

Parents – divorce – separation – high-conflict
Resources

Dimensions of conflict for separated families index: an index for family courts / BIRNBAUM, Rachel; MCCLEARY, Lynn; SAINI, Michael; BALA, Nicholas;

In: Children and Youth Services Review 88; May 2018, pp.191-196

Many services and interventions focus on assisting separated families experiencing high conflict. Yet, little research has focussed on identifying and distinguishing levels of conflict. This research tested reliability and validity of an Index based on assessing 15 dimensions of conflict typical of high conflict in separation. Seventy-seven mothers and 47 fathers receiving services from family courts or social service agencies were assessed by two raters for inter-rater reliability. Internal consistency was high, with Cronbach's alpha = 0.94 (mothers) and 0.96 (fathers). Inter-rater reliability was high, with ICC = 0.85 (mothers) and 0.83 (fathers). Preliminary evidence of validity was found comparing scores on the index to scores on the Conflict Tactics Scale and the Ahron's Quality of Coparenting Communication Scale.

Risk regulation in high-conflict parenting: / AMUNDSON, Jon; SHORT, Jennifer;

In: Journal of Divorce & Remarriage 59(6), 2018, pp.528-537

That "there is no gathering of roses without risking the thorns" might be the simplest way to think of the paradox of relationship. Risk regulation as psychological mechanism minimizes rejection (thorns) and maximizes assurance (roses). In the article, the social psychology of risk regulation is set in the context of divorce and high-conflict parenting. Risk regulation provides not only guidance for treatment, but also a conceptual framework for professional opinion in forensic evaluation and legal consideration.

Domestic violence and high conflict are not the same: A gendered analysis / ARCHER-KUHN, B;

In: Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law 40(2), 2018, pp.216-233

In child custody decision-making experiences of domestic violence and high conflict are not the same. Legislative reform has not yet been guided by the parent voice to inform differentiated responses that keep women and children safe. Available literature in child custody decision-making focuses on outcome research regarding children's adjustment and well-being. Debates about types of post-separation arrangements have yet to find agreement in three under-researched areas: (a) high conflict, (b) domestic violence; and (c) children under four. Yet, Canadian legislation supports shared parenting arrangements that privilege the dominant, powerful parent in situations of domestic violence. Based on a Canadian study that explores the parent perspectives and experiences of child custody decision-making, this paper privileges a sub-group of participants; five women, all survivors of domestic violence; defined here as both physical violence and coercive control. Data collection includes one-on-one tape-recorded interviews. Thematic analysis reveals that shared parenting is neither the goal, nor does it meet the needs of these women. The findings illuminate the importance of differentiating parent experience as distinct groups, and reinforces the notion of the state's role in the reproduction of gendered power. Legislative reform and collaborative community practices are critical to facilitate healthy differentiated responses.

Does shared parenting help or hurt children in high-conflict divorced families? / MAHRER, Nicole; O'HARA, Karey; SANDLER, Irwin; WOLCHIK, Sharlene;

In: Journal of Divorce & Remarriage 59(4), 2018, pp.324-347

Despite a recent shift in the allocation of parenting time arrangements following divorce, there is no clear consensus regarding the effects of shared parenting on children's adjustment in high-conflict families. We propose key questions and methodological options to increase the ability of results from well-designed empirical studies to inform practice and policy. We review 11 studies of relations between parenting time and parenting quality with children's adjustment in high-conflict divorced families. Despite heterogeneity of methods used across the studies, some tentative conclusions can be made based on findings of multiple studies. Higher levels of shared parenting were related to poorer child adjustment in samples with high conflict many years following the divorce, but typically not in samples that assessed conflict during the divorcing process or in the 2 or 3 years following the divorce. There is also evidence that the effects of shared parenting on child adjustment in the presence of high conflict differs by gender, and that high quality of parenting by at least 1 parent is associated with better child adjustment in high-conflict divorces. Implications for policy and practice are discussed as well as directions for research to strengthen the

knowledge base to inform policy.

Family counselling with high-conflict separated parents: Challenges and strategies / MUTCHLER, Matthew;

In: The Family Journal 25(4), 2017, pp.368-375

When parents separate and divorce, they and their children often suffer dire emotional consequences, especially when the parents have a "high-conflict" relationship. When the parents are able to have a more collaborative relationship, however, outcomes are more positive. Family counseling can be an excellent resource for these parents, but the literature in this area is sparse. This article reviews a framework of understanding high conflict in the context of separated parents. After establishing this base of understanding, common challenges in working with high-conflict separated parents are presented, along with non model-dependent strategies for meeting these challenges. Case examples are provided to illustrate both the challenges counselors may face and the strategies that are suggested for meeting those challenges.

