

Divorce Recovery

Parenting Plans From a Kid's Eye View

Parents have been telling the kids to get along, play nicely, share and not talk bad of others, their entire lives. Then the parents announce their separation and the conflict, hostility and upset between them, perhaps previously hidden from the kids, is now in the open. Their tension spills throughout the house. For the children of separating parents their

1. First wish is for their parents to get back together. If that is not possible, their
2. Second wish is for their parents to get along. If their parents cannot even get along, their
3. Third wish is for their parents to leave each other alone and quit fighting.

The level of conflict whether **low, medium** or **high** and the kids three wishes are the clue to parenting plan solutions.

In low conflict situations, the parents may not get along well, but perhaps well enough to stay in the same house, maybe not the same bedroom, but the same house. The parents may regard themselves as high conflict, but actually, this is more akin *to high tension* rather than medium or high conflict.

In high tension, there is a stress imposed by the bad feelings between the parents. There is concern for eruption of conflict, but none-the-less, the parents can manage their behavior and curtail open hostility. Children in these situations get their first wish. It may not be perfect, but they remain together with their parents under one roof. Scheduling and parental responsibilities generally remain the same.

Open hostility or antagonism differentiates high tension from conflict. **In medium conflict**, while the parents may not get along, there is still a level of civility which only from time to time dips to include subtle denigration, such as making faces, sniping or sarcastic comments and the like. The parents are well able to distinguish their issues from the needs of the children and keep the children's interest forefront, even though they the parents cannot stand to be under the same roof. Given medium conflict and the kids' second wish being that the parents get along, kids in these situations would like their parents to be neighbors. In their mind, if their parents lived in houses side by side, or at least within walking distance of each other, they would have some peace

of mind with regard to maintaining a close and loving relationship with both parents.

In high conflict situations, the hostility between the parents has likely never been hidden or managed well in view of the kids. There may be allegations of abuse between the parents or even of a parent towards the children. Issues of alcohol or drug use/abuse may be present and there is a greater probability of a mental health issue affecting at least one parent. Parents are deadlocked with regard to their view of the ongoing care of the children. The children shudder at the thought of their parents remaining in the same house, let alone the some neighborhood. Like the old western, "This town isn't big enough for the both of them". Kids in these situations, more often than not, still seek to maintain a close relationship with both parents. However they realize that like some young kids fighting in the sandbox, peace will only prevail as long as they are kept far apart. So these kids just want their parents to leave each other alone, so they might enjoy their own relationship with each parent, free from the intrusions of the other. In these situations, children are better off with some physical distance between the parents to act as a buffer or neutral zone where neither will run into the other.

Kids subject to parental separation do live with some level of hypocrisy. We tell kids to get along, play nicely and the like, yet and certainly during the separation process, many parents do anything but. Want your kids to adjust better? Follow the advice you would give them and consider a parenting plan according to the level of conflict.

Lewis R. Bigler, M. Div., MA, AAPC Diplomate
Family/Couple/Individual Counselor/Mediator,
Licensed Mental Health Counselor
4476 Main Street at Harlem Road,
Suite 204 Snyder Square
Amherst, New York 14226 - 716.634.0658
www.Biglercounseling.com