Role-play for avoidance and engagement/ emotion and logic

Exercise 2 Vivian and Jasmine

Vivian 41 and Jasmine 47 have been married for 18 years. They have two children, Zoe 15 and Jack 13. The last 10 years have been unhappy and conflictual. Jasmine has had a couple of affairs resulting in two previous separations when they told the kids and retained counsel, but then stayed together.

Jasmine initiated the separation, saying its final this time. She wants a chance to be happy. Although Vivian agrees there has been high conflict, and believes Jasmine treats her disrespectfully, she feels separation is wrong and they should stay together, at the very least until the kids are completely independent.

Vivian thinks the children’s well-being, particularly in light of Jack’s anxiety, is at risk if they separate. She doesn’t want to let the kids down again, and thinks Jasmine has underestimated the impact of final separation on them. She is worried Zoe will lose respect for her parents and Jack will withdraw and lose the gains he’s made recently at school. Jasmine thinks the kids will be just fine if they do this amicably in a collaborative process, and will in fact be better out of simmering tension in the house. If the kids do have long-term issues, she says, it will be because Vivian couldn’t let go of her anger and be collaborative and flexible.

Jasmine earns $500,000 a year. She works long hours, travels a lot and is extremely optimistic about the future. She’s big picture and confident this can all work out for everyone. She works a hybrid of remotely and in the office on an ad hoc schedule.

Vivian earns $100,000 a year. She goes into the office Mondays and Wednesdays and works from home the other days. She has been primarily responsible for the kids and the details of their lives and finances. She’s worried that they already overspend and the separation will mean they can’t maintain the kids’ private school and camp or prepare for their own retirements. It’s critical for her that she stays in the house and continues to have primary time with the kids to minimize the disruption they’re going to face.

Jasmine has rented a condo and plans to move out in two weeks. She agrees Vivian and the kids can stay in the house indefinitely provided they can nest-she can come in for her parenting time one week every month and one night a week.

Vivian feels Jasmine wants to have her cake and eat it too. If it’s too tense to stay together, how can coming into the house for a week every month be good for the kids? Does she get to leave, get her own place, a new life, be a *good girl* for letting Vivian stay in the house and still get all the benefits of living in the place she’s left? And the kids are old enough to know, and will know anyway, who’s idea all of this is. Vivian wants somebody to call Jasmine’s selfishness and make her get real about the impact her decision to separate is going to have on everyone but herself. She isn’t sure how she can heal from a separation she doesn’t want or agree if Jasmine keeps coming back. And yet Vivian desperately wants to avoid the kids going back and forth or spending any more time with Jasmine. She also wants the professionals to tell Jasmine she doesn’t get to decide everything. If this is happening, Vivian gets a voice too.

Jasmine worries that Vivian will be stuck in her anger and victim mode and be the downer she always is. Vivian knows they’ve been unhappy for years-how could she possibly want to stay together? She’s prepared to give her primary parenting time and see the kids in the house to make things as comfortable as possible for them all. Jasmine feels she’s missed the last 10 years of her life and wants this over as soon as possible so she can move on and begin living again. She knows everybody will be better off in the long run. Jasmine’s glad to work with a collaborative team that can help Vivian make decisions and move on.

The clients have met with the family professional(s) for intake, telling the kids about the separation and the overall idea of nesting-no details have been sorted. They haven’t yet met with the financial professional. The lawyers are preparing their client for the first collaborative meeting , including how they will share goals and interests and framing the issues to be addressed.

Worksheet for Exercise #2

Consider the following from the perspective of Vivian and then Jasmine

1. Explore the conflict style she sees for herself and her partner. How did she choose to approach conflict during the marriage?
2. When/if she avoided what happened? When/if she engaged what happened? What does she want to do in this process?

1. What are her most important goals/ wants and worries emotionally, substantively and procedurally? Are any internally competing?
2. Thinking about avoiding and engaging, how will you help her prepare to express her goals and worries at the first meeting and hear /respond to your partner? Which should she share and which might she not share in light of her priorities and any competing interests? Why or why not?