Mindful Co-parenting:
A Child-Friendly Path Through Divorce

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What Mindfulness Encompasses

- Awareness
- Focus
- Calmness
- Thinking, processing
- Values, goals
- Rational decision making
- Intentional living

What Is Co-parenting?

- Parenting
- Co-parenting
- Intact families
- Divorced families

What is Mindful Co-parenting?

Paying attention to how you parent your children along with your children’s other parent—day by day, moment by moment, with a focus on what is in the long-term best interest of your children

When Is Mindful Co-parenting Not Enough?

- Safety issues
- Child abuse
- Unmanaged DV
- Parental impairment
- Extreme alienation cases

Options for the Divorce Process

Four Alternative Approaches to Divorce

1. Pro se settlement
2. Hiring solution-oriented attorneys
3. Mediation
4. Collaborative divorce

How Divorce Affects Children

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Limits of Research
- Individual versus group differences
- Randomized controlled studies versus correlations
- Probabilistic aspect of prediction

Research Results (1)
- Children of divorce are more likely to have
  - Emotional problems
  - Behavioral issues
  - Poorer academic performance
  - Trouble in other areas of their lives
- Have adjustment problems > 2x as often

Research Results (2)
- However, divorce does not predestine a child
- 75% to 80% fall in the normal range or better
- Most can be happy, successful, and well-adjusted

Risk and Protective Factors for Children of Divorce (1)
- Stability
- Predictability
- Parental conflict
- Parental availability
- Parent-child relationship

Risk and Protective Factors for Children of Divorce (2)
- Personal characteristics of the parents
- Personal characteristics of the children
- Parenting style
- Social support
- Logistical challenges

A primary goal of mindful co-parenting is to minimize risk factors and maximize protective factors

Helping Parents Select Their Co-parenting Approach

The Toxic Combination of Personality Factors, Emotions, and Stress
Not All Conflict Is Created Equal

- Intensity of conflict
- Focus on children
- Putting children in the middle

Parents should:

- Identify a co-parenting approach that takes into account their level of conflict
- Apply that approach conscientiously and consistently

Using Emotion in Mindful Co-parenting

The world moves for love.
It kneels before it in awe.

—From M. Night Shyamalan’s “The Village”

Ways to Tap into Emotions

- Photos
- Positive and negative visualizations
- Roleplay child’s perspective
- Screen and share
- Targeted disclosure
- Acknowledgement of loss and hope
- Literature, film, stories, etc.

When I see parents impatient or tired or bored with their children, I wish I could say to them, But they are alive, think of the wonder of that! They may be a care and a burden, but think, they are alive! You can touch them—what a miracle! Your sons and daughters are alive. Think of that—not dead but alive! Exult and sing.

—Frances Gunther, in Death Be Not Proud

Focused Coparenting Consultation/Parenting Coordination Pilot Study

- Fostering contemplation of feelings and experiences
- Photo collages
- Tears video
Keys to Mindful Co-parenting

- Putting the children first
- Focusing forward
- Communicating effectively
- Honoring agreements
- Maintaining boundaries
- Managing your emotions

Putting the Children First
- Conscious, committed effort to prioritize
- What can get in the way
- Common goal
- Insulating children from conflict

Focusing Forward
- Letting go of the past
- Letting go of minor issues in the present
- Learning to accept

Communicating Effectively
- Neutral
- Cordial
- Friendly

Honoring Agreements

To Communicate Effectively, Be

Civil
Clear
Calm

The letter and the intent
Reasons Why Parents Fail to Comply
- Lack of understanding of agreement
- Different interpretations
- Inadequate wording
- Power struggle
- Manipulations
- Intervening obstacles

Ways to Gain Compliance
- Identify the problem
- Work together on a solution
- Find helpers
- Go to court (carefully)
- Do nothing

Maintaining Boundaries
- Step back from controlling
- Problems with attempts to control
- Boundaries can change with time
- Abuse and domestic violence

Managing Emotions
- Can be difficult to manage
- Important to do so
- Do’s and don’ts
- Provocations
- Decency and politeness

Special Circumstances
- Allegations of child abuse
- Rejection of a parent by a child (alienation spectrum)
- Concerns regarding parental inadequacy
- Uncontrolled domestic violence
- Severe parental conflict

A Few Final Thoughts
That's It!

Time for Questions...

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