

Why It's Important to Keep Good Relationships With the Ex

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It's not the divorce that is so damaging it is how it is often handled. Kids are just some of the collateral damage. Dads and Moms are doing their part to cause as much damage as possible to each other. First take moms. Sanford Braver reported in the American Journal of Orthopsychiatry that a whopping 40 percent of mothers reported that they had interfered with the father's visitation as a way to punish their ex-spouse. (1) Talk about bitter. Their own kids are being used as a weapon against their kid's biological dad. Think about for a moment. Forty percent is not just a small insignificant number. Clearly, this is not just a few irritated mothers but rather 4 out of every 10 mothers that are interfering, so what is going on? One of the things that might be going on is what role these ex-wives see for their ex-husbands. Joan Berlin Kelly writes in "Surviving the Breakup" that half, that's one out of every two mothers see no value in their children's dad having contact with their children.

The big picture is most all dads are meeting their financial duties. In fact, several studies show that three fourths of divorced fathers are fully meeting their financial obligations to their children. That is four million fathers are paying 12 billion dollars a year in child support. In truth those divorced men with the highest incomes are usually paying for most, if not all, of their children's expenses. This is especially true when the mother did not work full time outside the home throughout their marriage. There are a lot of statistics about divorce but one overrides all others. Fact is dads and children normally only remain close if the mother actively encourages and even facilitates that relationship.

So What Does Ex Hubby Bring to The Table?

Kids usually talk to their moms more about their social lives but it is the dads, part-time or long distance, who they turn to help them solve problems and to get advice on

education and jobs. But they also turn to their dad the most to get encouragement for self-reliance. Sometimes those facts of life fall on deaf ears. With half of all mothers not seeing any value in their children's father contact with their kids, either ex-wives are misinformed or they are just mad.

Divorced or separated dads are extremely important to your kid's well-being. Both parents are important to the health of your kids. Children who maintain a close relationship with their father tend to be more socially mature and to have fewer problems related to dating and sexuality. That's especially true if the divorced mother does not remarry. A number of studies involving teenagers and young adults who have close relationships with their fathers shows those kids are less likely to become clinically depressed, to develop eating disorders, and to develop anxiety disorders. Research also shows that kids who remain close to both parents are less stressed by divorce and dads who are connected to their kids are more likely to keep up with their obligations, financial and otherwise. Other studies show that children who are able to keep a close relationship with their father also tended to be more socially mature and to have fewer problems related to dating and sexuality.

Dads, regardless of their faults have roles that best can be done by them. Think about a married dad's role and you see a role that needs to be filled. In married couples it is usually the Dad who is primarily responsible for setting limits, emphasizing self-control and who is primarily responsible for discipline his children. Is that really what any mother wants to be responsible for doing? Someone got to be bad cop or at least one that can provide some balance. That role was critical when you were married why on earth you would expect your job to change.

Sure the divorce has changed relationships but not the basic nature of our species. Even smart mothers can use some help from the village, especially if the village includes their kid's dad. More than a dozen studies have shown that even well-educated mothers with ample money after the divorce often provide too little supervision, discipline and household order. Moms are often been shown to be too submissive to their own children. It is a tough job but somebody got to do it and that someone who needs to shoulder that responsibility is usually the dad-single or otherwise. Logic

dictates that both are needed but sometimes we think with our emotions and not are mind.

Men!!!

Women though are not the only ones behaving badly. Men and women often cope differently with divorce. Women often draw their children around them closer. They rely on friends and family to get through. Men reaction could not be more different. When dads can't cope with the divorce they can tend to disengage, move away, work too much and even remarry. Then put all their energies and focuses on something else like a new woman or new family. Often this is because of a feeling that they just don't matter anymore or because it's too difficult to always be in a fight with the ex. It can also be because of feelings of guilt, anger and sadness at not being able to real a dad.

