22]. Our findings show parents attributing a suggestion or criticism to AI because they expected it to be easier to raise in that form. From the recipient's perspective, apparent AI assistance could also signal effort in preparing a message. Yet AI's contribution could acquire a different significance when used to support a preferred position. Parents could disagree over whether its recommendation was an option to consider or evidence favoring an approach. In a legal dispute, AI-generated material also supported parents separately in defending opposing positions (Section 4.3). A third voice could thus influence an exchange without providing a judgment both parents accepted.

These findings suggest that the benefits of assistance should be assessed separately from whether parents reach agreement. Parents described more manageable exchanges and potentially less back-and-forth, while still having to revise proposals and negotiate the weight of AI advice (Section 4.3). Post-separation research likewise shows that workable co-parenting need not depend on frequent communication or emotional closeness [38, 46, 52]. Evaluation should consider whether AI helps parents manage necessary exchanges, including when differences remain. It should also examine whether AI contributions help parents work through differences or become additional points of contention.

5.3 Negotiating the Boundaries of Legitimate AI Assistance

AI assistance could be useful to one parent while raising concerns for the co-parent or child. Our findings show parents making choices about what information to provide, whether to disclose AI use, and which decisions to retain themselves (Section 4.4). These choices raise a question beyond whether the assistance works: under what conditions is its use acceptable when it also concerns other people? We use legitimate assistance to refer to this ethical question. It requires considering the interests of those affected alongside the needs of the parent seeking support.

The first tension concerns providing context for useful assistance. Palen and Dourish conceptualize privacy as ongoing boundary regulation [44]. Our findings show parents selecting what information to supply and when to keep earlier exchanges separate from a new question (Sections 4.2 and 4.4). Retaining context could reduce repeated explanation, but could also allow an earlier account of a disagreement to shape later advice. That context could also

include information about the co-parent and children. Providing background involved deciding what information about other people to supply, as well as how to make an answer more relevant. Its privacy implications therefore extended beyond the parent using AI.

Parents' need for support could make withholding information difficult. The findings describe sharing personal records despite concerns about the provider because the assistance was considered important to a parenting case. They also distinguish confidence in AI's handling of a particular task from trust in the company providing it (Section 4.4). Work distinguishing trust from reliance helps interpret continued use without assuming confidence in every aspect of the service [33]. A parent may share sensitive information because they consider the help more important than the privacy risk. This does not make the concern disappear. Providing privacy controls is therefore only part of the response. Systems should also be evaluated for how much useful support they offer when users withhold sensitive information. Satisfaction with the assistance should not, by itself, be treated as acceptance of the provider's data practices.

A second tension concerns disclosing AI involvement to the co-parent. Our findings show that apparent AI use could be interpreted as care in preparing a message. Parents also worried that it could make them appear uncaring or invite criticism (Sections 4.3 and 4.4). Disclosure raised further fears that the co-parent might seek access to private AI conversations. Research on post-separation parenting applications shows that records can support resistance while also becoming resources for control [25]. Work on coercive control and post-separation abuse further cautions against assuming that both parents have equal freedom to disclose or disengage [51, 53]. Transparency therefore needs to be considered alongside its possible consequences. Sharing a proposal, acknowledging AI assistance, and revealing the conversation that produced it are different disclosures. A co-parent may need enough information to question a proposal without gaining unrestricted access to the other parent's private preparation.

Disclosure could also extend beyond exchanges between the parents. Parents differed in whether they considered it necessary to tell children about AI-assisted planning or analysis. Concerns included what might happen if a child repeated information about AI use to others (Section 4.4). Decisions about disclosure thus involved considering how information might travel beyond its intended recipient and what consequences this could create for the parent or child.

A third tension concerns accepting AI assistance while retaining responsibility for how it is used. Participants described limits on unreviewed communication on their behalf and on committing in advance to accept AI decisions. They also adapted advice to their children's ages and circumstances rather than passing it on unchanged (Section 4.4). These practices show that retaining parental responsibility involves more than approving an output: parents still need to decide whether the advice fits the situation and how to act on it. Disagreements over the weight of AI recommendations further show that an answer does not become a shared decision simply because AI produced it (Section 4.3). AI can help prepare an explanation or arrangement, while parents still have to decide what to communicate and work through disagreements about proposed actions.

These tensions suggest that evaluating assistance requires looking beyond the immediate user's satisfaction. It also requires considering whose information is supplied, the consequences of disclosure, and how responsibility is retained when advice informs action.

5.4 Design Implications for AI-Mediated Co-parenting

The preceding discussion motivates three connected design concerns: how participation is organized, how AI contributions are assessed, and how their consequences can be addressed.

