



Expert Interview with Traci Whitney

Carol Ferguson



www.LifeContinuesAfterDivorce.com

Traci Whitney

Carol Ferguson: Hi everyone. This is Carol Ferguson from LifeContinuesAfterDivorce.com and today I'm talking to Traci Whitney, the creator of TwoHappyHomes.com, parents that work together make happy kids. Welcome Traci.

Traci Whitney: Thank you. Thank you for having me.

Carol Ferguson: Traci, I would like you to tell us a little bit about yourself and how you came to create Two Happy Homes.

Traci Whitney: Well I got divorced myself two years ago now and I'm working on the computer all the time. Like most people, everything is on the computer nowadays. So I found that even just a few months after getting a divorce, that I really wanted to find tools that can help us communicate and everything is just so crazy when you have kids in two households. At the time there really wasn't much out there at all and I wasn't finding anything I was really happy with.

By trade, I'm a graphic designer so I have a lot of experience creating websites and I really thought of something I could do and kind of mulled it over actually for probably a year or two. So finally we're able to get into actually developing the website and it just launched this March so we're really excited about that.

Carol Ferguson: OK. I've had a look at it. As I said, it's at TwoHappyHomes.com and I think it's an excellent tool. I'm really impressed with what you've done and maybe we can go through the tool a little bit and you can give us some insights into the different pieces.

Traci Whitney: Sure, sure.

Carol Ferguson: OK, I see the very first thing as I'm going through the features is something called a Shared Calendar.

Traci Whitney: Yes. This is one of the biggest complaints we hear with co-parents is just communicating about schedules everyday. It's crazy and sometimes if you have multiple kids or multiple households or step kids and everything that's put on to the mix, it's really, really challenging to keep everything in order. So we have a shared calendar online that you can create a parenting schedule that you can refer back to and make changes.

You can create events in different categories, activities, school, family, medical appointments. You can even create private events that are just for your eyes only so your co-parent doesn't see those.

It just really helps to keep everything all on one page. You have a shared calendar and you don't have to keep going back and forth and asking what time does soccer practice start and it's all just right there for you both to look at.

Carol Ferguson: That's excellent. I really like that idea. Now what if you wanted to use the calendar but your ex didn't?

Traci Whitney: Absolutely. I mean you can always do the calendar just to keep your own schedule organized. That does happen or sometimes we have members that have a hard time getting the co-parents to use it but even still it's a great tool to keep. All these different aspects of parenting, single parenting, divorced parenting with kids would keep them all in one place.

Carol Ferguson: Right. Like I know that if I want to fill it in and he doesn't, that I can fill in my stuff. I probably also fill in his stuff. Is there a way that I can print this calendar or is there a way that I can share it with the kids?

Because I remember when my kids were growing up, I had this huge, big poster board if you will in the kitchen and we always wrote everyday what was happening so that they would know sometimes when mommy was out of town or we would all know what their activities were. Is there any way that they can get access to this too?

Traci Whitney: Well you can definitely print it out. Right now we don't have access for kids but that's one of the features that we're going to be adding. Right now we're in the sort of the first stage and we're going to be adding features as we go along.

So one of them will be guest access whether it's for kids or grandparents or school teachers or councilors. They will be able to do that in the future, get access and with limited access obviously. They won't be able to see your financials and that kind of thing but they will be able to see the schedule and maybe some of the contact or medical information.

Carol Ferguson: Yeah, that's a great idea. Even as you mentioned the grandparents. Because they need to keep up with all the activities too, don't they?

Traci Whitney: Exactly, yes.

Carol Ferguson: OK. Well it's great that at least for now you can print it out and do as I maybe did. Stick it on the fridge or on the kitchen wall or something. That's a good start.

Traci Whitney: Right.

Carol Ferguson: OK. The other thing, after you have a shared calendar, you had something called a Note Board.

Traci Whitney: Yes, the note board is great because co-parents can send each other messages via the note board and the nice thing is that they're all kept in one spot. So you don't have to go thumbing through emails to find a message from your co-parent and sometimes you don't want that on email anyhow.

