

# The Divorce War

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# A Family Tragedy

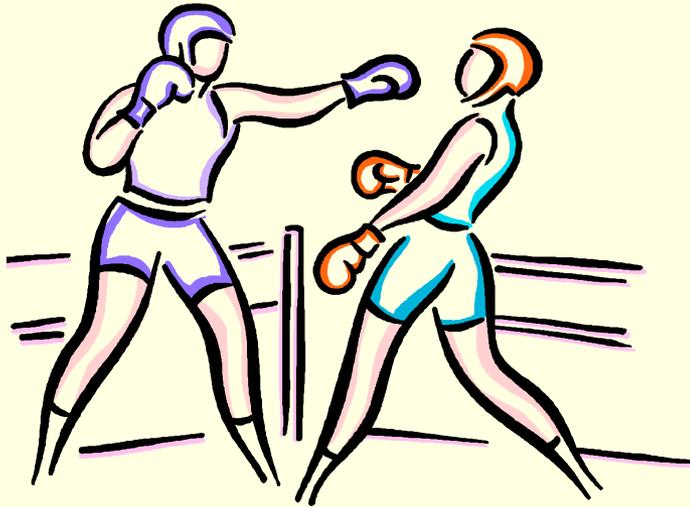
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- Communication stops
- Co-parenting stops
- Everyone is in pain...
- ...alone
- Self-care goes down
- Guilt & shame appear
- Friends and family choose sides

# Legal Action Begins the War

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- Someone files
- Someone is served
- Both sides are vulnerable and afraid
- Thinking is distorted by fear, advice, past
- Loved one becomes the enemy
- Each side wants to win
- Each side will lose

# What about the Middle?

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- Children want to love both parents
- Children are loyal
- They are repeatedly put in the middle
- They hear adult information
- They have feelings and questions...
- ...that they hide

# A Word on War...

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“I do not know, however, when my mother and father began their long, dispiriting war against each other.... I still believe that they both loved us deeply, but, as with many parents, their love proved to be the most lethal thing about them. They were remarkable in so many ways that the gifts they bestowed almost equaled the havoc they so thoughtlessly wreaked.”

Pat Conroy from *The Prince of Tides*

# Issues for Divorced Kids

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- Repressed feelings they are protecting their parents from.
- Deep wells of grief
- A strong desire to have their family back
- A feeling that the world is an unsafe, dangerous place that they cannot control.

# Behaviors in Divorced Kids

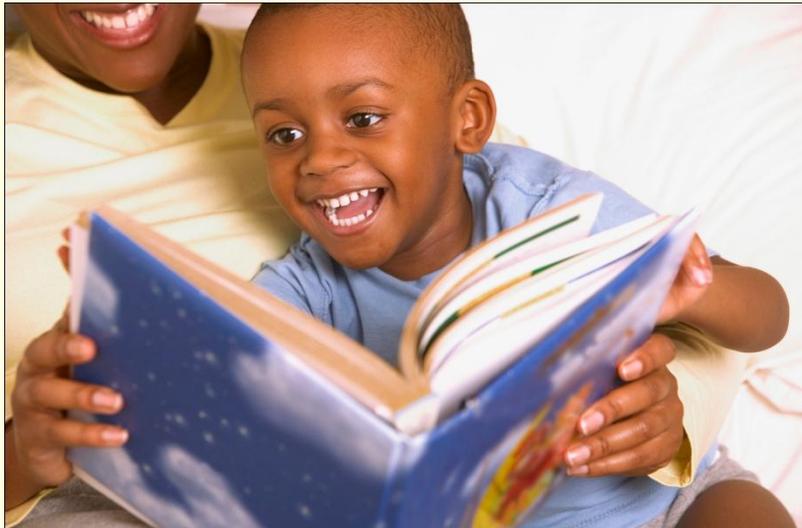
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- Anger, more for Mom
- Sons elevate self
- OCD symptoms
- Regressed behaviors
- School issues
- Shutting down
- Parenting or targeting siblings

# Mistakes Divorcing Parents Make

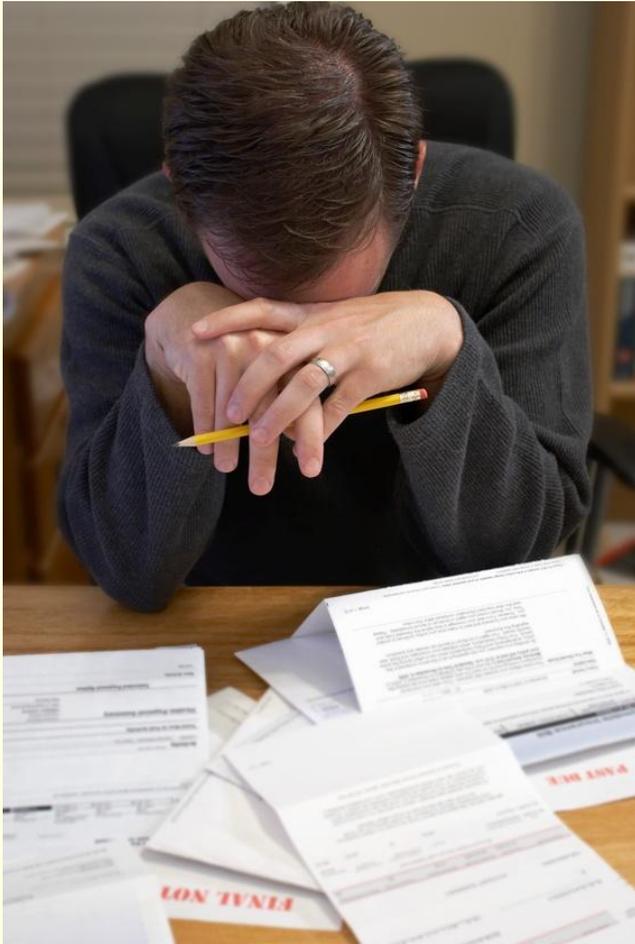
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- Guilty parenting
- Boundaries
- Inconsistency
- Competing with other
- Taking things personally
- Not communicating as a parenting team
- Not forgiving the war wounds
- Poor self care
- Introducing new partners too quickly
- Interrogating the kids

# What Happens to Mom & Dad?

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- Ultimate break-up
- Money worries
- Holidays suck!
- Mad at God
- War wounds / trauma
- Competing with step-parent
- Triggering own issues

# Denial and Minimization

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- Myth: If the parents are happy, the kids will be happy
- Myth: It's a temporary crisis that will quickly pass

# A little research...on divorced kids

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From the work of Wallerstein,  
Lewis & Blakeslee, 2000

- Delayed Adolescence
- NOT a temporary crisis
- Fear of marriage and parenting
- Different childhoods

# Actually...

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## Children from divorced homes...

- Are more aggressive toward parents and teachers
  - Experience more depression
  - Have more learning difficulties
  - Are 2-3 x more likely to get SAP services
  - Are more likely to be in mental hospitals
  - Have sex earlier
  - Are more likely to have children out of wedlock
  - Marry less
  - And divorce more
- ..than peers from intact homes.

# Mistakes Divorce Attorneys Make

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- Fueling the war
- Using fear to motivate
- Forgetting the children
- Forgetting about the well-being of the client
- Fighting for trivial items
- Not encouraging negotiation
- Believing that strangers know what is best

# What Helps?

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- Ending the War!!
- Therapy as a family
- Rebuilding a functional parenting team
- Forgiveness
- Communication about feelings
- Play!
- Getting back to normal