5.4.1 *Organizing Participation in AI Assistance. Support participation without prescribing greater closeness.* Our findings show that useful assistance could remain private or become part of shared coordination (Section 4.2). Building on work that accommodates selective coordination across households [14, 34], systems should allow parents to respond to AI-assisted proposals without requiring them to adopt the same tool. For example, a parent could send a proposed arrangement through an existing communication channel and include the practical assumptions behind it. The recipient could question those assumptions or suggest an alternative without joining the original AI conversation. Where systems track proposals, sending or viewing one should remain distinct from accepting it. Participation should also not require the recipient to provide a matching personal history. Evaluation should examine whether both parents can contribute to coordination without being pressured to share private preparation or use AI themselves. These features cannot ensure cooperation or enforce an arrangement across households.

Preserve useful context without making accumulated history a condition of support. Parents valued continuity but also described unwanted influence from earlier exchanges and difficulties transferring their history between tools (Section 4.2). Systems should let users select the records available for a task and exclude earlier discussions without rebuilding all relevant context. For example, a school arrangement might draw on current schedules and a parenting agreement while excluding an unrelated dispute. When information is missing, the system could ask a focused question rather than request a complete relationship history. Exportable records and summaries could reduce the effort of changing tools. However, summaries should distinguish source material from AI interpretations and allow users to correct what is carried forward. Evaluation should examine whether irrelevant history continues to shape advice, how much effort correction and transfer require, and whether useful assistance remains available when parents provide less information.

5.4.2 *Supporting Assessment of AI Contributions. Make AI contributions open to scrutiny and revision.* Our findings distinguish factual errors from advice that misjudges a relationship or becomes overly aligned with the user’s account (Section 4.2). Systems should distinguish what a source states from an interpretation of motives or a recommended action. Where sources are available, users should be able to inspect the passage supporting a summary and correct assumptions that do not fit their circumstances. Proposed actions could be presented as alternatives with different consequences, rather than as a single appropriate response. Acknowledging distress should not automatically validate an accusation or make legal escalation the default recommendation. Likewise, agreement among models should not be presented as independent verification of the account they were given. Evaluation should examine whether users can identify unsupported interpretations and revise unsuitable advice, including advice that initially feels reassuring or supports their position.

Concentrate review where assistance becomes consequential. Review can restore work that parents sought AI assistance to reduce. Research on cognitive forcing found that interventions could reduce overreliance, but the most effective designs received less favorable subjective ratings [7]. This motivates examining the costs of review in co-parenting rather than assuming that more checking always provides better support. Our findings also show why asking users to reread every original message could undermine the relief offered by filtering (Section 4.3). Designs could instead support focused review of information used to change an arrangement or justify a consequential decision. Users might check an amount, date, or relevant passage without reopening the entire exchange, while retaining access to broader context when needed. Following the aim of appropriate reliance [33], evaluation should examine whether this review helps users detect important errors and unsuitable advice. It should also assess the time and emotional effort required. Selective review remains a design proposal to test, not a guarantee that consequential errors will be caught.

5.4.3 *Enabling Accountability for AI-Assisted Actions. Provide accountability without requiring unrestricted visibility.* Our findings describe concerns that disclosing AI use could expose private preparation to criticism or requests for access (Section 4.4). Boundary regulation and research on technology-facilitated control caution against treating greater visibility as uniformly protective [25, 44]. Systems should separate sharing a proposal, acknowledging AI involvement, and disclosing the conversation history. Before sharing, users should be able to review the audience and accompanying information. Material prepared for professional review should not automatically become available to the co-parent. At the same time, recipients need enough information to question a proposal. A shared version could make its practical assumptions and unresolved questions visible without exposing the complete archive. Evaluation should examine whether recipients can challenge consequential contributions and whether sharing creates pressure or unintended disclosure. Access controls cannot prevent every subsequent reuse of shared material, so retaining more records should not itself be treated as protection.

Retain parental judgment without placing every responsibility on parents. Parents described reviewing advice and adapting it to their children’s circumstances before acting (Section 4.4). Systems should support these decisions, but user approval should not be treated as evidence that all risks have been addressed. Providers also need processes for responding when assistance is misleading or information is shared unintentionally. NIST’s voluntary Generative AI Profile emphasizes organizational responsibility and processes for feedback and recourse [4]. In co-parenting services, this could include a clear route for users and affected co-parents to report problems, with responsibility assigned for reviewing and responding to those reports. An affected co-parent should not need access to the other parent’s private AI history merely to raise a concern. Services should also explain the limits of their assistance and when qualified human review is needed. Where referral is recommended, designs should account for parents who turned to AI because professional support was unaffordable. These directions support parental judgment while making providers’ responsibilities explicit.

6 Limitations and Future Work

Our study has several limitations. First, the participant sample was relatively small. Recruiting for this study was challenging because participants needed both direct experience using AI in post-separation co-parenting and willingness to discuss a potentially sensitive area involving former partners, children, and, in some cases, legal or highly private circumstances. Our findings therefore provide an exploratory account of these emerging practices rather than a comprehensive representation of divorced parents. Second, our sample was gender-imbalanced, with seven participants identifying as male and three as female. The findings may therefore disproportionately reflect men’s experiences of AI-mediated co-parenting, and the sample does not allow us to systematically examine how these practices, influences, or tensions may differ by gender. Third, all participants were based in Canada or the United States. Post-separation co-parenting is itself shaped by cultural and legal contexts, including how parenting responsibilities are organized across households and what formal, professional, and technological resources are available to divorced parents. Our findings should therefore be understood within these North American contexts and may not transfer directly to settings where post-separation parenting is organized differently.

