

The Overlooked Value of the Child Specialist as a Family Focused Facilitator in Collaborative and Mediation Meetings

Presented by Bart Carey, J.D., Cathleen Collinsworth, CDFA, MAFF, Bruce Fredenburg, LMFT, Carol Hughes, Ph.D., LMFT,
2021 IACP Annual Forum



**COLLABORATIVE
PRACTICE**

Resolving Disputes Respectfully

Learning Objectives

Participants will be able to:

1. Explain to clients the unique value Child Specialists bring to Collaborative Divorce or Mediation teams, their pivotal role in facilitating better outcomes for divorcing parents and enroll the clients in understanding why it is crucial for Child Specialists to be present at all full team meetings, including financial settlement meetings.
2. Explain to clients:
 - a. What the unmet needs of the children, both minor and adult, could be.
 - b. Why the other professionals are less able to adequately identify their children's unmet needs or provide the most useful guidance for these unmet needs. (Lawyers and Financial Specialists are typically not trained for this and the Divorce Coaches rarely meet the children.)
 - c. How Child Specialists can more effectively assist the clients and the professional team to identify and meet these unmet needs.
 - d. How Child Specialists, when present in financial and settlement meetings, can identify and voice hidden, yet essential information, that empowers the parents to create more durable agreements that better serve both them and their children, while simultaneously improving cost efficiency.
 - e. How their children, even their adult children, are stakeholders and major influences "in the room," and should be acknowledged as such whenever the parents meet.

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3. Describe and utilize the tools developed by pioneering Child Specialists and their successful interdisciplinary teams to facilitate better outcomes with more durable agreements.

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The Role of the Neutral Minor Child Specialist

Since confidentiality is the cornerstone of collaboration and mediation and since the Neutral Minor Child Specialist is not serving as a custody evaluator, the Neutral Child Specialist does not provide a written report nor provide recommendations as a custody evaluator does. The Neutral Minor Child Specialist does, along with the Collaborative Divorce Coaches, assist the Co-parents to make better co-parenting decisions for their family.

Who is the Neutral Child Specialist?

The Neutral Child Specialist is a licensed mental health professional with specialized training in Mediation and Collaborative Divorce, who has expertise and experience working with Children and parents going through divorce. The Neutral Child Specialist brings the voice of each Child into the process and serves on the team as a neutral representative of each Child's needs and preferences in the divorce process. At the Full Team Evaluating Choices and Co-creating Agreements meetings, the Neutral Child Specialist "holds the space" for the Children's presence. That said, I remind Children and their Co-parents that each Child has a voice not a choice, because it is the Co-parents who will be making the decisions that affect each Child.

How does the Child Specialist gather information?

The Child Specialist may employ a combination of any of the below or any other information gathering tools deemed appropriate for the family:

- Meets the Co-parents together and/or alone to hear each Co-parent's hopes, goals and concerns to gain an understanding of each Co-parent's view of the Child(ren) and to observe the Co-parents' dynamics
- If there are siblings, meets the Children first in their sibling unit
- Meets each Child alone to determine his/her needs and wants
- Meets each Child together with each Co-parent and may meet together with siblings
- May meet the Child(ren) and the Co-parents in the home(s) or other out-of-office environment
- Utilizes questionnaires and inventories, completed by Children, Co-parents and collateral resources to gather information
- May gather information, with appropriate signed releases, from collateral sources (teachers, therapists, child care providers, etc.) As a protection for the Children, the integrity of the process and the collateral sources, collateral communications are not with the rest of the Professional Team or the Co-parents, unless with specific releases from collateral sources. The Child Specialist NEVER divulges information about the case to

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the collateral sources. Information goes one way only – from the collateral contact to the Child Specialist.

- Continuously communicates with Divorce Coaches throughout the process about Co-parenting issues, family dynamics and any and all pertinent information that assists the Co-parents effectively Co-parent their Children, become agreement ready and co-create their agreements
- Shares the information, as appropriate, with the Divorce Coaches in the 5-way Co-parent/Divorce Coaches/CS meeting
- Continuously gathers information from all interactions with Child(ren), Co-parents, and all professional team members

What does the Child Specialist do?

The Child Specialist:

- Provides a neutral, non-judgmental environment where Children ask questions and share their perceptions and feelings about the changes occurring in their family
- Elicits child(ren)'s experience of Co-parents' parenting skills
- Focuses on "Child's best interests" that may seem counter to "Child's voice"
- Seeks to understand each Co-parent's hopes, goals and concerns for their and their child(ren)'s futures
- Highlights Co-parents' common underlying interests
- Assists Co-parents understand the post-separation/divorce needs of each Child
- Educates Co-parents about how to enhance their Children's adjustment to the divorce and Co-parenting plan
- Educates Co-parents about factors which enhance or endanger Children's adjustment to divorce
- Elicits a shared vision from the Co-parents regarding their respective involvement in each Child's life in the present and future (which may include initial and future Co-parenting plan ideas)
- Educates Co-parents about their Child(ren)'s needs based on getting to know the child(ren)
- Encourages Co-parents to begin to co-author a new story of cooperation
- Assists Co-parents understand each Child's possible living preferences and concerns about present Co-parenting
- Provides Co-parents with the information they need to better understand what is happening to the Child(ren) and to make important Co-parenting decisions
- Provides relevant information to the collaborative professional team
- Educates about conflict disengagement and effective Co-parenting
- Gives difficult feedback to Co-parents, when necessary
- Assists the Co-parents and the other collaborative professional team members to craft a Co-parenting plan for Children and Co-parents that meets the needs of each Child and Co-parents



The Role of the Neutral Adult Child Specialist

Since confidentiality is the cornerstone of collaboration and mediation, the Neutral Adult Child Specialist does not provide a written report. The Neutral Adult Child Specialist does, along with the Coaches, assist the Co-parents to make better co-parenting decisions for their family.

