

Divorce: When Families Fall Apart



Julie Lowe

Header

Body
Text

High Conflict vs. Low Conflict

- Defined by the intensity and frequency of conflict before and after divorce.
- Research shows that intensity is much more significant than frequency.
- High Conflict Divorce: Highly intense conflict that occurs between parents after (and often before) separation/ divorce occurs.
- Children in High conflict divorce/ marriages have more behavioral/ emotional problems than those in low conflict (lacks intensity, even if there is frequency)

High Conflict and Parenting

- Parents in high conflict marriages are more depressed than those in low conflict
- They are less emotionally available to children
- Greater negative parent-child relationships
- Lower parent-child affection
- Quality of parenting is one of the best predictors of child's psychological and social adjustment in married families (and divorcees)

Amato & Booth, 1996; Vanewater & Lansford, 1998

Parental Response in High Conflict Divorce

Mothers

- Tend to be less warm and nurturing
- More insensitive to responses and interaction
- More rejection of child
- Erratic and coercive in discipline
- More angry at child
- More physical aggression indicated
- “Gate-keeping”

Fathers

- Fathers tend to withdrawal from parenting
- Less discipline
- Less interaction and nurturing
- More insensitive and negative in interactions with child

Risks: Factors that Affect Kids in Divorce

- Stress & level of conflict during marriage, separation & divorce.
- Psychiatric illness & personality disorder of parent(s)
- Diminished or inadequate parenting
- Loss of important relationships
- Child used during conflict
- Re-partnering and remarriage
- Move to new locations
- Reduced or unstable economic resources
- Lack of stability in daily routine and schedules

Why Are Some Children Unaffected?

- ◉ Parent's leave child out of the conflict
- ◉ Conflict doesn't center on child
- ◉ Lower intensity of conflict
- ◉ Protective buffers are in place
- ◉ Not many family transitions – move, new school, remarriage, etc
- ◉ Child's normal routine and schedule resumes

Things Families Can Work on to Help Children

- Intensity of anger and bitterness
- Continuous conflict
- Distrust and suspiciousness
- Contempt towards other parent
- Polarized views on child issues and decisions
- Loss of child focus – needs of the child are secondary
- Use of child to get even with other parent or express anger
- One parent's own version of "truth"

Adversarial Divorce Process

- ◉ Escalates and consolidates parental conflict
- ◉ Diminishes civility between parents rather than encourage it
- ◉ Encourages positional black and white thinking
- ◉ Looks for Parental flaws and inadequacies rather than strengths
- ◉ Discourages communication
- ◉ Focus on parent's rights, not child's needs

Talking to Children about Divorce

- No one talked to them – 23%
- Only mother talked to them – 44%
- Parents discussed separation together – 17%
- One or Two statements made – 45%
- Fully informed & allowed to ask questions – 5%

Dunn et al, 2001; Smart & Neale, 2000; Smart, 2002

How does this impact how we help families?

What Prevents Talking to Children?

- We don't know what to say
- We fear how the child will react
- We struggle to control their own emotions
- Guilt about hurting/ damaging the child
- Fear child will blame them
- Fear they will be rejected by the child, or child will take sides
- Parents own anger, turmoil, struggles take priority

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- Most kids are not adequately informed about separation and how it will impact their lives
 - When they are informed, often parents want to hand over the responsibility to a counselor/ other professional
 - Often there is no opportunity to ask questions
 - Parenting plans are imposed without any discussion
 - Children are asked their opinions/ suggestions (without giving them control)

Protective Factors to Help Kids

- Quality parenting is one of the central factors that comes up in almost all research regarding how to reduce risk in children of divorce
- Diminished impact divorce and multiple transitions
- Good, consistent discipline continues by both parents. (Rules and boundaries are consistently followed)
- Economic stability
- Greater involvement of Fathers

Implications for Care

- Know what issues a might be wrestling with and how to think about them
- Consider how conflict informs how you help parents individually or together
- Consider what you could do to support them, the parent or the children
- Consider the practical needs for extra support – with childcare, tutoring, afterschool care, meals, yard work
- Consider the emotional & spiritual needs of the family – where do they feel alone, rejected, judged by the church, need counseling, friendship, etc
- What are the resources the church can develop – support groups, divorcecare,

