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## Leave The Kids Out Of It

By Daniel Gowan

Time after time I have watched teenagers, just prior to leaving home, initiate conflict or exaggerate a fight with their parents to facilitate the separation. This often leaves the parents confused and hurt at a time they are genuinely trying to connect. The tension serves to equip the child with a framework of motivation to ease the separation.

Fortunately, this dynamic plays a useful and timely role in greasing this process, and dealt with productively, plays itself out in a short time. I am seeing that this paradigm occurs between adults at the time of divorce, too, and it fuels the friction with many couples. Unfortunately, it puts the kids in the family in an untenable position with the potential for elevated pain and suffering.

In divorce counseling, Rule No. 1 says that no matter how big a jerk your soon-to-be ex is, do not say anything negative about him or her to the kids. Every ounce of negativity you offer them will return later on your head with an expanded consequence. I see my clients, children of a divorce, time and time again sitting in my office working out a clearer perspective of truth about both parents. When one or both parents have been negative toward the other, the child always ends up resenting the offender.

This is true if the client is 12 or 32, and it is even more heightened if one

parent has been lying about the other. The truth does come out.

Your not-so-significant other may now be the jerk of your life, but they are still your child's parent. You do not have the right to manipulate that relationship. All parents deserve a primary relationship with their child – one that is not controlled by another person.

You owe it to your kids to set aside your desire to inflict pain. The pain you direct toward your ex will usually take out the onlookers, including your kids. The fact that you are divorcing is adequate expression that you are both redefining your relationship with the other. You do not have the right to make your children an additional battlefield, or you will count them among the casualties.

By the way, this principle remains true despite how the other is treating you. I recognize the difficulty in accepting this piece of it, but it is true nonetheless.

Check out the collaborative law process in Texas. It is a refreshing approach to this redefinition of relationship we call divorce.

In this process, divorcing couples seek beneficial resolutions, and the kids' needs take on a higher priority in the process. I have seen the process serve the children and the couples well. The

process does not work for all, but it is one of the resources available to divorcing couples that can strengthen

their concern for the children's well-being.

I can always find common ground with feuding parties; sometimes we just have to take a step or two back from the conflict to see it in a different light. If you begin this separation process with common ground around protecting the kids and putting their needs first, you will do a better job, a healthier job, in redefining your relationship.

That is, after all, divorce at its simplest – a redefining of boundaries in

a relationship. You will enhance your relationship with your children if you deal appropriately with them in their relationship with their other parent.

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