Mentalisation-based therapy for parental conflict - parenting together: an intervention for parents in entrenched post-separation disputes / HERTZMANN, Leezah; ABSE, Susanna; TARGET, Mary; GLAUSIUS, Krisztina; NYBERG, Viveka; LASSRI, Dana;

In: Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy 31(2), 2017, pp.195-217

High-conflict relationship dissolution has been shown to cause substantial emotional risk and psychological harm to children's developmental outcomes. Parents in chronic post separation conflict who repeatedly use the courts to address their disputes are by nature difficult to engage in therapeutic services. This paper describes the theoretical and practical key elements of a mentalisation-based therapeutic intervention, Mentalization-Based Therapy for Parental Conflict - Parenting Together (MBT-PT), that has been developed in order to address some of the unique challenges that these parents and the professionals working with them are facing. Specifically, the intervention aims to reduce anger and hostile conflicts between parents and mitigate the damaging effects of inter-parental conflict on children. The implementation procedure of the MBT-PT intervention among parents in entrenched conflict over their children, in the context of a random allocation pilot study, is briefly described. Next, the MBT-PT intervention is exemplified using clinical examples, followed by potential implications concerning practice and policy for professionals working with this population of parents.

Treating high conflict divorce / BARNWELL, Brenda J. & STONE, Mark H.

In: Universal Journal of Psychology 4(2), 2016 pp. 109-115

A model for treating high conflict in divorce is presented because the standard service model typically mandated is not sufficient to address the high stress dynamics residing in family systems or the self-concept of parents. The model for treating high conflict emanates from Bowen's family systems model and Kohut's theory of self-psychology. A strategy for client assessment and program evaluation is outlined together with an example showing the effectiveness of treatment for one sample of participants.

Mentalization-based therapy for parents in entrenched conflict, a random allocation feasibility study/ HERTZMANN, Leezah; TARGET, Mary; HEWISON, David; CASEY, Polly; FEARON, Pasco; LASSRI, Dana

In: Psychotherapy 53(4), December 2016 388-401

To explore the effectiveness of a mentalization-based therapeutic intervention specifically developed for parents in entrenched conflict over their children. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first randomized controlled intervention study in the United Kingdom to work with both parents post-separation, and the first to focus on mentalization in this situation. Using a mixed-methods study design, 30 parents were randomly allocated to either mentalization-based therapy for parental conflict—Parenting Together, or the Parents' Group, a psycho-educational intervention for separated parents based on elements of the Separated Parents Information Program—part of the U.K. Family Justice System and approximating to treatment as usual. Given the challenges of recruiting parents in these difficult circumstances, the sample size was small and permitted only the detection of large differences between conditions. The data, involving repeated measures of related individuals, was explored statistically, using hierarchical linear modeling, and qualitatively. Significant findings were reported on the main predicted outcomes, with clinically important trends on other measures. Qualitative findings further contributed to the understanding of parents' subjective experience, pre-

and posttreatment. Findings indicate that a larger scale randomized controlled trial would be worthwhile. These encouraging findings shed light on the dynamics maintaining these high-conflict situations known to be damaging to children. We established that both forms of intervention were acceptable to most parents, and we were able to operate a random allocation design with extensive quantitative and qualitative assessments of the kind that would make a larger-scale trial feasible and productive.

Cognitive-behavioral methods in high-conflict divorce, systematic desensitization adapted to parent-child reunification interventions/ GARBER, Benjamin

In: Family Court Review 53(1), January 2015 96-112

Children who are triangulated into their parents' conflicts can become polarized, aligning with one parent and rejecting the other. In response, courts often order families to engage mental health professionals to provide reunification interventions. This article adapts empirically established systematic desensitization and flooding procedures most commonly used to treat phobic children as possible components of a larger family systems invention designed to help the polarized child develop a healthy relationship with both parents. Strengths and weaknesses of these procedures are discussed and illustrated with case material.

