

The North Fulton Marriage Newsletter

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Co-parenting

Last year I found a Youtube clip of marriage counselor and researcher John Gottman discussing the impact of marital problems on children. Gottman's research found that one could predict marital satisfaction by looking at the levels of stress hormones in the urine of the couple's children. Effectively, higher levels of stress hormones in children correlate to lower marital satisfaction in their parents. Think about that. It's powerful. I know it impacted me. It makes me think twice before raising my voice or arguing with my wife in front of our daughter. Children remain our best barometer to measure family and marital health.

This type of research also gives us an indication of how traumatic divorce can be for children. I remember as a child, my greatest fear was that my parents would divorce. Thankfully, they did not, but there was always this underlying insecurity for me that they would split up. I also often thought that it was my fault when they fought, had arguments or practiced the silent treatment. When children are very young, their parents are effectively their God, regardless of their religious or spiritual upbringing. They struggle and transition through seeing themselves separately from their parents. So, imagine what it must be like when parents divorce. Trauma. Professionally I have seen all ends of the divorce impact spectrum: Teenagers four or five years post-divorce, still trying to resolve their anger and grief; children in the middle of the divorce process just trying to survive emotionally; and even adults, 20, 30, or 40 years down the line still trying to understand or make sense of their parents divorce eons ago. So, you may be thinking, "Why all the negativity?" Well, sometimes the truth, which is sometimes negative, helps drive home a point. And that brings us to the concept of co-parenting and why it is so crucial for divorcing parents' to understand the concept. Co-parenting is a term used to describe parents that are collaboratively parenting their children during a divorce and post-divorce. Though you may not be married, this does not mean that you can't effectively parent together. I will very often tell divorcing couples that you may not have gotten along when married, but for the sake of your children we are going to see to it that you get along once you divorce. I am going to bullet point a list of co-parenting don'ts and co-parenting do's:

Co-parenting Don'ts:

- Don't expect your children to take your side or try to convince them to take your side.
- Don't view the divorce as a game to be won—there are no winners, ever.
- Don't lie to your children about your spouse to make your spouse look bad.
- Don't continually blame your spouse for the divorce in front of your children.
- Don't use custody agreements or modifications as a means of revenge toward your spouse.

Co-parenting Do's:

- Do learn to forgive and move forward with your life.
- Do remember that it will take a long time for your children to adjust to their new life.
- Do let go of your anger.
- Do view your spouse as your child's parent, not as the enemy.
- Do seek out individual counseling to help you resolve grief and remorse about divorce.

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