

## **Parental Conflict: It can be very harmful for children**

The wish of all children of separation or divorce is that their parents do not argue or fight with each other and can, in some way, work out difficulties in a mature fashion without resorting to hurtful comments and behaviors. Most children want to have quality time with each parent without interference from the other.

This wish has a strong basis in reality as research has shown that ongoing, unresolved, chronic conflict between separated parents has an extremely negative impact on the current and future mental health of their children.

It is common and normal for two parents to have different ideas, opinions, values, and priorities. Part of being successful in a post separation relationship with another person is being able to use appropriate communication skills so that ideas and opinions can be expressed and received with respect and differences of opinion can be worked out using healthy conflict resolution strategies.

If separated or divorced parents do not communicate respectfully with each other and do not have a good strategy for resolving conflicts, the result is chronic, unresolved conflict between the parents. There is an ongoing hostile emotional tone between the parents that continues to erupt over time and in the same patterns.

This harmful conflict can range from yelling, criticizing, blaming, interference with a child's access to another parent, put-downs, mocking, sarcasm, ignoring, intimidation and threats of harm, to actual physical violence such as throwing or destroying things, or grabbing, shoving, slapping, hitting, kicking, or other forms of physical assault. Chronic parental conflict is most common in families where parents with children have separated or divorced, or have never been married or lived together.

## **Your children are depending on YOU, their parents!**

**Parental conflict is far more disadvantageous to the formation of a child's relationship with family and friends and the child's social behaviour than any other aspect of the family's background\*\***

\*\* Findings by Statistic's Canada' longitudinal study on children and published in their report called "Growing up in Canada"



**Don't let your children be damaged for life because of parental conflict**

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For further information about this program contact the parenting facilitator or the agency listed below:

**Family Conflict Resolution Services**

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Providing support and advocacy services for Canadian children and their families

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*.....Helping children of separated and/or divorced families*



## **Where Do I Stand?**



*A workshop designed to help children to better understand and to cope with the stresses surrounding the separation and/or divorce of their parents especially when there is high conflict between parents*

## Are these issues affecting you or your child?

- ❑ *Is your child demonstrating behavioural issues which you believe may be traced back to conflict between you and your former partner?*
- ❑ *Is your child indicating that he/she is not happy with the parenting time between parents?*
- ❑ *Does your child seem depressed about issues connected to the separation and/or divorce between you and your former partner?*
- ❑ *Do you want your child to be more informed about matters affecting him/ her, but you find it difficult to talk to your child about issues such as parenting time, exchange, etc.?*
- ❑ *Is your child being affected by parental estrangement or parental alienation?*

## The FACTS about Separation and Divorce

Post-divorce or separation conflict between parents and members of extended families can have life-long negative impact on your children. Most research shows that of all factors which cause harm to children, parental conflict is the most damaging with significant long term effects.

Just as it is vitally important that parents learn about the causes of their conflict and to learn what they must do to effectively eliminate conflict, the children as well need to learn about how to deal with the stressors associated with their parent's conflict. Educating parents and the children will help them to lessen conflict and get their lives back into a more normal state of post separation/divorce functioning.

## The "Where do I stand" workshop for children can help

The *Where Do I Stand* workshop is a program to help children of separated and divorced families cope with stresses involved when parents separate.

Currently the program is designed for children 9 years of age and older. The program has been designed to be convenient and inexpensive for all families and achieves this by being delivered over the internet via video conference.

Participation is on a one by one basis to one or more children from the same family unit. Group workshops may be available at some time in the future.

### The purpose of the workshop is to:

- Help children understand why the divorce and/or separation happened and make sense of their role in it; and
- Help children learn new coping strategies for dealing with upsetting feelings, parent-child conflict, visitation problems, and other stressors; and
- Help children learn their role in helping the family function better.

### Some of the topics covered in the children's workshop include:

- The importance of having both parents and extended families.
- How to speak out and to have your wishes and preferences heard and respected on matters which affect you
- Parental Alienation and Parental Estrangement
- Various types of custody arrangements – joint custody, sole custody and parallel parenting
- Understanding what a court Order is and the role of the family court in helping your family
- Various types of parenting plans
- What your parents and family members should do and should not do to each other or to their children

- Understanding domestic violence (DV)
- The right and freedoms of children as well as their responsibilities
- Child abuse and neglect
- Child protection services
- How child advocates and children's lawyers can provide help when needed
- Dealing with new step parents
- When and where to call when help is needed

During the program children will have the opportunity to ask questions about their specific circumstances affecting them.

Parents who wish their children to participate in the program must have the ability to connect to the internet and have a video camera. A cell phone with a Wi-Fi connection and a place to participate privately in the program is all that is needed. At the end of the program, the children will receive a certificate of completion of the program.

This program is most effective when parents participate in the Co-operative Parenting Program which is also available through Family Conflict Resolution Services.

## About the workshop facilitators

Facilitators for the program may be mediators, counsellors, child advocates or they may be contracted professionals such as teachers or social workers who have had experience dealing with children and/or the family justice system.

Program guidelines ensure that workshop facilitators provide services that are neutral and objective and work with the children towards helping them become more knowledgeable in a safe manner towards achieving the best outcome for children and their families.

Facilitators will also make referrals to other outside third part services which could be helpful to the child and/or parents