Children's coping and adjustment in high-conflict homes, the reformulation of emotional security theory/ DAVIES, Patrick; MARTIN, Meredith

In: Child Development Perspectives 8(4), December 2014 242-249

Repeated exposure to interparental conflict increases children's vulnerability to a range of psychological problems by undermining their emotional security in the relationship between parents. However, emotional security theory in its original form lacks the depth and precision to guide hypotheses regarding individual differences in the nature, precursors, and sequelae of children's emotional security. In this article, we summarize a reformulated version of the theory to address this gap. Specifically, we focus on the ways in which the reformulated theory can elucidate: (a) the nature and developmental implications of systematically characterizing the inner workings of emotional security as a goal system, (b) the relative potency of family characteristics as sources of individual differences in children's emotional security, and (c) processes associated with developmental cascades that account for how and why emotional insecurity is linked to a range of psychological problems.

The chameleon child, children as actors in the high conflict divorce drama/ GARBER, Benjamin

In: Journal of Child Custody 11(1), 2014 25-40

Contemporary theory asserts that children become triangulated into their parents' conflicts due to alienation, estrangement, and enmeshment. These dynamics account for some children's alliance with one parent and rejection of the other. The present article suggests that the child's innate need to adapt and the caregivers' corresponding needs for confirmation together create an additional dynamic that must be considered as part of any family system evaluation. The "chameleon child" engages in necessary and natural short-term adaptive behaviors at unknown developmental costs. An observational protocol is described with which evaluators can begin to distinguish among these dynamics. Case illustrations are provided.

Complex alienation dynamics and very young children/ LUDOLPH, Pamela; BOW, James

In: Journal of Child Custody 9(3), 2012 153-178

Infants and preschoolers living in families beset by alienation dynamics are widely thought to resist alienation because of their immature emotional and cognitive abilities. Most writers also agree, however, that these children remain at significant risk for later consolidated alienation if family circumstances are not expeditiously changed. We address the resiliency and risk of very young children in the face of alienation, drawing on the literatures of attachment theory, child development, family systems, cognition, memory, and high conflict divorce. We also explore issues important to a thorough evaluation in these families and make suggestions as to effective treatments.

High-conflict divorced couples: Combining systemic and psychodynamic perspectives.

Cohen, Orna; Levite, Ziva.

Journal of Family Therapy. Vol.34(4), 2012, pp. 387-402.

This article describes typologies of couples in high-conflict divorces and explores their dynamics through the prism of family systems and British object relations theories. The article argues that

couples embroiled in high-conflict divorce often have primitive object relations. They tend to use splitting and projection processes and find it difficult to tolerate ambivalence or disagreement. Fear of the ex-spouse's retaliation is often accompanied by fear of their own destructiveness and by a wish to make reparation. However, it seems that reparation attempts in primitive object relations rarely achieve reconciliation. A case study demonstrates the complicated dynamics of these couples. Clinical recommendations are made. (PsycINFO Database Record (c) 2016 APA, all rights reserved)

Differentiating alienated from not alienated children: A pilot study / BAKER, Amy J L; BURKHARD, Barbara; ALBERTSON-KELLY, Jane;
In: Journal of Divorce & Remarriage 53(3), 2012, pp.178-193

The subjects of this study were 40 consecutive children in a child therapy and evaluation agency, half of whom were seen for reunification therapy and half for other reasons related to parent-child difficulties in the context of high-conflict divorce. Children completed a 28-item paper-and-pencil questionnaire regarding their thoughts and feelings about their parents to assess the degree to which their statements reflected unjustified alienation from one parent and alignment with the other. Responses to the questionnaires were coded by the first author as reflective of alienation or not. Case files were independently reviewed by agency staff for presence of indicated abuse, and clinicians independently rated the children's resistance to treatment services. Findings revealed that presence of alienation was found in all but one reunification therapy case and in only four of the nonreunification cases. In addition, the children who were coded as exhibiting alienation were rated by their clinicians as significantly more resistant to treatment. Only one alienated child had an indicated abuse or neglect finding in the file, as opposed to five in the not-alienated group. These data highlight the unique configuration of behaviors and attitudes of alienated children and contribute to the knowledge base about how to evaluate and identify them.