Who is the Adult Child Specialist?

The Neutral Adult Child Specialist is a licensed mental health professional with specialized training in Mediation and Collaborative Divorce, who has expertise and experience working with Neutral Adult Children and parents going through divorce. The Neutral Adult Child Specialist brings the voice of the Adult Child(ren) into the process and serves on the team as a neutral representative of the Adult Child(ren)'s needs and preferences in the divorce process. At the full team Evaluating Options and Co-creating Agreements meetings, the Neutral Adult Child Specialist "holds the space" for the Adult Child(ren)'s presence. That said, I remind Adult Children and their parents that Adult Child(ren) have a voice not a choice, because it is their parents who will be making the decisions, some of which may affect the Adult Child(ren).

What does the Adult Child Specialist do?

The Adult Child Specialist:

- Assists co-parents understand the post-separation/divorce needs of each adult child and provides education related to enhancing the adult child's adjustment to the divorce.
- Elicits a shared vision from the co-parents regarding their respective involvement in each adult child's life in the present and future (which may include initial co-parenting plan ideas).
- Highlights common underlying interests.
- Suggests co-parents begin to co-author a new story of cooperation.
- Assists co-parents to understand each adult child's concerns about present co-parenting.
- Provides co-parents with the information they need to better understand what is happening to the adult child/children and to make important co-parenting decisions.
- Provides relevant information to the collaborative team or mediation team.
- Assists with conflict disengagement and improved co-parenting.
- Assists the co-parents and the collaborative team or mediation team to craft a co-parenting plan for each adult child and co-parents that meets the needs of each adult child and co-parents.

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How does the Adult Child Specialist gather information?

The Adult Child Specialist may employ a combination of any of the below, or any other Information gathering tools deemed appropriate for the family

- Meets the co-parents together and/or alone to hear each co-parent's hopes, goals and concern, to gain an understanding of each co-parent's view of the adult child(ren) and to observe the co-parents' dynamics.
- Meets each adult child alone to determine his/her needs and wants. May meet via phone or Skype.)
- May meet with each adult child or children together with each co-parent and with siblings.
- May meet with each adult child and the co-parents in various combinations
- May utilize questionnaires and inventories to gather information.
- May gather information, with appropriate signed releases, from collateral sources. As a protection for the Adult Children, the integrity of the process and the collateral sources, collateral communications may be shared with the Coaches, but not with the rest of the Professional Team or the Parents. **The Child Specialist NEVER divulges information about the case to the collateral contacts. Information goes one way only – from the collateral contact to the Adult Child Specialist.**
- Continuously communicates with Coaches throughout the process about co-parenting issues, family dynamics and any and all pertinent information that assists the co-parents effectively co-parent their adult children, become agreement ready and co-create their agreements.
- Shares the information, as appropriate, with the Coaches in the 5-way co-parent/coaches/Adult Child Specialist meeting.
- Continuously gathers information from all interactions with adult child(ren), co-parents, and all professional team members.

What does the Adult Child Specialist consider?

- Developmental issues (e.g. the needs of a 4 year old, 10 year old or 22 year old child are quite different)
- Temperament of each adult child and each co-parent
- Each adult child's relationship to family members.
- Relationships beyond the immediate family
- Particular strengths/resilience of each adult child
- The adult child's current reaction(s) to the family changes: worries, fears, hopes, preferences.
- Special vulnerabilities (e.g. learning difficulties, emotional distress, disabilities, substance abuse, etc.)

How do the adult children benefit?

Each adult child has:

- A safe place with a neutral third party to share his or her story about what's happening in the family.
- An opportunity to ask questions and get clarification about the changes in the family.
- Support and comfort during a stressful time and a sense that he or she has a voice, but not

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- a choice, in the process.
- Relief by bringing to the co-parents' attention problems, worries, fears and hopes that may have gone undetected or unexpressed.

How do the co-parents benefit?

The co-parents have:

- New information and the opportunity to consider the special needs and concerns of each adult child.
- Information about their adult child's point of view.
- Help in understanding the specific worries and concerns of each adult child.
- Discussion regarding the anticipated challenges and difficulties inherent in co-parenting.
- Help in identifying and appreciating their common interests as co-parents.
- Input regarding their co-parenting plan, whether the children are minors or adults, because all children, whether minors or adults, benefit from their co-parents working together for the adult children's benefit.

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What does the Child Specialist consider?

- Developmental issues (e.g. the needs of a 4 year old, 10 year old or 22 year old child are quite different)
- Temperament of each Child and each Co-parent
- Each Child's relationship to family members
- Extended family and community relationships
- Particular strengths/resilience of each Child
- The Child's current reaction(s) to the family changes: worries, fears, hopes, preferences.
- Special vulnerabilities (e.g. learning difficulties, emotional distress, disabilities, substance abuse, etc.)

How do the Children benefit?

Each Child has:

- A safe place with a neutral professional to share his or her story about what's happening in the family
- An opportunity to ask questions and get clarification about the changes in the family
- Support and comfort during a stressful time and a sense that he or she has a voice in the process
- Relief by bringing to the Co-parents' attention problems, worries, fears and hopes that may have gone undetected or unexpressed

How do the Co-parents benefit?

