

3 Key Components for Becoming Co-Parents after Divorce and Alleviating Alienating Behaviors

As a parent, you want the best for your children. When your child hurts, you (privately) hurt with them. That old phrase that every child rolls their eyes in response to, “this is more painful for us (the parents), than it is for you,” becomes painstakingly real and true the moment you join parenthood!

Now imagine that the two people your children depend on for survival, defer to for wisdom and answers, seek approval from for every task, and love more than words can describe break the devastating news that mom and dad will soon be residing in two different homes. Your child’s perception of life and family is shattered! And you, mom and dad, are the only two people that can make the transition for this new living arrangement smooth. Moving forward, your child’s psychological and emotional well-being will be hinged on every choice you make and every word you utter. Your child has looked to you every day of their short little lives for guidance on how to behave, what to feel and how to react in unknown/unfamiliar situations, what to say to people, how to develop relationships and maintain them, how to resolve problems, etc. YOU are their biggest and best fans, cheering them on and encouraging them when they feel defeated. So, when only half of their team is available to support them, how can they ever succeed in the game of life?

Alienated children adamantly and vehemently assert that it is their choice to no longer spend time with a parent. However, to live without access to both parents due to a “choice” leaves children broken and in grave despair. Parental Alienating Behaviors will devastate families and can cause generational upheaval. If you, or someone you know, is caught in a tumultuous family dynamic between two homes, it is vital that you seek help from well trained professionals. You will need support to navigate this treacherous storm and the well-versed team will be vital in guiding you through the horrific aftermath of the disastrous child custody warfare.

The therapist will observe 3 parts of the changing family dynamic: (1) the parent-child relationship with each parent; (2) the co-parent relationship; and (3) how each parent supports the other parent-child relationship.

In assessing the relationship that a child shares with each parent, it is important to be attentive to the strength of both attachments. If a child tends to gravitate to one parent over the other, then as long as the interaction is healthy, the child’s need for that parent should be preserved. Meanwhile, the therapist can assist the other parent in developing the necessary components for nurturing the child in order to strengthen the relationship. The goal is to bring the child to a place that

he or she feels safe to choose both parents, confident to confide in either parent, and secure with their attachments.

In addition to growing the parent-child relationships, it is crucial that both parents begin working to redefine their roles as they will forever be enjoined as co-parents. Parents should strive to resolve any unsettled negative positions. Their goal is to become indifferent to one another. This indifference will afford them success in child focused interaction, as it will be less likely for someone to be emotionally reactive. Concurrently, the therapist will introduce new vocabulary and methods for effective communication in efforts to establish a functional co-parent relationship. I would challenge you to choose to love your child more than you dislike your co-parent and encourage you to be hopeful for a future of working together. Showing your children that you can still be a team for them, is the best gift you can give and it will allow them to choose both of you. Remember, to only have half of your parents, you will only be able to access half of yourself. Think of it like this, if your basketball team arrives to play the game with only 3 players, you would have to forfeit and accept the game as a loss. So as parents, would you want your child to feel defeated because they are forced to forfeit a relationship with one of you?

Finally, reflect! Take a look at yourself and consider your position with encouraging your child's relationship with their other parent. Do you have a pure heart when you are talking with your child about the other parent? If your child comes to you with a complaint about the other parent, these questions will help you guide your child to work through the complaint:

- Does your mom or dad love you?
- Would your mom or dad ever purposefully hurt you?
- If your mom or dad knew they were hurting you, would they fix it so they don't hurt you anymore?
- Have you told your mom or dad that they are hurting you?
- If they don't know they are hurting you, how can they fix it?
- Is it fair to be upset with your mom or dad if they don't know they are hurting you?
- Would it be possible for you to talk to them so they have a chance to fix this?
- If they hurt you again after you talk to them, then we will get your counselor to help you talk to your mom or dad so you can both figure out how to fix the problem together.

Bear in mind that everything you say is magnified and at risk of being misinterpreted when conflict exists. Simple statements of discontent are no longer overlooked. Even if your child's other parent chooses to be a jerk, you don't have to join them. I implore you to enhance your self-awareness by seeking out objective third parties to give you feedback and insights. Make it your

mission to give your child at least 1 home that they can still be a kid. Make them feel important and loved by keeping them out of the middle. When they grow up, they will remember the parent that made them feel stressed versus the parent that allowed them to be a kid and feel loved. You are your child's only hope! How you help them navigate through the devastation of divorce should weigh heavily on your heart...your child's future depends on it!



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