Parental alienation and the dynamics of the enmeshed parent-child dyad, adultification, parentification, and infantilization/ GARBER, Benjamin

In: Family Court Review 49(2), April 2011 322-335

When caregivers conflict, systemic alliances shift and healthy parent-child roles can be corrupted. The present paper describes three forms of role corruption which can occur within the enmeshed dyad and as the common complement of alienation and estrangement. These include the child who is prematurely promoted to serve as a parent's ally and partner, the child who is inducted into service as the parent's caregiver, and the child whose development is inhibited by a parent who needs to be needed. These dynamics—adultification, parentification and infantilization, respectively—are each illustrated with brief case material. Family law professionals and clinicians alike are encouraged to conceptualize these dynamics as they occur within an imbalanced family system and thereby to craft interventions which intend to re-establish healthy roles. Some such interventions are reviewed and presented as one part of the constellation of services necessary for the triangulated child.

Toward the differentiation of high-conflict families, an analysis of the social science research and Canadian case law/ BIRNBAUM, Rachel; BALA, Nicholas

In: Family Court Review 48(3), July 2010 403-416

Social science research and the courts have begun to recognize the special challenges posed by "high-conflict" separations for children and the justice system. The use of "high conflict" terminology by social science researchers and the courts has increased dramatically over the past decade. This is an important development, but the term is often used vaguely and to characterize very different types of cases. An analysis of Canadian case law reveals that some judges are starting to differentiate between various degrees and types of high conflict. Often this judicial differentiation is implicit and occurs without full articulation of the factors that are taken into account in applying different remedies. There is a need for the development of more refined, explicit analytical concepts for the identification and differentiation of various types of high conflict cases. Empirically driven social science research can assist mental health professionals, lawyers and the courts in better understanding these cases and providing the most appropriate interventions. As a tentative scheme for differentiating cases, we propose distinguishing between high conflict cases where there is: (1) poor communication; (2) domestic violence; and (3) alienation. Further, there must be a differentiation between cases where one parent is a primary instigator for the conflict or abuse, and those where both parents bear significant responsibility.

Parental alienation, DSM-V, and ICD-11: / BERNET, William; VON BOCH-GALHAU, Wilfrid;

BAKER, Amy J L; MORRISON, Stephen L.;

In: American Journal of Family Therapy 38(2), 2010, pp.76-187

Parental alienation is an important phenomenon that mental health professionals should know about and thoroughly understand, especially those who work with children, adolescents, divorced adults, and adults whose parents divorced when they were children. We define parental alienation as a mental condition in which a child—usually one whose parents are engaged in a high-conflict divorce—allies himself or herself strongly with one parent (the preferred parent) and rejects a relationship with the other parent (the alienated parent) without legitimate justification. This process leads to a tragic outcome when the child and the alienated parent, who previously had a loving and mutually satisfying relationship, lose the nurture and joy of that relationship for many years and perhaps for their lifetimes. The authors of this article believe that parental alienation is not a minor aberration in the life of a family, but a serious mental condition. The child's maladaptive behavior—refusal to see one of the parents—is driven by the false belief that the alienated parent is a dangerous or unworthy person. We estimate that 1% of children and adolescents in the U.S. experience parental alienation. When the phenomenon is properly recognized, this condition is preventable and treatable in many instances. There have been scores of research studies and hundreds of scholarly articles, chapters, and books regarding parental alienation. Although we have located professional publications from 27 countries on six continents, we agree that research should continue regarding this important mental condition that affects hundreds of thousands of children and their families. The time has come for the concept of parental alienation to be included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-V), and the International Classification of Diseases, Eleventh Edition (ICD-11).

Defining high conflict: / ANDERSON, Shayne; ANDERSON, Stephen;

In: American Journal of Family Therapy 39(1), 2010, pp.11-27

The term high conflict is used regularly across various literatures; such as divorce, family court, and psychotherapy; to describe relationships that are mired in conflict. Despite its widespread use, the term has not been precisely defined in a clinically meaningful way. This article offers a definition of high conflict based on a synthesis of previous literatures related to high conflict, observations of court personnel, and the authors' own clinical experiences working with this population. A case study illustrates the pervasive negative exchanges and hostile insecure emotional environment that characterize these couples. The implications of this definition for clinical practice are also discussed.

Overcoming Barriers Family Camp: A program for high-conflict divorced families where a child is resisting contact with a parent. [References].

Sullivan, Matthew J; Ward, Peggie A; Deutsch, Robin M.

Family Court Review. Vol.48(1), 2010, pp. 116-135.