The Co-parents have:

- New information and the opportunity to consider the special needs and concerns of each Child
- Information about their Child's point of view
- Help in understanding the specific worries and concerns of each Child
- Discussion regarding the anticipated challenges and difficulties inherent in Co-parenting
- Help in identifying and appreciating their common interests as Co-parents
- Input regarding their Co-parenting plan, whether the Children are minors or adults, because all Children, whether minors or adults, benefit from their Co-parents working together for the Children's benefit

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The Overlooked Value of the Child Specialist as a Family Focused Facilitator in Collaborative and Mediation Meetings

Child Specialists (CSs) are usually the least understood and most underutilized team professionals. CSs glean a wealth of essential information about family dynamics, emotional triggers and hidden agendas. Even experienced practitioners can fail to appreciate how CSs, integrated as coequals at meetings, are often the only professional with the standing to bring warring couples to agreement. Lawyers, Financial Specialists and MHPs, will learn how pioneering interdisciplinary teams innovatively employ CSs on Collaborative Divorce and Mediation Teams to shift clients toward agreement, simultaneously improving cost efficiency.

Read below what collaborative and co-mediation professionals who use Child Specialists as family focused facilitators in collaborative divorce and mediation meetings say about the value that Child Specialists bring to their work.

“I have worked with a number of Child Specialists, each one bringing a variety of tools for family focus into the process. Beyond the traditional role of bringing the child's (minors, adults, and grandchildren) voice into the process, thereby reminding the parents of their impact and their potential, an effective Child Specialist is also ever present in the room when financial and legal concerns and topics are being addressed. Typically, the Child Specialist is the one professional both parents trust and want to hear from in a collaborative process. When the Financial Specialist and/or the lawyers are discussing technical information, I have experienced the Child Specialist doing a critical ‘check in’ with the parents, thereby disrupting the discussion to acknowledge an important shift, usually a potentially harmful shift, in one or both parent's body language, tone, or other behavior. Divorce Coaches are also ever present at this time, so this is not to discount their critical role. The Child Specialist, however, brings a reality from within the family, rather than within the parent. The Child Specialist as such, I have found to be critical, especially when no other voice, except for the children's can be heard.”

~Diana L. Martinez, J.D.
Collaborative Family Lawyer, Mediator & Trainer
www.DLMartinezLaw.com

“I have been practicing as a financial specialist in family law matters for the last 22 years, the past 13 years as a Collaborative Financial Neutral. I have experienced working with parties getting divorced in the litigation process, mediation, hybrid collaborative and the full team collaborative process.

In all cases that have utilized the Child Specialist the decision making process of the parties seems to work better. It is rare that either the father or the mother does not want to put their child(ren) first. Even when they are arguing with each other, if the focus can get them back to their child(ren) they have an ability to make decisions for the betterment of the family.

The Child Specialist brings that child into the room with the parents and helps keep the parents focused on why they chose the full team collaborative process in the first place. I have personally witnessed parents about ready to end the entire collaborative process and go to litigation and when the Child Specialist steps in as the voice of the child(ren) both parties sit back – stop-listen-think and then come back into the process for the best results of the family going into the future.”

~ Cathleen Collinsworth, CDFA®, MAFF®

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Financial Specialist, Mediator & Trainer

www.cccdfa.com

“As one of the lawyers on the team I view the Child Specialist as uniquely situated to center the clients on consensus building. Children, both adult and minor, are ever present during their parents’ divorce. Children are a significant part of the family dynamic and not always in the most supportive/functional way. Children, both minor and adult, are stake holders and major influences “in the room” whenever the parents meet. While the Neutral Child Specialist is not a true neutral, being aligned with the children of the clients, being impartial in relation to the parents powerfully amplifies the voice of the child(ren). I have never met a client who did not want to do what is best for their child(ren). Presenting as a co-equal team member, parents work directly with the Neutral Child Specialist as the voice of the child(ren). This discourages them looking to me as decision maker, as lawyer, and puts the responsibility on them as parents and empowers parents to focus on children’s needs and interests. It values parents role as parents keeping control of the parenting decisions, brings the kids “into the room”, while being afforded valuable information and guidance. The voice of the child(ren) puts parents [back] on common ground and focused on meeting the needs and interests of someone other than themselves.”

~ Bart Carey, J.D.

Collaborative Family Lawyer, Mediator and Adjunct
Law School Professor

www.familypeacemaker.com

“The Neutral Child Specialist (NCS) is the ONLY professional team member who will engage and interact with the entire family. As such, the NCS will have a unique perspective of the family system, how it functions, and the “roles” that each family member plays within the family structure. This is critical information for professional team members to know as they interact with their client individually, or with the couple together. How did this family function (who made the major decisions, why did that person make the major decisions, how were those decisions made, etc.)? These functions will be drastically changing. What role did each family member play within the family structure (martyr, over-achiever, acting-out-trouble-maker, go-along-to-get-along, etc.)? These roles will be drastically changing. This is but a fraction of the kind of information the NCS will be able to provide to the professional team by interacting with the entire family unit. However, this information can be critical for some families. Their family structure is about to drastically change – from known to unknown, from a one-house unit to a two-house unit; from joint parents (together) to co-parents (individual). Learning to work together as co-parents rather than as joint parents requires an expert to educate, training, structure, and encouragement. It requires a Neutral Child Specialist.