The problem is when dads disengage it is the kids that are the real losers. Any time dads disengage or moms resist the dad keeping involved it is their kids that feel unwanted, abandoned and mad. Divorce is simply change it is how it is handled that determines if it was a successful change. The evidence clearly shows that dads are important but sadly most fathers see very little of their children after divorce. Only about eight percent of divorced fathers get to live with their children for as much as a third of a year. For most it is far less.

Unfortunately many councilors and psychologist ignore the divorced dad. Some even act as if the children only have one parent, which is their mother. It might come as a surprise to learn that it is dads, not the moms who are more likely to become depressed, commit suicide, or develop a stress-related illness after their divorce. But then you realize it is usually the dad that becomes childless. The carefree "swinging bachelor" is a myth and has little connection to reality. When both parents work full time you will find both dads and moms generally doing similar amounts of housework and childcare. Studies show, it is teenagers of divorced parents say it was their dad who gave them the best advice, who taught them the most, and who pushes to do their best.

Pushing Buttons

In marriage, couples learn how to push each other's buttons. Do you think your buttons disappear when you get divorced? In fact, once divorced many buttons become glowing neon, flashing "press here". When you have unfinished business with your ex, you still push buttons and allow your own buttons to be pushed. Unfinished business like mom interfering with their kid's visitation or thinking their kid's dad does not matter only harms your kid. It can lead to some destructive games with your kids as the pawns.

"I spy" is a game that can be played by either or both parents. It is where the kids are to act as a spy for a parent. I spy would start when one of the parents says "What were they doing" or some similar prying question. It's so much not destructive for the mom or dad, but rather for the kids. Bad mouthing a kid's mom or dad only hurts the kid. Holding on to anger only destroys your kid. Divorce in its essence is nothing more than change and like any change it all depends on how it is handled.

After a divorce you can count on your ex trying to push your buttons. It is as certain as the sun rising the sun rising. It is a certainty. The key to getting unstuck in this destructive game is knowing when it's happening and not playing. How do you know your buttons are being pushed? It is easy to tell. When the ex does something and you get hurt, frustrated or angry your buttons are getting pushed. Your best defense is to be aware of your feelings and don't let them drive your behavior. But some people when their buttons get pushed just can't shut their mouths about it – even if they are with their kids. Those negative feelings and thoughts just keep pouring out. Worse still your kids get stuck in the middle. It is not the divorce that damages you and your kids, it how you handle the divorce. Kids don't need to hear you vent. Go vent to a friend, a therapist or your dog not your kids.

When your buttons are pushed and you react they win, you are hooked. It is essential to "divorce" yourself from the moment. To start with here are some ideas. Take a deep breath and focus on the here and now. "I'm divorced. I'm here with my kids. I love my kids more than I hate my ex". Exercising is also a good outlet to get rid of pent up feelings. When exercising be mindful that when you are exercising you are trying to not focus on the negative things your ex is doing. Focus on all the positives in your life instead.

Take care of your buttons so they don't get pushed. Don't let your ex push your buttons (when the ex does something and you get hurt, frustrated or angry your buttons are getting pushed). Don't let your emotions get you in to an "I'll show them" confrontation. Good advice is to simply shut your mouth when you get frustrated (vent to a friend, a therapist or your dog not your kids). You can't control other people or their reaction but you can control how you react so stop complaining and look at what you can do not what your ex is doing. Finally practice Co-parenting. Cooperating, being flexible, respectful and thinking of the best interest of the children will help avoid power struggles.

If you are wondering if you are stuck in some of this destructive thinking, go to the website dkeithdenton.com and take the free survey. Use the parenting tab and click on the "Are You Stuck Questionnaire" and see where you rank.

References

(1) Braver, S.L., Wolchik, S.A., Sandler, I.N., Foger, B.S. and Zuetina, D. (1991). Frequency of visitation by divorced fathers: Differences in reports by fathers and mothers. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 61, 448-454