Fourth, we interviewed only one parent from each co-parenting relationship. Accounts of the other parent’s practices, intentions, and AI use therefore reflect participants’ perspectives rather than independently verified dyadic accounts; similarly, descriptions of difficult or high-conflict relationships cannot by themselves establish whether conflict was

symmetric or whether coercive control was present. Finally, our study focused on parents who use AI in their co-parenting. It does not capture the perspectives of parents who chose not to use AI or who stopped using it, and cannot establish how common AI-mediated co-parenting is among divorced parents.

Future research should extend this account across broader populations and relational settings. Larger, more gender-balanced, and more geographically and culturally diverse samples could reveal how AI-mediated co-parenting varies across gender, legal systems, family norms, and co-parenting infrastructures. Dyadic studies could compare how the same AI-mediated interactions are interpreted by each co-parent, while longitudinal research could examine how AI use and its perceived effects change as relationships and technologies evolve. Future work should also include parents who do not use, reject, or discontinue AI to understand when AI becomes acceptable, useful, or inappropriate in post-separation co-parenting.

7 Conclusion

Through semi-structured interviews with 10 divorced parents in Canada and the United States, this study examined how AI becomes part of post-separation co-parenting. Our findings describe how parents incorporated AI into existing infrastructure and organized its assistance. AI helped parents handle difficult communication and develop practical arrangements. Bringing AI's voice into exchanges could make suggestions or criticism easier to raise and receive, but could also create disagreements over its advice or support opposing positions. Parents negotiated boundaries around the information they supplied, whether they disclosed AI involvement, and the responsibilities they retained.

We situate AI within an existing co-parenting ecology and show how its influence extends beyond message production. Whether assistance is appropriate also depends on its implications for privacy, disclosure, and responsibilities toward the co-parent and children. Our design implications address how participation is organized, how AI contributions are assessed, and how accountability can be supported without unrestricted visibility into private preparation. Future research should examine these directions across diverse co-parenting settings and include the perspectives of co-parents affected by AI assistance who may not use it themselves.

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A Interview Questions

The following questions served as a flexible interview guide. Follow-up probes were adapted to participants' responses and the specific situations they described, with selected examples shown below.

Part 1. Co-parenting Context and AI Entry (RQ1).

Q1. Could you briefly tell me about your current co-parenting situation?

Example probes: parenting arrangement, coordination needs, communication practices, digital tools.

Q2. How did AI fit into your co-parenting process?

Example probes: first use, AI tools or platforms, frequency, purposes, duration.

Part 2. A Concrete AI-mediated Experience (RQ1–RQ2).

Q3. Can you walk me through a recent or memorable situation where AI became part of a co-parenting issue?

Example probes: situation, difficulty or uncertainty, desired support, timing of AI involvement.

Q4. What did you actually ask AI to do, and what did it give you?

Example probes: prompts, contextual information, ongoing versus fresh setup.

Q5. What did you do with what AI gave you?

Example probes: use directly, revise, regenerate, reject, involvement of others.

Q6. What difference did AI make in that particular situation?

Example probes: alternative without AI, subsequent action, interaction, outcome.

Part 3. From One Incident to Broader Practice (RQ1–RQ2).

Q7. Beyond this situation, has AI changed how you co-parent more generally?

Example probes: different situations, broader practices, changes over time.

Part 4. Tensions, Failures, and Boundaries (RQ3).

Q8. In your co-parenting use, are there times when AI is unhelpful, gets something wrong, or creates a new difficulty?

Example probes: causes, recognition, responses.

Q9. Are there things you would not want AI to do in co-parenting?

Example probes: limits, inappropriate uses.

Part 5. AI on Both Sides (RQ2–RQ3).

Q10. Has your co-parent also used AI in your co-parenting interactions, as far as you know?

Example probes: receiving AI-involved communication, interpretation, response.

Q11. Does it matter to you how AI is used by each side of the co-parenting relationship?

Example probes: acceptable use, disclosure, awareness.

Note: When participants had no direct experience of AI use by the other co-parent, questions in this section were treated as hypothetical rather than as accounts of lived experience.

1197 *Part 6. Remaining Needs and Closing Reflection (RQ1–RQ3).*

1198 Q12. Is there anything in co-parenting that is still difficult for you that AI does not really help with?

1199 *Example probes:* remaining needs, useful support, desired changes.

1200 Q13. Looking across everything we have discussed, what do you think AI has changed most for you as a co-parent?

1201 Q14. Is there anything about AI and co-parenting that you think I should understand but have not asked about?

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