As a collaborative divorce coach (who is not a NCS) I find the information received from the NCS to be extremely valuable and beneficial for me, and therefore my client. With the information from the NCS I am able to provide my client with an awareness of the developmental stage of their child and therefore their child’s level of understanding of what’s happening in their world. Understanding what’s happening at their child’s level allows my client’s the opportunity to bring their child’s needs to the forefront of the process. And, this is especially true for adult children who seem acutely aware of what’s happening yet have an extreme need to “understand” their parent’s divorce. Understanding what’s happening at their child’s level brings meaning to the phrase we often use: Kids Before Money. It also allows for my client to rethink their views of an appropriate and desired parenting schedule – a schedule that can now take into account what’s happening in their child’s world, rather than just into their own world of hurt, confusion, frustration, and anxiety. As such, it is my very firm belief that whenever children are involved

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(whether minor or adult children), a Neutral Child Specialist is a much needed value added asset to the professional team process.“

~ Marvin L. Chapman, PsyD, LMFT, CFC (2015)
Divorce Coach and Psychotherapist
www.marvinchapman.net

“Having a child specialist on a collaborative team (or a co-mediation team) is an absolute necessity for me as a collaborative attorney, especially if the children are adult children. When I was a litigator I used to tell my clients that after their children turn 18, they are no longer minor children, no longer subject to the Court’s jurisdiction and no longer part of the equation. I now understand that adult children of a divorcing family do matter – all children of a divorcing family matter. Divorcing parents are redefining the legacy they leave to their children no matter what the age of the child. They model how adults solve problems, and their children learn from watching how their parents approach the divorce – it is either a ‘battle to be won’ or a ‘problem to be solved’. What is at stake is what children in restructuring families learn from their parents, and what they take with them into their relationships. Adult children can easily become the confidant of a parent, become the hidden voice in the background trying to influence a parent or an influencer trying to steer a parent towards safety or into a position of interest. With the increasing numbers of ‘grey divorces’ I am also seeing increasing numbers of divorces with adult children. Having the child specialist on board from the beginning equips the professional team and the family to aid the parents in co-creating healthy agreements, while allowing the children to be in the center rather than in the middle.”

~Brian Don Levy, Esq.
Collaborative Attorney, Mediator & Trainer
www.CollaborativeAttorney.com
www.CollaborativeDivorceServices.com

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Susan and Ricardo married 20 years ago. Susan is 43 and Ricardo 45. Their oldest daughter Brittany is nineteen and completing her first year of college. She is attending the University of Washington and lives in a dormitory. Brittany is very angry with Susan because of the divorce and thinks her mother is being unfair to her father. Brittany now does not talk to her mother as often as she used to and does not initiate any communication. The parents say that is because Brittany is busy with school. Their son James is 17, a high school senior. Until recently, James has always done well in school and is a good athlete. This past semester, his parents learned that he has been drinking at parties and smoking marijuana with friends and his grades have been falling. James is seeing a therapist who specializes in adolescent substance abuse. Their youngest child Anne is 12 and completing the sixth grade. She is an above average student and doesn't want to talk about the divorce. She plays soccer and has a number of friends. She tells her parents she is fine.

Susan was a Stock Broker for two years after graduating with a degree in business. 19 years ago she and Ricardo agreed that she would stop working to raise their children. One year ago she returned to college part time to earn a teaching credential.

For fifteen years Ricardo was a Real Estate attorney for a Fortune 500 Co. and traveled frequently. Five years ago left his job to open his own Real Estate company. Ricardo is now a successful Real Estate Broker. Last year he earned approximately \$900,000 and will likely earn more this year.

Over the years Susan and Ricardo have developed parallel lives. Susan blames this on Ricardo and complains he was not around to raise the children. She verbalizes that she wants Ricardo to be able to have a better relationship with their children but is impatient and angry with him and wants him to figure out how to do this.

Susan says that when Ricardo worked as an attorney he traveled all of the time and was never home. Although he started his own Real Estate business to be home more he has been absorbed in the business these past five years. She reports that her numerous attempts for more emotional closeness have failed. She has built up a network of close women friends to meet her needs for closeness. Her college classes also keep her very busy now.

Ricardo comes from a wealthy family and is likely to inherit several million dollars when his aging parents die. They already left him a small 10-unit apartment complex near the beach in Santa Monica that he sees as his separate property. The parents resent Susan for wanting to leave Ricardo.

Ricardo has grown resentful due to Susan's repeated rejections of his sexual overtures. He wants a closer relationship with his children and occupies himself with creating new business deals, mountain climbing, and long distance running. Despite their parallel lives, the tension in their home is high.

After many months of weighing her options Susan concluded that she will be better off alone than in the anger, resentment, or boredom that she is currently experiencing. Two months ago she decided to tell Ricardo her plan to separate and divorce. Ricardo did not expect this and is angry and depressed. Both agreed to investigate a Collaborative Divorce to avoid wasting money in a court battle.

1. How would you explain to these clients the value added of having a Neutral Child Specialist on their Collaborative Divorce Team?
2. What strategies would you contemplate the Neutral Child Specialist would use to add value to the Collaborative Divorce Team?

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Dear Peaceful Wife and Peaceful Husband,

I have been out of town since immediately following the full team Brainstorming Options, Evaluating Choices and Co-creating Agreements meeting, so this is my first opportunity for email access. It is unfortunate that the meeting, that was scheduled to end at 1:30, continued past 4:00, at which time Cathleen and I had to leave to join a professional team conference call that was scheduled for 4:00. This denied you both the opportunity to have input from the two neutral professional team members during the last almost hour that you were attempting to reach resolution.

You have both heard me describe the family to be like the mobile above a child's crib, with each animal representing one of the family members. You have also heard me describe that all of the professional team members join onto that mobile during the Collaborative Divorce process, and we represent that you chose a family focused process for your divorce, one that attempts to keep the interests of all the family members in the forefront. Our experience has taught us that, as the professional team is working to assist you to **co-create** your **family focused** agreements, that will meet the interest of **each** family member, the expertise and perspective of the neutral professionals can be an effective intervention to right the balance of the mobile, should it start to lean too much in one direction, thereby losing the family focus. While Cathleen is the only true neutral, we refer to the Child Specialist as a neutral as well, because we are not aligned with either parent. Cathleen is the voice, so to speak, of your current and future financial picture and I am the voice of your children. Every decision you make affects your current and future financial picture and every decision you make affects your children's current and future lives. It is from this perspective that I am writing this email to you, in the hopes that you will spend some time reflecting on your current and future paths, the paths you will take to conclude your divorce.