You don't want the kids to see it or you don't want that kind of thing at work or there are several reasons why you might not want that in your email. So it's nice to have it all in one spot and it keeps a record of your communication and you can go and refer back to it as you please.

Carol Ferguson: OK, very handy. After the note board, we have something called Finances.

Traci Whitney: Yes, the Finances is a great way to keep track of your parenting expenses. We have so many expenses, soccer practice and gymnastics or school plays and there are medical expenses.

So many things go along with kids that – obviously each co-parenting family is going to have their own setup as far as who's responsible for what and the nice thing is that when you enter an expense, say you've spent \$100 in gymnastics, you can work that any way you want.

So you can say, "Will we split 50-50 or 70-30 or 60-40?" and then that when you record that, it shows up on your co-parent's ledger as they owe you \$40 for that expense. And it keeps a running tally of who owes who what and you can pay each other online or record payments that you've received in person. So it just keeps everything again all on one spot and easy for each co-parent to keep track of and it's just a little bit less stressful.

Carol Ferguson: Right, yes. Finances is always a stressful issue.

Traci Whitney: Right.

Carol Ferguson: So the application will actually figure out the percentage. If you put which percentage, they will actually figure out the dollar value associated with that.

Traci Whitney: Right, that's correct. Yes.

Carol Ferguson: OK. And as you're talking, it makes me think that I know this is probably not for that particular reason but I imagine if you're having trouble getting your ex whether it be the mom or the dad to contribute. This is always some kind of proof that you could use. Maybe even if you had to go to a lawyer or something like that.

Traci Whitney: Right, and I think that's true with almost any of these features, so especially the note board. You can keep track of your communication. The other thing about the note board actually is you can create private entries. So again they're for your eyes only and you can use that for a journal if there's anything you need to record.

But yes, you're correct. So with expenses, you can print it out or you can export it as well and share it with your attorney or whoever might need to see it.

Carol Ferguson: OK. And another feature that you have is something called Contacts.

Traci Whitney: Yes. So again with kids, it's school, activities. You want to keep track of all of your family contacts, friends. There's medical. There are so many people that you need to keep track of on a daily basis and again multiple children and multiple households. This just keeps everything in one spot.

So if you need to find your daughter's fourth grade teacher's email, you can just drop on here and again, you don't have to – you're sharing this information with your co-parents which makes it nice because if one parent says, "Oh, I really need that teacher's information. I don't have it," they don't have to be calling or emailing their co-parents to bother them. They can just jump on the website and find it right there. It makes it easy for everybody.

Carol Ferguson: Right, especially if you may not be getting along so well with the other one.

Traci Whitney: Right. That's the thing is whether you're getting along or not. It's just nice to have it so it makes everything simple and easy. It keeps communication clean and if you're not getting along, then you can really minimize the communication that you need to have in person.

Carol Ferguson: Right, because it's on the computer. There's no emotion attached to it. It's just facts.

Traci Whitney: Right, and it's neutral territory. So we find that people are not always jumping to – and that's your conclusion like when you get an email and you get all flustered about it. It happens I think less so – again sort of like neutral ground and you're here for your kids and to make co-parenting work.

Carol Ferguson: Right.

Traci Whitney: So it's a better atmosphere.

Carol Ferguson: Right. I really like your next category is medical.

Traci Whitney: Yes. So the medical has its own section of contacts which actually coordinates with your contacts. So if you enter a contact in your – if you enter a medical contact in your contacts section, it's going to automatically copy over into your medical contacts and vice versa.

So if you really need to get your medical contacts quickly, they're there and they're separate in your medical section. There's also a list of medications. So you can keep track of prescriptions or daily medications, asthma or allergy or something like that.

So you can keep track of who takes what and the doses and the timing and all of that obviously critical information. The other thing you can do is list insurance information here and it's actually not just medical insurance. You can put in life insurance or disability and then you can do your health and so on.

