



What Your Children Need You to Know

A Guide for Co-Parents in High -Conflict Divorce

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Going through a separation or divorce is one of the hardest experiences a family faces. This guide shares the most important findings from child development science in plain language. The good news is powerful: **you have more influence over your child's wellbeing than you may realize.**

1. Ongoing Inter-Parental Conflict (IPC) Leads To...

Research shows that it is **not divorce itself** but the **ongoing conflict between parents** that harms children most. When children are caught in continued parental hostility, the consequences are real and measurable:

- **Mental health disorders** — anxiety, depression, emotional dysregulation, PTSD-like symptoms
- **Poor academic performance** — reduced focus, motivation, and engagement in school
- **Difficulty with peer relationships** — social withdrawal, isolation, and distrust
- **Low self-esteem and shame** — children often blame themselves for the family conflict
- **Addictions and risky behaviors** — substance use, alcohol, and impulsive decisions in adolescence and adulthood
- **Harmful sexual behaviors** — earlier sexual activity, difficulty with healthy intimacy later in life
- **Sleep problems and physical health issues** — chronic stress elevates cortisol and weakens immunity
- **Attachment difficulties** — trouble trusting, bonding, and forming healthy relationships throughout life
- **Existential fears** — feeling unsafe, lost, isolated, and that the world is unpredictable and threatening



The science: Harvard researchers (2026) define this as toxic stress — the prolonged activation of the body's stress response when no buffering adult relationship is present. Contentious divorce is listed as an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) that can alter developing brain circuits, impair learning, and increase lifetime risk for chronic illness.

2. One Responsive Co-Parent Is Enough: BE That Parent

“The single most common factor for children who develop resilience is at least one stable and committed relationship with a supportive parent, caregiver, or other adult.” — Harvard Center on the Developing Child (2026)

Decades of research in resilience science, attachment theory, and neuroscience agree: your child does not need both parents to get along perfectly. What your child needs most is **YOU** — warm, consistent, and emotionally present. ***Secure attachment to even one responsive parent is the most powerful protective factor in child development.***

Children with at least one securely attached parent are significantly more likely to:

- Recover from adversity and stress — they are measurably more resilient
- Perform better academically and sustain focus and motivation
- Form healthy friendships and loving relationships in adulthood
- Develop strong emotional regulation and high self-esteem
- Avoid anxiety, depression, addictions, and risky behaviors

What being a responsive parent looks like:

- Sitting on the floor and playing with your child — fully present, no phone
- Listening without judgment when your child expresses big emotions
- Staying calm during your child's meltdown (your regulated nervous system regulates theirs)
- Creating predictable routines and a peaceful, stable home environment
- Never speaking negatively about the other parent in front of your child
- Reassuring your child: “Both your parents love you. None of this is your fault.”



You do not need to fix the other parent. You need to become the regulated, connected parent in your home. That commitment alone will change the course of your child's life.

3. Why Work with a Co-Parenting Coach

Here is what you gain:

- ▶ **Guidance when you need it most**
A safe, professional space to process difficult situations and make better decisions for yourself and your children.
- ▶ **A supportive community of other parents**
Group coaching calls connect you with others on the same journey. Shared experience melts isolation.
- ▶ **Strength, clarity, and vision for the future**
Move from reactive to intentional — from surviving the day to building the family life your children deserve.
- ▶ **Brain-science tools for staying regulated**
All tools are grounded in neuroscience and the science of connection. You learn to respond rather than react in the hardest moments.
- ▶ **Becoming more whole as a person**
Using Compassionate Inquiry (Dr. Gabor Maté), all parts of you — the parent, the grieving adult, the person with unmet needs — get a chance to heal and re-integrate.
- ▶ **A transformed relationship with your child**
Connection-based parenting tools (Hand in Hand Parenting) help parents and children grow closer, calmer, and more emotionally open — even during the hardest chapters.

Ready to become the parent your child needs?

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Your attorneys shared this guide because they care about your children's wellbeing in the long run — and so do I.