Just a few weeks ago, the below radio interview aired on National Public Radio. I hope you will visit the link and listen to the interview, reflecting on how what the interviewee is saying relates to both of you and to your children. While the facts of the couple's case is different from yours, I believe that the focus of the New York Collaborative Divorce Lawyer is worth your time. One of the points he stresses is how important it is for couples to listen to each other as they are struggling to co-create their agreements. We know that when people listen carefully to each other and make a serious effort to understand the concerns that each brings to the table for resolution, they have a much better chance of finding solutions that will work for **both** of them, than if they resort to battle.

<http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/339/break-up?act=3#play>

How might you both be able to meet your and your children's interests in your settlement agreements? Early on you both chose the Collaborative Divorce process because you wanted to avoid the predictable emotional and economic toll of the adversarial divorce process and because you wanted constructive, respectful divorce conflict resolution, guided by your best hopes rather than your worst fears about the future.

As the voice of your children, I say, "We (your children) have been feeling and continue to feel the tension between you and it affects us very negatively." (For example, Huey has recently been struggling academically.) "Every day we carry on our backs your tension, hostility, uncertainty and fear that arise from the lack of resolution, which would allow you and us to move on with our lives."

Of course, please don't hesitate to reach out to Cathleen, me or any other of your professional team members to discuss what I have written above, as you consider your next path.

All my best,
Carol

Carol Hughes, Ph.D., LMFT

Psychotherapist • Child Specialist • Divorce Coach • Mediator

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www.drcarolhughes.com
www.divorcepeacemaking.com
949.855.2740

Listen to Dr. Hughes discuss children and divorce on ESPN LA <http://es.pn/lepkaYi> and at <http://www.divorcetalkradiocalifornia.com/radio-programs/> on March 1 and March 15, 2014.

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COLLABORATIVE
PRACTICE
Resolving Disputes Respectfully

E-mail sent by Neutral Child Specialist to Co-parents and Professional Team when a parent threatened to leave collaborative and litigate

Peaceful Mom and Peaceful Dad's Statement of Highest Intentions

It is our hope to create open, honest and transparent communication with the team and for the benefit of our family now and into the future. We pledge to provide stability, emotionally and financially, respecting our family members. It is our goal to continue to create a happy and positive future for our family and friends.

Dear Peaceful Mom and Peaceful Dad,

I am aware, Peaceful Dad, that you have decided to terminate your Collaborative Divorce Process. While I respect you and your free will to make such a decision, I am terribly troubled to hear about it. As I read your Statement of Highest Intentions, which states your honorable and pure highest intentions for your divorce both now and into your, Peaceful Son and Peaceful Daughter's future and current and future stability, emotionally and financially.

You have both heard me describe the family to be like the mobile above a child's crib, with each animal representing one of the family members. You have also heard me describe that all of the professional team members join onto that mobile during the Collaborative Divorce process, and we represent that you chose a family focused process for your divorce, one that attempts to keep the interests of all the family members in the forefront. Our experience has taught us that, as the professional team is working to assist you to **co-create** your **family focused** agreements, that will meet the interest of **each** family member, the expertise and perspective of the neutral professionals can be an effective intervention to right the balance of the mobile, should it start to lean too much in one direction, thereby losing the family focus.

While Peaceful Neutral Financial Specialist is the only true neutral, we refer to the Child Specialist as a neutral as well, because we are not aligned with either parent. Peaceful Neutral Financial Specialist is the voice, so to speak, of your current and future financial picture and I am the voice of Peaceful Daughter and Peaceful Son. Every decision you make affects your current and future financial picture and every decision you make affects your children's current and future lives. It is from this perspective that I am writing this email to you, in the hopes that you will spend some time reflecting on your current and future paths, the paths you will take to conclude your divorce.

Last August I heard the below radio interview that aired on National Public Radio. I hope you will visit the link and listen to the interview, reflecting on how what the interviewee is saying relates to both of you and to your children. While the facts of the couple's case is different from yours, I believe that the focus of the New York Collaborative Divorce Lawyer is worth your time. One of the points he stresses is how

The Overlooked Value of the Child Specialist as a Family Focused Facilitator in Collaborative Meetings presented by Bart Carey, J.D., Cathleen Collinsworth, CDFA, MAFF, Bruce Fredenburg, LMFT, and Carol Hughes, Ph.D., LMFT

important it is for couples to listen to each other as they are struggling to co-create their agreements. We know that when people listen carefully and make a serious effort to understand the concerns brought to the table for resolution, they have a much better chance of finding solutions that will work for **both** of them, than if they resort to battle.

<http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/339/break-up?act=3#play> (I have attached the transcript of the show as well, if you prefer to read it.)

How might you both be able to meet your and your children's interests in your settlement agreements? Early on you both chose the Collaborative Divorce process because you wanted to avoid the predictable emotional and economic toll of the adversarial divorce process and because you wanted constructive, respectful divorce conflict resolution, guided by your best hopes rather than your worst fears about the future.