Basically anything you have that you need to list for insurance purposes is right there. It's just really nice to have all the information. I mean that's just so important to have and I mean I know I do it all the time, constantly thumbing through papers to look for X, Y or Z insurance information that you might only need to refer to a couple of times a year but it's really nice to have it in one spot.

Carol Ferguson: Right. In the medical section, is there also a place that you can put like for instance vaccinations that they've received, diseases that they've had?

Traci Whitney: There's not really a separate section for that but you can put that under – the nice thing about the way that we set some of this up is that it's very defined by the user. So there are a lot of notes fields and ways that you can enter information if there's something that you really want to record.

So if you want to put in a vaccination, you can just go to medications and note that they've had this vaccination and what day it was and that sort of thing.

Carol Ferguson: Right, because even if you're not doing it again to share, the information is still important to have somewhere.

Traci Whitney: Right. You never know when you might need to refer to that as well.

Carol Ferguson: Right. OK. Good. The next feature is something called Sharing.

Traci Whitney: Right. So sharing, it's a very simple way of sharing files with each other basically. So you can share basically any kind of files. So if you have like a divorce decree and you want to have that on there or if you want to scan your insurance cards, you can post them there and make it easy to print those out.

There's also photo sharing. So if you missed the kids' Christmas play, then you can post that on there or anything you really need to share. I kind of think of it like a safe, like you have insurance documents that you want to post and things that you might both need to access or like I said, if you want to just share some photos, it's all right there.

Carol Ferguson: OK. So it would be kind of like a place that you want to share something but it doesn't really fit into any of the other categories.

Traci Whitney: Right. I mean this is actual uploading of files.

Carol Ferguson: Right. OK. And then you have something called Community.

Traci Whitney: Yes. I love the community. Well, there are a few sections. So there's expert advice and there's a forum where people can communicate with each other. There's a refer section where it lists some of the sites that I've come up with or that other people have recommended as far as what are some of the better co-parent sites or even just some seasonal things, some ideas; and also there's a link out to the Two Happy Homes blog.

The expert advice is a great section. They're all pieces of advice for the Two Happy Homes by experts in the field and counselors and doctors and people that have written content specifically for the site for co-parents. So it's all tailored to fit the needs of the members.

Carol Ferguson: OK. So these are articles that your experts have sent you to include on your website.

Traci Whitney: Exactly, yes.

Carol Ferguson: OK. And in your forum, is it just members that are in there or is it also some experts?

Traci Whitney: Anybody can actually post in the – the nice thing about the community is that it's not – you don't have to be a member of the website to access it. So anybody can post in the forum.

Carol Ferguson: OK. So it's people just posting, maybe looking for some support, some advice, asking questions of other people in the same situation, that kind of thing.

Traci Whitney: Right, exactly. It's a nice way for peers to be able to connect with each other.

Carol Ferguson: OK. Does anybody moderate it or you just let people post whatever?

Traci Whitney: Well I try to moderate it as much as possible but the posts don't have to be approved.

Carol Ferguson: Right, OK. OK. And the last thing I see here is something called Family Dashboard.

Traci Whitney: Yes. So when you sign on as a member and you create your account, you have a family dashboard and that gives you sort of a glimpse of what's going on with your memberships and with your family. So there's a quick glimpse of your upcoming activities for the week. There's even a glimpse of what's coming up for the next month or two and there's also – if there's any new notes that have been posted, those will show up or any new expenses.

So it's just sort of an at-a-glance look of what's going on with your account and your family, to see if there's anything new that has been posted. So if you just have a minute and you want to log on really fast, you can go to the dashboard and see if there's anything new and you're all set or you can go from there.

Carol Ferguson: OK. So the dashboard will actually know what has happened since the last time you were in or does it just show you what's happening in the next week or so?

Traci Whitney: It shows you basically the most recent activity or it shows you the next upcoming event for like the next week and then it has another quick glance of what's coming up for the next month or two. So it just gives you really the most recent activity and then you can see your upcoming calendar for any events that are coming up in the near future.

Carol Ferguson: OK. Very cool.

Traci Whitney: Thank you.

