



## **Keeping A Child Away From The Other Parent Can Backfire**

Marriages can fail for many reasons. When they do, people can be seen on a spectrum from minimal conflict to high conflict as they sort out the task of untangling their lives to resume independent living. Where children are involved, living can only ever be semi-independent as the needs of the children will forever keep the couple united. As the level of conflict and animosity increases between the parents the thought of being tied through the children is too much for some people to bear. As such, some parents will seek to exclude or diminish the role of the other parent in the lives of the children. This meets the dual objective of greater freedom from the other parent and punishing the other parent for perceived injustices.

In excluding or diminishing the role of the other parent several strategies can be deployed. These include; undermining access by being away or planning alternate events for the children; refusing access altogether for frivolous reasons; telling the child hurtful things about the other parent; planting suggestions to the child that the other parent may hurt them; making allegations that the other parent is incompetent or even harmful, in the absence of real evidence.

Parents who use such strategies actually increase the degree of parental conflict and increase the likelihood of Court action as the parent whose relationship with the child has been limited, turns to the Court to seek a remedy. At times and ironically, the parent who is attempting to undermine the other parent's relationship tries to use the Court action as evidence that the parent is spiteful and malicious.

In such actions, the children always lose and eventually so too does the vengeful parent.

While the vengeful parent may think their child can suffice with them alone, the social science research is clear that children develop best and enjoy a healthier psycho-socio outcome as adults when they have secure relationships to both parents. Children who are taught to cut themselves off from a parent are at greater risk of using similar strategies for managing their own adult intimate relationships and thus are at greater risk of failed adult relationships too.

Further, most children, either through Court action or when as teenagers they seek out the alternate parent, do

get to know the avenged parent. When their experience of the avenged parent conflicts with what they were told about them, in other words, when a parent who was supposedly bad, turns out to be good, the children then turn on the parent who had originally undermined the relationship. Children who eventually establish relationships with parents they were kept from without good cause, feel resentful for having been misled. They come to reject the parent who sought to keep the children for themselves.

As adults, these children forgo the relationship with the parent who raised them in favour of the parent who was kept away. As the vengeful parent plans for the demise of the other parent's relationship in the short term, in the long term these parents not only hurt their children, but also themselves. They come to lose their children when they get older.

Parents are advised to understand that it is every child's birthright to have reasonable relationships with both parents, assuming freedom from harm and appropriate care and supervision. Any parent who seeks to disrupt a child's relationship with the other parent may ultimately hurt the child and undermine their own chances for a life-long relationship.

The issue is not withholding a child from a parent, but structuring the situation to provide for children's safety and well-being. If there is truly an issue with a parent's behaviour, demand they seek help to address the problem yet facilitate access through a place of safety. If the issues with the other parent have more to do with one's own upset or anger, then seek counseling to manage feelings in view of the child's needs to have reasonable relationships with both parents.

Certainly don't act in a manner that ultimately hurts your child and places your relationship at risk when your child grows up and learns the truth. It would be a shame for all involved for that to happen.

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