As the voice of your children, I say, "*We (Peaceful Son and Peaceful Daughter) have been feeling and continue to feel the tension between you, Mom and Dad, and it affects us very negatively. We have both been struggling in many ways. Every day we carry on our backs the tension, hostility, uncertainty and fear that arise from the lack of resolution, which would allow you and us to move on with our lives and begin to heal. Please stop being enemies and help us heal.*"

Of course, please don't hesitate to reach out to me or any other of your professional team members to discuss what I have written above, as you consider your next path.

All my best,
Carol

Carol Hughes, Ph.D., LMFT

Psychotherapist • Child Specialist • Divorce Coach • Mediator

www.drcarolhughes.com

www.divorcepeacemaking.com

949.855.2740

Listen to Dr. Hughes discuss children and divorce on ESPN LA <http://es.pn/lepkaYi> and at <http://www.divorcetalkradiocalifornia.com/radio-programs/> on March 1 and March 15, 2014.

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<Barry Berkman NPR Interview.docx>

The Overlooked Value of the Child Specialist as a Family Focused Facilitator in Collaborative Meetings presented by Bart Carey, J.D., Cathleen Collinsworth, CDFA, MAFF, Bruce Fredenburg, LMFT, and Carol Hughes, Ph.D., LMFT

Good Morning, Adult Child,

I am following up with you in my role as the Adult Child Specialist for your mom and dad's Collaborative Divorce. You may recall that Collaborative Divorce is family focused. As I explained to you previously, this focus includes bringing the adult children's voices into the process whenever necessary and appropriate. It also includes a focus on the family members' transition as the family is restructuring. It is regarding this family restructuring that I am reaching out to you.

First, I want you to know that I respect your privacy and your own life journey, as you are likely dealing with all that life throws at us, and not just your parents' divorce and your relationship with each of them going forward. It is not my role to push you into anything that you do not feel ready to do. In addition, as I explained to you before, I only share with them if you give me permission to share.

I have spoken quite a bit with your mom during the past many months. I think it would be beneficial to her, and I think to you as well, if you were willing to speak with me first alone, and I have a conference call with her and me to discuss your and her desires and expectations regarding your and her relationship going forward. When parents of adult children divorce, it is not unusual for the parents, as well as the adult children, to need some assistance communicating about their desires and expectations for their relationships as they are transitioning into their restructured family.

I don't know if you think you need this assistance. It would certainly help me be able to help your mom with this transitioning and restructuring if the three of us could speak, so that I can subsequently assist her in absorbing and understanding what I hear you say to her. Of course, I would remain available to you for assistance in this regard as well, should you want.

When we talked before I mentioned an article I wrote about adult children and divorce. You can find it on the Resources page on my DivorcePeacemaking.com website.

I appreciate you taking the time to read this email, Adult Child, and I look forward to hearing from you.

All my best,

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949.855.2740 Co-author of *Home Will Never Be the Same Again: A Guide for Adult Children of Gray*

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I don't know if you think you need this assistance. I know that your mom needs it. It would certainly help me be able to help her with this transitioning and restructuring if the three of us could meet, so that I can subsequently reinforce with her what I hear you say to her. Of course, I would remain available to you for assistance as well, should you need.

I know that when we talked before I mentioned an article I wrote about adult children and divorce. In case you would like to read it, you can find it on the Resources page on my DivorcePeacemaking.com website.

Your mom has shared with me that you are planning to be in So Cal in August. Would you be willing to schedule meeting with her and me in this regard?

I appreciate you taking the time to read this email and I look forward to hearing from you.

All my best,

Carol Hughes, Ph.D., LMFT

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Where Are the Child Specialists On Our Collaborative Divorce Teams? The Case for Value Added

by Bruce Fredenburg, M.S., LMFT, and Carol Hughes Ph.D., LMFT

(Any masculine reference shall also apply to females and any feminine reference shall also apply to males. In addition, for emphasis and easy distinction, we have chosen to capitalize the various professionals' roles.)

Collaborative Divorce is a family focused process. However, we have noticed a pervasive problem. Why is it so common that collaborative divorce teams are without a Child Specialist? Whenever a divorcing couple has children, it is our opinion that the professional team should always include a Child Specialist. However, we have witnessed that many collaborative professionals fail to understand the unique power of the CS and thus overlook a significant team asset by not including this important professional.

We have noticed that many Collaborative Divorce Teams continue to underestimate the necessity of the Child Specialist. We believe this is because many collaborative trainings neglect to explain and demonstrate this role fully. The result is that the legal, financial and even many mental health professionals lack an understanding of what the Child Specialist does. We hope this article will stimulate discussion and effect an understanding of the power of the Child Specialist to facilitate better outcomes.

It is well known that divorce has two tracks and they operate simultaneously: the Business Track and the Emotional Track. The Emotional Track can easily knock the Business Track off course and create enormous damage to the family, as well as cost the clients much more time and money. Although the Business Track is the realm of Lawyers and Financial Professionals, the Emotional Track benefits from the expertise of the Mental Health Professionals (Divorce Coaches and Child Specialists).

Often, the most highly emotionally charged concerns for parents going through divorce are the issues regarding their children. The Child Specialist can be the most effective agent for change on the team when the role is filled by a well trained, skillful Mental Health Professional (MHP), who also has expertise with children and parents experiencing divorce. This is especially so with high conflict couples. And yet, so many teams are formed without a Child Specialist, or at best, the Child Specialist is only brought in as an after thought, much like an extra in a movie brought in for a crowd shot or a minor scene.

