

LOW AND HIGH IMPACT DIVORCE IMPACTS CHILDREN

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Low-impact and low-conflict divorces can often have more damaging effects on children than high-conflict and high-impact divorces.

Divorce is not easy, and it often brings out the worst in us, but in some marriages, the signs of divorce can be hard to spot for children. If you and your spouse have always had a low-conflict marriage, where there is little yelling, it can be hard for a child to understand where a divorce is coming from.

Dr. Paul Amato, a sociologist at Penn State University, and Alan Booth, also from Penn State, did a study a number of years ago on 2,000 divorcing parents and 700 children of divorcing parents. What they found is that, “From the child’s perspective, there is no evidence that anything is drastically wrong,” says Dr. Booth. “It is an unexpected, uncontrollable and unwelcome event where one parent leaves the home and the other is overwhelmed with the demands of single parenthood and a lowered standard of living.”

Dr. Booth suggests that marriages in which there are high amounts of conflict can actually be more beneficial to children because it can feel as if there is finally an end to a hostile situation. While we are never ones to argue for high conflict, it can make more “sense” to a child.

Whatever the reason or type of divorce you are going through, whether high or low impact, it is never a good enough excuse to pull your kids along through the hurtful ride of roller-coaster emotions. This means learning how to co-parent with your ex-spouse.



BUILDING A SUCCESSFUL CO-PARENTING SITUATION

“The biggest obstacles to successful co-parenting are emotions,” says Alisa Peskin-Shepherd, principal of Transitions Legal, a family law practice that specializes in mediative divorce. “Emotional obstacles are usually anger, resentment and jealousy. Often parents have a hard time separating those feelings toward their former spouse from their attempt to focus on their children.”

The idea of focusing on your children might seem obvious, but that can be really difficult when you receive that text from your ex that makes you want to throw your phone directly into their face. There are some tips that can help though! Here are some tips from parents who have actually found the magic combination to a successful (meaning they don’t completely resent each other) co-parenting situation.

GIVE YOURSELF A ‘TIMEOUT’

“Take time to reflect on how your behavior and your decisions are affecting your child,” says Peskin-Shepherd. “Especially where there is constant disagreement, try to accept that you are not going to change the other person and find a way to make something work without being dependent on the other parent’s response.”

If you are not able to give yourself a timeout, and find that you are still stewing about conversing with your ex, consult a “co-parenting coordinator,” attorney or counselor – with or without your ex-spouse. This objective third party can be a great sounding board for ironing out your co-parenting relationship.

“Our expectations that two people who didn’t get along when they are married will suddenly be able to co-parent without some help is not reasonable,” Peskin-Shepherd says.

According to Alison Willet, a Birmingham resident and psychologist who has worked with high-conflict divorce, it is crucial for ex-spouses to heal fully from the pain that stems from their divorce if they plan to find a way to co-parent effectively.

The mother of three daughters and two step-daughters goes on to say, “People going through divorce need to take the necessary time to grieve the end of this major relationship and remember that at one time, they loved or cared about the other parent. When parents are psychologically intact, it will be easier for them to put the needs of their children first.”

PLAY TO YOUR EX’S STRENGTHS (THIS MIGHT BE VERY DIFFICULT)

By now you know what your ex is good at and what they’re not so good at. So play fair when it comes to your kids and your ex’s abilities.

“You probably know your ex-spouse better than anyone else,” says Chris Tucker, father of Finn, 9, and Simon, 7, and step-dad to Lucas, 6. “Play to those strengths – not in a manipulative way, but in a spirit of making the best use of one another’s talents.”

Tucker’s situation is: he has his boys two-thirds of the year; their mother visits monthly from Virginia. She also takes them over school breaks and summer. Tucker, his wife, his ex-wife, and her husband all work as a unit to parent the children.

“We like to think of ourselves – Colleen, her husband, my wife and I – as members of a family ecosystem,” says Tucker. “This means that everyone involved is invested in and accountable for raising our kids, and it goes a long way in building trust and mutual respect.”

COMMIT TO COOPERATING

This can be the hardest part of a co-parenting relationship – cooperating.

According to mother Shaindle Braunstein-Cohen, “Effective co-parenting does not require friendship, but it does require cooperation.”

“My ex and I get along when we have contact, but we never have contact outside of our son,” she says. “When my son wanted to show his dad his new room in our new home, he did. Successful co-parenting involves only one thing: loving your child more than you hate your ex.”

When her ex moved out-of-state, Braunstein-Cohen gained full custody of her 14-year-old Seth. When he wants to see his dad or vice versa, both her and Seth’s father to make it happen. “Sure, that meant I had many holidays without him, but it wasn’t about me,” she says.

of mutual respect that allows them to co-parent their three children, Jordan, 19, Paige, 15, and Ethan, 13.

“It’s not about you,” says Rubin. “Instead of worrying about each other, worry about the kids. It’s a parent’s job to turn their children into productive and emotionally healthy adults, and you can’t do that if you’re focused on each other.”

SILENCE YOUR SUPPORT SYSTEM

Your friends and family will want to defend you, but there’s nothing helpful about your mother sending your ex a nasty email. The support system should remain impartial, and if they’re not, you need to intervene.

KEEP YOUR EGO IN CHECK

It goes without saying that you’re going to doubt your parenting ability and fear that your children will want to be with the other parent. But you have to resist the urge.

“It’s easy to see your ex-spouse as a threat,” says Tucker. “Remind yourself that your ex is also your children’s parent and would also step in front of a bus for them. Trust that they also have your children’s best interests at heart.”

Says Braunstein-Cohen, “Be totally honest with yourself. Everyone has ego involved; they want their child to know they were not at fault, that they are a better parent. Let it go and really think about what makes your kids happy.

“Obviously you don’t agree or sometimes even like each other very much – that’s why you got divorced,” she adds. “Get over it.”

A FAMILY LAW ATTORNEY

But when it comes to the actual legal process of a divorce, you’ll want to work with a skilled family law attorney. There are a number of things that need to be considered during a divorce: child support, spousal support, marital property division, and other things. Working with a skilled attorney can help ensure you get a fair case. For advice on [divorce](#), child custody determinations, setting up a co-parenting agreement, dividing marital property, and [spousal support](#) you need the expert law firm of [Khalaf Law Group](#). Schedule a consultation today.

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