Carol Ferguson: So again that's something that you can share with your parent or with the co-parent or you can just do it yourself. I was just thinking – remember we had said that you're going to eventually have it so that kids and grandparents and so on could look at it.

Are there some features that you can share and not others? So for instance, if you go in, and you wanted to share the calendar, but you didn't want to share say medical, can you share only parts or do you share everything?

Traci Whitney: With your co-parent, you mean?

Carol Ferguson: Yes.

Traci Whitney: Well anything – pretty much anything that you create in – an event or a note or a contact, you can create those things and make them private.

Carol Ferguson: OK.

Traci Whitney: So if you make them private, they will not get shared with your co-parent.

Carol Ferguson: OK. And I suppose you won't know if I put a name in and it's not the co-parent but it's the grandmother.

Traci Whitney: Right, that's right.

Carol Ferguson: So I could decide to share with the grandmother.

Traci Whitney: Right. And obviously if you want to give your family access to your account, then that's possible as well.

Carol Ferguson: Right, depending on the situation. Like maybe the father is not even around but maybe a lot of the responsibility is between you and the grandparents.

Traci Whitney: Right, exactly. That's right. So in that case, that might be something that would be really helpful in that situation.

Carol Ferguson: Right. Excellent tool. I really like what I've seen. I've played around with it a little bit. I'm not at that point anymore where I need to do that. My children are all grown but I certainly would have appreciated this at the time. I see that you have different memberships also. Can you explain that?

Traci Whitney: Yes, so there's a free membership and that includes basically every feature. There's a couple of things that are not included in that, like a link out to PayPal so they pay each other online and that kind of thing and then has limited – you can store a limited amount of contacts, a limited amount of medical information. But it's all the same features.

So that's a free membership and we really want to make it so that anybody can use this. I mean it's an important tool for co-parents to have access to and we really did not want to make it be something that you have to pay to use.

The premium membership has unlimited access to any of those kinds of things like paying each other online, unlimited contacts and also it does not have any advertising on the site. The free membership has some banner ads.

So really it's just a matter of whether you need some extra things or not with the premium membership and they both – they really both work equally as well. It's great.

Carol Ferguson: OK. And is there anything else about the website that I didn't mention that you would like to?

Traci Whitney: Well I would love to offer your listeners a coupon for three free months of a premium membership if that's OK.

Carol Ferguson: Oh, that would be excellent. Certainly. Could they use this at anytime?

Traci Whitney: Thank you. It's LCAD2012. It's the code and then you just enter that if you're signing up.

Carol Ferguson: OK. So L like Linda, C like Carol, A like Albert, D like David.

Traci Whitney: Exactly.

Carol Ferguson: 2-0-1-2.

Traci Whitney: Exactly.

Carol Ferguson: OK. Is there an expiry date on this or can they use it anytime?

Traci Whitney: They can use it anytime.

Carol Ferguson: OK, excellent. Well that's very generous. Thank you very much.

Traci Whitney: Oh, you're welcome.

Carol Ferguson: And anything else?

Traci Whitney: Oh, it's just I'm really honored to be talking with you and really excited to be telling people about the site and really hope that it helps co-parents and that's why I did it. So to help people like me so I hope that it does that.

Carol Ferguson: So if anybody wanted to get in touch with you or if for instance they wanted to join or they had some questions about it or maybe some suggestions on changes to it or whatever, how could they get in touch with you?

Traci Whitney: Sure, and I love that. I love getting suggestions from people. I always keep track of what people want or what they're looking for and always a work in progress. So I love that. They can contact me at Traci@TwoHappyHomes.com.

Carol Ferguson: OK, perfect. Well thank you very much Traci. It was very interesting and very informative and as I said, I wish I had had this. But I'm so glad you have it and certainly I'm sure it's going to help many co-parents get through all that ...

Traci Whitney: Jumble.

Carol Ferguson: Jumble. Yeah, good answer. Good word.

Traci Whitney: Well thank you. Thanks for having me.

Carol Ferguson: OK. Take care.

Traci Whitney: You too.