

Caught in the Middle

Often children are caught in the middle when parents decide to divorce. One of the most common types of emotional trauma for the child may occur when parents try to make children take sides.

Parental Alienation Syndrome (PAS)

PAS may occur when one parent programs a child to choose one parent over the other, think bad thoughts about the other parent, or tell the court where they want to live. Programming may be done to strengthen one parent's position in a court of law or simply to "get even" with the other parent.

PAS does not consider the child's feelings. It also does not take into account the fact that the child has the right to love both parents. Children naturally want to please their parents. When parents ask the child to take sides, it puts the child under great pressure. Children are confused. They do not want to choose. They should not have to. Children need a mommy and a daddy whether the parents live together or apart.

Co-Parenting Education Classes

Many communities offer parenting programs for divorcing parents. In some states these are court mandated for parents before a divorce is granted. *For Kids' Sake* is one such program that helps mothers and fathers understand that they will always be the child's parents, no matter what. *For Kids' Sake* offers tips for ways to co-parent that will take the pressure off the child. Parents also learn how to reduce conflict that involves custody and where the child will live.

Mediation

Many courts also require that divorcing couples go through mediation. The mediator is a neutral third party that will help parents work out an agreement in which both parties are content. Mediation helps parents work out where the child will live. It also can work out visitation agreements that both parents and the children like. The more parents can settle things, the less stress the child will be under.

Books to Read

Ahrons, C. (1995). *The good divorce: Keeping your family together when your marriage comes apart*. New York: HarperPerennial/HarperCollins.

Baris, M. A., & Garrity, C. B. (1988). *Children of divorce: A developmental approach to residence and visitation*. De Kalb, Illinois: Psytec.

Bienenfeld, F. (1987). *Helping your child succeed after divorce*. Claremont, CA: Hunter House.

Garrity, C. B., & Baris, M. A. (1994). *Caught in the middle: Protecting the children of high-conflict divorce*. New York: Lexington Books.

Ricci, I. (1990). *Mom's house, Dad's house: Making two homes for your child*. New York: Simon & Schuster

Sources:

Gardner, R. A. (2002). Parental alienation syndrome vs. parental alienation: Which diagnosis should evaluators use in child-custody disputes? *American Journal of Family Therapy*, 30(2), 93-115

Ricci, I. (1990). *Mom's house, Dad's house: Making two homes for your child*. New York: Simon & Schuster