Let's examine the value added by the Child Specialist:

- The Child Specialist is a powerful agent for change. We suggest you view a skilled Child Specialist, whether a male or female, as being like the queen of the collaborative divorce chessboard. With the requisite release and professional team agreement, the neutral Child Specialist can move in any direction without limits. Retained by both parents, equally, as the voice of their children, he is free to contact either parent, as appropriate, as well as all of the other professional team members, without fear of having crossed a boundary.
- The Child Specialist is also the only member of the professional team to see all of the family members interacting with each other. An experienced Child Specialist, trained in family systems and developmental issues of children experiencing divorce, can glean a wealth of information about family dynamics, emotional triggers and hidden agendas, such as family secrets and how the family deals with stress. Equipped with information that may otherwise stay hidden, the professional team can more effectively and

efficiently guide the family through the process, which increases the chances of success while also being more cost efficient.

- For high conflict couples, often the only basis for interest based negotiation is their mutual love and concern for their children. Divorce is a painful process. One or both parents might make decisions out of anger, or simply for pain relief. Experience, confirmed by neuroscience, tells us that, when people are angry and/ or afraid, these are the worst times to make decisions. In addition, agreements made under these conditions are rarely durable. Extra time and money is spent trying to maintain troublesome agreements or undo them. The Child Specialist, acting as “the voice of the children” in all meetings, including financial meetings, can bring change into the room by shifting the focus and therefore the emotional climate. A well timed intervention as ‘the voice of their children’ in a non-judgmental, proactive way is a powerful intervention.
- Although the Child Specialist is specifically not an evaluator, many couples don’t fully understand this. Thus, high conflict couples are often better behaved when the Child Specialist is present. This can be very useful during meetings focused on the Business Track of divorce, such as meetings with the neutral FP. Most divorce professionals have experienced such meetings turn unproductive and grind to a halt when excessive anger or tears have overcome one or both parents. Again, the Child Specialist, equipped with pictures of the children and sufficient, first-hand knowledge to voice the children’s real concerns can bring the parents back to what is most important to them. This creates a foundation for interest based negotiations at times when nothing else can bring the couple to consensual agreements.

With these points in mind, when entering into such a challenging endeavor as guiding clients through a peaceful, respectful divorce, we ask, “Why would we want to start the process by leaving our most powerful tool unopened in the box? How many of us would begin a chess match by removing our queen from the board before we start?”

Here are some common rationales for this mistake:

- The couple doesn’t see the need. “The kids are fine or will be fine.”
- The children are older, i.e., adolescents or adult children so, “Why the need?”
- More professionals cost too much. “Why should I pay for another professional?”

Let’s examine each of these rationales and see if they withstand scrutiny.

- The couple doesn’t see the need – This belief is often misleading. Parents want to think that their children are ok or will be ok. In addition, children don’t want to share negative information with their parents, especially a parent who appears to be in pain or with one who appears to be dispassionate about the divorce. Whether the parents are overwhelmed by their pain or comfortably distant, their children are often at risk.



Drawn by a child whom the parents say is “fine”.

This picture conveys volumes about the inner world of this child. In a Collaborative Divorce without a Child Specialist, how would the parents and the professionals know

the actual emotional state of this child? Without such insight, how would the coaches assist the parents to craft the most effective parenting plan?

- The children are older - Older children are more likely able to notice when one parent is too upset to hear about more problems and may tell their parents whatever they think they need to hear. Parents dealing with their own emotional issues are less available as parents. Adolescents going into the high risk years may be left without an effective parental support system. The result is that they are left to process their own grief and loss by themselves or with nothing more than a committee of other teenagers. Minor children need to be reassured that they still have their family, albeit restructuring. The Child Specialist can enroll the adult children to stay connected with their minor siblings. In addition, most parents are surprised to find out how much adult children are impacted by the divorce. The impact reaches far beyond the obvious worry and guilt about which parents to visit on holidays and how to connect the grandchildren with each grandparent.
- More professionals cost too much – Whenever someone asks, “Why should I pay for another professional?” they are actually asking two different questions with two different answers. The first is, “What value do I get for my money?” and the second is, “How much will it cost me if I don’t make the investment?” Here, we must examine the value added in exchange for the cost and the damage done if the investment isn’t made. Couples make these decisions all the time, “How much will it cost us to repair the brakes on the car? And, what could it cost if we don’t?”

Including the Child Specialist from the beginning of the Collaborative Divorce process is more cost effective in dollars and cents. As stated above, divorce involves two tracks: the Business Track – the Lawyers and the Financial Professionals have the skill set for this track, and the Emotional Track – the Coaches and the Child Specialist have the skill set for this track. Much of the co-parenting plan involves dealing with the rocky areas of the emotional track. Experienced Coaches know that without the Child Specialist they and the parents are likely lacking some of the most important information. The financial savings of resolving these emotional problems with a team of Coaches and Child Specialist can be significant. Sensible MHPs know that they cannot handle the legal track. Sensible lawyers know that they cannot handle the emotional track as effectively as an MHP.

Including the Child Specialist from the beginning of the Collaborative Divorce process, delivers to the clients a better and more cost effective work product. Whether the professional team consists of two Coaches or one Coach, not all Coaches are trained and experienced in working with children. Therefore, it is a mistake to assume that the Coach(es) can assist the parents to create an effective co-parenting plan without the input of a Child Specialist. Even when the coaches are also experienced Child Specialists, unless they are freed to be solely the voice of the children, their input can be compromised. Without the input of the Child Specialist, the professional team risks assisting the clients to develop an inferior work product. Who wants that? Their children’s welfare is probably the most important interest in their lives.

Omitting the Child Specialist is usually an expensive mistake in terms of money and emotional costs. A similar mistake is bringing the Child Specialist into the process late. This sends a message to the parents that their professional team considers the Child Specialist as a less important member of the team, therefore, the Clients will as well. In either case, the professional team has unwittingly disarmed the Child Specialist by underestimating the importance of the role. The Child Specialist could be the only team member who might get the Clients to agree. Bringing the Child Specialist into the process at the beginning acknowledges her as a coequal member of the professional team. This elevates the clients’ perception of the Child Specialist, which increases her influence and thus her likelihood for success.