Help for Kids

- Informing or debunking their misconceptions about the divorce
- Walking along-side them in the midst of high conflict
- Helping them sort through personal feelings, fears, hurt, anxiety, anger
- Validating accurate perceptions while fighting against inaccurate ones
- Helping them maintain their role as a child, not an equal with parents, nor having an equal say
- Encouraging and validating importance relationship with both parents

Parental Comfort vs. God's Comfort

Comfort is limited

Comfort is flawed

Is not always accessible

Prone to disappoint

Comfort is limitless

Perfect Comfort

Always available

Incapable of
disappointing

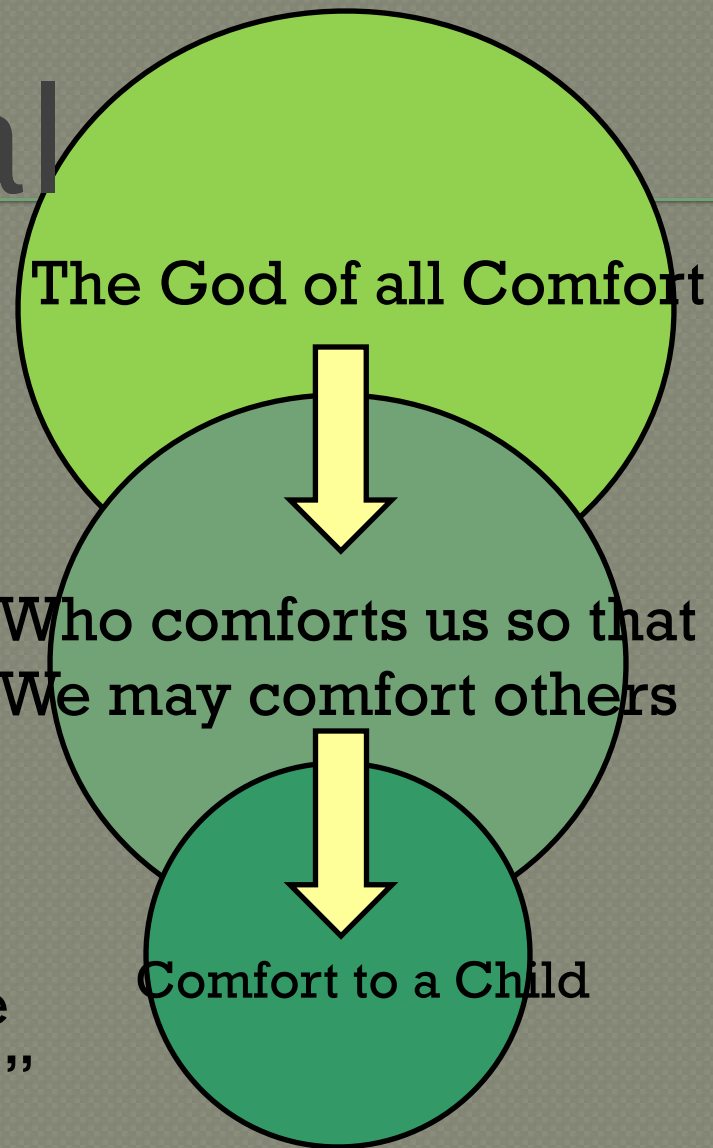
There are places inside a child's head & heart that we can not go – places only God can reach.

Incarnational Comfort



2 Corinthians 1:3-5

“Comforting others with the
Comfort we’ve been given...”



Speak Hope

- ◆ Finding places God exists in their suffering
- ◆ Giving Voice to laments
- ◆ Speaking words of hope that encourage belief in better days ahead
- ◆ Retell their story (play a new song/
new robe)

- Your presence is a support

- Be a reminder them they are not alone
- Listen, really listen
- Guide in practical decision-making when the person is not able to
- Look for a supportive community

Specialized Group Interventions & Materials

- After the Storm: Resolving Post-Separation Conflict. Video and manuals.
www.divorce-education.com
- Parenting without Conflict – Los Angeles County Superior Court Family Court Services
- Kid's First Group for Parents in High Conflict – Freeport, ME
- www.UptoParents.org
- www.sharedground.com
- Confident Kids – Christian support group curriculum for children
- Divorce Care www.divorcecare.org
- Choosing Wisely Before You Divorce - www.BeforeYouDivorce.org
- DC4K: DivorceCare for Kids - www.DC4K.org
- ParentZone - www.DC4K.org/ParentZone