

PARENTAL CONFLICT



Conflict in Families After Separation About 90% of Families Resolve the Conflict

By Psychology Works

Frequent and intense conflict between parents negatively impacts a child's sense of safety and security, which affects their relationship with their parents and in the long term, with others. Parental conflict that focuses on children is also linked to adjustment problems later in life. The younger the child, the more likely they are to blame themselves for their parents' problems. Good parenting provides structure, warmth, emotional support and positive reinforcement which acts as a buffer to the family conflict.

Initially, parental separation can lead to an increase in parental conflict, hurt and anger, although in some families, the level of conflict is reduced when the parents do not have regular contact with each other. It takes about 2 to 3 years to meaningfully reduce parental conflict after separation, although it remains high in about 10% of families.

Factors that increase the risk of poor adjustment in children may be due partially to high conflict and other problems in the family before the separation. Pre-separation conflict may affect the children's ability to adapt and adjust to their parents' separation.

In some high conflict families, children are twice as likely to have emotional, social, behavioural and academic problems compared to children from families that are intact.

The worst effect on children occurs when parents use their children to express their

Other factors identified as having a negative impact on how children adjust following their parents' separation include:

- the psychological adjustment of the parent after separation
- the quality and type of parenting received by the

Problematic Parent Behaviours can Affect a Child's Relational Capacity for their Lifetime.

unresolved anger and hostility, even after the separation.

Children that are placed in the middle of their parents' dispute are more likely to be angry, stressed, depressed or anxious, and have poor relationships with their parents than children who are not used in this way.

Ideally, children should feel able to talk openly about their lives in both the households, but not feel obliged to do so. They should feel safe when expressing their feelings but not feel obliged to do so.

Children who blame themselves for their parents fighting have also been found to be at greater risk of poor social and emotional adjustment following their parents separation.

- children before and after the separation
- the quality of the relationship between parents and the children
- the loss of important relationships with family members and peers
- changes in family structure, such as parents re-partnering, or moving a distance away
- a reduction in financial resources.

The following parental behaviours have been identified as being highly problematic:

- asking children to carry (hostile) messages to the other parent
- asking children (intrusive) questions about the other parent
- creating a need in the child to hide information
- creating a need for the child to hide positive things (including feelings) from the other parent
- demeaning and putting down the other parent in the presence of the child

Information referenced is adapted from research by Kelly, J. (2012). Risk and Protective Factors Associated with Child and Adolescent Adjustment Following Separation and Divorce: Social Science Applications, Chapter 3. In K. Kuehnie and L. Drozd (Eds.). Parenting Plan Evaluations: Applied Research for the Family Court, Oxford University Press, New York.