Bringing in the proper professionals at the beginning, delivers better services for value added. Collaborative Divorce differentiates from other dissolution of marriage processes in that it's family-centric. Since children are part of the family and since the divorce affects them as well, the job of the Child Specialist is to keep the children in the center and out of the middle of the divorce.

In summation, it seems that the professionals' reluctance to include the Child Specialist as a co-equal member of the professional team by either omitting the position or failing to have the Child Specialist present at the beginning of the case, stems from the same mistake: Underestimating the power and value of this position.

Carol Hughes, Ph.D., is a California licensed psychotherapist and board-certified hypnotherapist, who has been in private practice in Laguna Hills, CA, since 1983. As one of the founding members of Collaborative Divorce Solutions of Orange County (CDSOC), since 2003 she has provided services as a Divorce Coach, Child Specialist and Case Manager. Since 2007 she has served on the Board of Directors of CDSOC, including currently serving as President and formerly being the Chair of CDSOC's Training and Education Committee, that provides monthly training for the practice group. She has served on the board of directors of Collaborative Practice California's (CP Cal) as Chair of the Professional Outreach Committee and IACP's Practice Development Committee, that develops training programs for IACP's annual October Forums and annual February Institutes. Carol has extensive training in mediation and in the interdisciplinary team model of collaborative practice. She frequently trains and mentors collaborative practitioners, has appeared on the Time Warner Public television series "How to Get a Divorce" and has been a presenter at California's annual statewide conference for collaborative professionals. Carol is also a co-founder of and trainer for the Collaborative Divorce Education Institute (CDEI), a non-profit organization, whose mission is to educate the public about Collaborative Divorce, as well as provide quality training for collaborative divorce professionals in the Southern California area.

Bruce Fredenburg, M.S., LMFT, with Board Certification in Clinical Hypnosis has been a licensed therapist since 1982. He has extensive training in mediation and in the interdisciplinary team model of collaborative practice, and has also trained in the one coach model. He also is trained and experienced in the management of chronic pain, dealing with trauma, chemical dependency and addictions. As one of the founding members of Collaborative Divorce Solutions of Orange County (CDSOC) in 2003, he serves as a Divorce Coach, Child Specialist and Case Manager. Bruce has held the position of Chair of CDSOC's Training and Education Committee, which provides monthly training for the practice group, Vice-President, which provides monthly training and President-Elect. Bruce has twice been a presenter at California's annual statewide conference for collaborative professionals and has appeared on the Time Warner Public television series "How to Get a Divorce". He is the author of Two Audio Learning Programs: "*Men and Women: How to Understand Each Other*", and "*Take the Pain Out of Change*", and a compact disc recording Anti-anxiety Tool: "*Profound Relaxation.*" Bruce was recruited to create and teach parenting classes for Adoptive and Foster Parents for County of Orange Social Services Agency. He has published articles on Male-Female Communication for "*Sharing Ideas*" a national magazine dedicated to professional speakers, trainers and meeting planners. An award winning speaker, he has presented training programs for corporations, government agencies, schools, and professional associations since 1989. Bruce is also a trainer for the Collaborative Divorce Education Institute (CDEI), a non-profit organization, whose mission is to educate the public about Collaborative Divorce, as well as provide quality training for collaborative divorce professionals in the Southern California area.

How To Help Your Children During Separation and Divorce

By Carol R. Hughes, Ph.D., LMFT
www.divorcepeacemaking.com
949.855.2740

“If we don't stand up for children, then we don't stand for much.”

**~Marian Wright Edelman
Founder, Children's Defense Fund**

Research about the effects of divorce on children indicates that:

- Each year, over 1 million American children experience the divorce of their parents.¹
- Ongoing parental conflict increases kids' risk of psychological and social problems.²
- Improving the relationships between parents and their children helps children cope better in the months and years following the divorce.³

Children are the innocent victims of divorce. Divorce ranks second only to the death of a loved one as life's most stressful experiences.⁴ Litigation, which by definition is adversarial, can compound that stress exponentially due to the hostility it can engender and the exorbitant costs that parents can incur. “Combat divorce,” a common term for litigation, requires that each parent have the biggest battleship armed with the biggest guns, which take aim at the battleship of the other parent. Let's remember that, no matter what else changes, each of these soon to be “ex-spouses” **forever** remains their child(ren)'s **other parent**. During the process of litigation, that obvious fact can become obscured in the harsh and adversarial language used to characterize the other spouse, thus making it almost impossible for each parent to think of the other parent as their child(ren)'s **other parent** and as a parent who possesses positive qualities.

So where are the children in this process? To continue the “combat divorce” metaphor, they are huddled together in a foxhole wondering what has happened to the family they once knew. As they tenaciously cling to each other in this bunker, they are shaking, fearing whether the next mortar will land in their foxhole or whiz over their heads. Will they lose one or both of their parents permanently? After all, it seems like it has been a short journey from their happy family with Mom and Dad playing with them in the park to the day when Dad or Mom moved out. They never imagined that one of their parents would not be with them in their home. Recently, they have overheard Mom and Dad fighting and talking about having to sell the house where they grew up and where they created so many happy memories. They hear Dad and Mom discussing that they may have to change schools. The thoughts are whirling through their minds: *We will have to make new friends! We won't be able to be on our same soccer team! What if we won't be able to keep our doggie Duke*

and our kitty Miss Trouble because in our new rented house no pets will be allowed! