

Parental Separation: Who do I see for help?

There is a dynamic that naturally evolves when parents only see lawyers to determine their ongoing relationship to children, post separation or divorce.

Regardless of the disposition of the lawyer, on the mind of the parent, is winning or coming away with a particular outcome. The parent races to stake a claim. The parent meets the lawyer, states his or her case, convinces the lawyer of the righteousness of the claim and thus retains the lawyer to fight the battle.

When one parent has staked a claim and begun battle the other parent will naturally defend him or herself. Given that most people view the best defense as a good offence, the other parent has to stake a bigger claim. In the process, each parent resorts to assailing the other while holding his or herself out as the better parent. The fight is on and hopes fade.

Lawyers are experts at law. Some are also experts at negotiation. Certainly others are expert at litigation. However, from a child's view, relationships with their parents are generally **non-negotiable**. From the child's view and already feeling their relationships are threatened, their goal is to see relationships remain intact; that neither parent hurts the other; and that they can enjoy their lives reasonably with both parents with as little disruption as possible.

The more involved parents are in battle and the more they are hurt, the greater the likelihood the children's lives are emotionally and psychologically disrupted. The more disrupted their lives, the more difficult it is for them to get on with the tasks of childhood, learning and socialization and learning to live in two worlds: the world of their mother and the world of their father. Therefore, the greater the parental conflict, the more severe and chronic will be the problems of school and their own social development. Given childhood is the time of life for the development of cognitive and social skills necessary for adult life, those children whose learning and socialization is disrupted by a divorce or separation are then also at greater risk of problems in adulthood.

Separated or divorced parents are often encouraged to seek help for themselves and for their relationships with the children to help them understand issues related to the children of divorce facing the fact they are now living in two worlds.

We are not going to be able to prevent the issues of being a child of divorce but we may be able to minimize the childhood and adult conflict by learning about the consequences of various courses of action and by learning about the range of alternatives for restructured family life, children's time between parents and processes for decision making. The goal is to resolve matters more amicably, thus alleviating stressors on the child to provide for better child and adult psychosocial and relationship outcomes.

Consider the fact that early childhood educators and teachers don't want children to fight their battles in the sandbox. They want them to "learn to get along and play nicely." This is what children learn and what they expect to see in their parents. When parents do otherwise, their influence will outweigh the early childhood educators and teachers. Children will learn to battle and fight, particularly with loved ones and peers, as that will be their role model.

If you know parents who are struggling with these issues of separation and its impact on them and their children, tell them you know a family counselor and mediator with 48 years experience who you encourage them to consult. You may give them my card and suggest they call me and you may ask if it would be alright if you had me call them.

Lawyers care for the legal matters, a family counselor such as myself are experienced in developing parenting plans that both parents can be enthusiastic about living up to for their child(ren).

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