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IMPACT ON THE CHILDREN OF A DYSFUNCTIONAL CO-PARENTING RELATIONSHIP



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When parents are unable to get along and maintain a functional relationship, the children are often the ones who suffer the consequences. In fact, according to the National Parents Organization, more than 70 percent of children in the United States will experience some form of parental conflict before they reach adulthood. The impact of this conflict can be far-reaching and long-lasting, leaving children feeling insecure, anxious, and even depressed. In this blog post, we'll take a closer look at the impact of parental conflict on children and what you can do to help your kids through this tough time. So, if you're the parent of a child who is caught in the middle of a co-parenting conflict, read on for some valuable insights.

WHAT IS PARENTAL CONFLICT?

Parental conflict is defined as any disagreement or argument between parents that causes stress or anxiety for the children involved. This can include everything from heated arguments and name-calling to more subtle forms of conflict such as passive-aggressive behaviours and withholding love or affection. Parental conflict can occur both during and after a divorce or separation, and it can have a profound effect on children of all ages.



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WHAT IS CO-PARENTING?

Co-parenting is when both parents take an active role in raising their children even though they are no longer in a relationship with each other. Co-parenting can be a challenge under the best of circumstances, but it can be even more difficult when there is a conflict between the parents. If you're a co-parent, it's important to find ways to resolve your differences so that you can provide a stable and loving home for your children.



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WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF PARENTAL CONFLICT?

Parental conflict can have a number of negative consequences for children, both in the short term and the long term. Some of the most common effects of parental conflict on children include:



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BEHAVIOURAL PROBLEMS

Children who witness parental conflict are also more likely to exhibit behavioural problems, such as aggression, bullying, and acting out. According to recent research, children who live in two-parent families are more likely to experience behavioural problems than children who live in single-parent families.






MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

The parental conflict has also been linked to mental health problems in children, such as anxiety & depression, insomnia, eating disorders, and even PTSD. This can manifest itself in a number of different ways, such as withdrawing from friends & activities, acting out in school, or experiencing nightmares & flashbacks.



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RELATIONSHIP PROBLEMS

Parental conflict can also lead to relationship problems for children later in life. Studies have shown that children of divorced or separated parents are more likely to have difficulty forming and maintaining healthy relationships themselves.






POOR SELF-ESTEEM

Parental conflict can also lead to poor self-esteem in children. When children see their parents arguing or behaving negatively toward each other, they may start to believe that they are somehow responsible for the conflict. This can lead to feelings of guilt, shame, and worthlessness.



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POOR ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Studies have shown that parental conflict can also lead to poor academic performance in children. Research done in 2019 showed that an unexpected divorce tends to create more academic problems for kids than a divorce that was expected.






RISK-TAKING BEHAVIOURS

Adolescents with separated parents are also more likely to engage in risk-taking behaviours, such as drinking, smoking, sexual behaviours, and drug use. This is likely because these kids are seeking ways to cope with the stress and anxiety caused by parental conflict. An article published in the American Psychological Association showed that one of the biggest reasons for a higher number of sexual partners among adolescents is the separation from fathers, as this often leads to a lack of supervision and an increased sense of independence.



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BONDING ISSUES

Parental conflict can also lead to bonding issues between children and their parents. When children witness their parents arguing or mistreating each other, they may have a hard time trusting or bonding with them. The situation gets even worse when their parents get divorced as this leads to less contact with one parent, mostly fathers. A 2014 study showed that children feel less close to their fathers after a divorce than they do to their mothers.






EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF DIVORCE

Parental separation usually creates emotional turmoil for children. The condition can be quite frustrating, confusing, and depressing for them. Different age groups of children react differently to parental divorce, but all of them go through some emotional roller coaster. For example, young kids become more clingy and withdrawn, whereas adolescents might become rebellious.



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SIBLING CONFLICT

Parental conflict can also lead to sibling conflict. This is because when parents are fighting, they often take sides and favour one child over the other. This can cause feelings of jealousy, resentment, and anger among siblings. It can also lead to physical fights and arguments.






LONG-TERM EFFECTS

The effects of parental conflict can last into adulthood. Studies have shown that children of divorced or separated parents are more likely to experience divorce themselves. They are also more likely to have difficulty forming and maintaining healthy relationships themselves. In addition, they are more likely to have mental health problems, such as anxiety and depression.



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WHAT CAN PARENTS DO TO HELP THEIR CHILDREN COPE WITH A DYSFUNCTIONAL CO-PARENT RELATIONSHIP?

ENSURE YOUR CHILDREN SPEND EQUAL TIME WITH BOTH PARENTS

It's important for children to spend time with both parents, even if the parents are no longer together. If possible, make sure your children have equal time with both parents. If you can't do this, try to have a regular schedule so your children know when they will see each parent.



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ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILDREN TO EXPRESS THEIR FEELINGS

One of the most important things you can do as a parent is to encourage your children to express their feelings. It's normal for children to feel a range of emotions when their parent divorces, such as sadness, anger, confusion, and worry. It's important for children to express these emotions so they can deal with them in a healthy way.






HELP YOUR CHILDREN UNDERSTAND THAT THE DIVORCE IS NOT THEIR FAULT

Parental divorce can be hard for children to understand. They may think they did something to cause the divorce or that they could have prevented it. So it's important to help your children understand that the divorce is not their fault. You can do this by talking to them about the divorce, being honest with them, and answering their questions.



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MAKE SURE YOUR CHILDREN HAVE A SUPPORT SYSTEM

Children of divorced or separated parents need a support system to help them cope with the divorce. This support system can be friends, relatives, or counsellors. This support system can help children express their feelings, talk about the divorce, and provide a listening ear.






ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILDREN TO BE INVOLVED IN THEIR FAVORITE ACTIVITIES

Divorce can be a stressful time for your children. To help them cope, encourage them to be involved in activities they enjoy. You know your children better than anyone, so you'll know their favourite activities. Ask them to participate in those activities with you or other family members.



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TALK TO YOUR CHILDREN'S TEACHERS

If your children are having difficulty coping with the divorce, talk to their teachers. Ask for their help in monitoring your children's progress and behaviour. The teachers can give you insight into how your children are doing in school and how they are interacting with other children.






MAKE SURE YOUR CHILDREN KNOW YOU LOVE THEM

One of the most important things you can do for your children is to make sure they know you love them. Show your love through your words and actions. Let them know you're there for them, and that you'll always love them, no matter what.



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AVOID BADMOUTHING THE OTHER PARENT

It's important to avoid badmouthing the other parent in front of your children. This can be hurtful and confusing for your children. If you have negative things to say about the other parent, save them for when your children are not around.






SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP

If you feel like you can't cope with the divorce, or if your children are having difficulty coping, seek professional help. There are counsellors who can help you and your children deal with divorce in a healthy way. These counsellors can provide support and guidance during this difficult time.



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No one said parenting was easy--but it doesn't have to be quite so hard. If you're going through a divorce, there are things you can do to make the situation easier for yourself and your children. From spending equal time with both parents to talking to your children's teachers, there are a number of things you can do to help your children cope with the divorce. And, if you're having difficulty coping yourself, there are counselors who can help. So don't hesitate to seek out professional help if you need it. Doing these things can help you and your children get through this difficult time.

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