Overcoming Barriers Family Camp is an innovative program designed to treat separating and divorced families where a child is resisting contact or totally rejecting a parent. Both parents, significant others, and children participate in a 5-day family camp experience that combines psycho-education and clinical intervention in a safe, supportive milieu. This article describes the components of the program, from referrals to intake to aftercare. Evaluation immediately following the camp experience is provided for the camps that ran in 2008 and 2009, and 6-month follow-up interview information is provided for the 2008 camp program as well as 1-month follow-up about the initiation of aftercare with the 2009 families. A discussion of the strengths and challenges of this approach with entrenched, high-conflict family systems concludes the article. (PsycINFO Database Record (c) 2016 APA, all rights reserved)

Conceptualizing visitation resistance and refusal in the context of parental conflict, separation, and divorce/ GARBER, Benjamin

In: Family Court Review 45(4), October 2007 588-599

A child's visitation resistance and refusal (VRR) in the context of parental separation, divorce, and post-divorce litigation must not prematurely be interpreted as evidence of alienation, a conclusion which can be as detrimental to the family system as it is ill founded. The present article proposes a child-centered, developmentally informed heuristic with which forensic evaluators might begin to more uniformly approach the potential causes of and remedies for VRR. An attachment-based, step-wise decision tree is described together with an overview of the remedies presently believed most appropriate to each. Recommendations for empirical study of the multiple convergent dynamics which determine VRR and establishment of corresponding interventions follow.

Family systems theory, attachment theory, and culture/ ROTHBAUM, Fred; ROSEN, Karen

In: Family Process 41(3), Autumn 2002 328-350

Family systems theory and attachment theory have important similarities and complementarities. Here we consider two areas in which the theories converge: (a) in family system theorists' description of an overly close, or "enmeshed," mother-child dyad, which attachment theorists conceptualize as the interaction of children's ambivalent attachment and mothers' preoccupied attachment; (b) in family system theorists' description of the "pursuer-distance cycle" of marital conflict, which attachment theorists conceptualize as the interaction of preoccupied and dismissive partners. We briefly review family systems theory evidence, and more extensively review attachment theory evidence, pertaining to these points of convergence. We also review cross-cultural research, which leads us to conclude that the dynamics described in both theories reflect, in part, Western ways of thinking and Western patterns of relatedness. Evidence from Japan suggests that extremely close ties between mother and child are perceived as adaptive, and are more common, and that children experience less adverse effects from such relationships than do children in the West. Moreover, in Japan there is less emphasis on the importance of the exclusive spousal relationship, and less need for the mother and father to find time alone to rekindle romantic, intimate feelings and to resolve conflicts by openly communicating their differences. Thus, the "maladaptive" pattern frequently cited by Western theorists of an extremely close mother-child relationship, an unromantic, conflictual marriage characterized by little verbal communication and a peripheral, distant father, may function very differently in other cultures. While we believe that both theories will be greatly enriched by their integration, we caution against the application of either theory outside the cultures in which they were developed.

**The role of sibling support in high-conflict families: / CAYA, Michelle; LIEM, Joan;
In: American Journal of Orthopsychiatry 68(2), April 1998, pp.327-333**

Effects of sibling support on the relationship between family conflict and individual psychological adjustment was explored in a sample of university students. Those from high-conflict homes with high sibling support reported more positive adjustment than did only-children and individuals with low sibling support. Sibling support was not associated with greater adjustment in low-conflict homes, thus reinforcing its potential benefits as a buffer to stress.

**Family members as third parties in dyadic family conflict, strategies, alliances and outcomes/
VUCHINICH, Samuel; EMERY, Robert; CASSIDY, Jude
In: Child Development 59(5), 1988 1293-1302**

Systems theorists have argued that triads rather than dyads need to be considered as a basic interaction unit, particularly in regard to episodes of conflict. While theoretically appealing, the description of the strategies used and alliances formed when third parties intervene in dyadic conflict presents a number of conceptual and empirical challenges. In the present report, a reliable system for coding such third-party participation in verbal conflicts is described and is used to analyze routine family conflicts that were observed during dinner. A number of specific findings of interest are reported, including that girls were more likely than boys to intervene in all family disputes except marital conflicts, that mothers and fathers rarely sided against each other when intervening as third parties, and that the third-party strategies most commonly used corresponded with family roles: fathers used authority strategies, mothers used mediational tactics, and children used distraction. Of greater importance, however, are the general findings that document the influence of third parties on dyadic conflict. Additional family members frequently joined dyadic family conflicts, they were about equally likely to attempt to end or to continue the conflict, they formed alliances about half of the time, and their intervention strategies were related to the outcome of the conflict as well as its patterning.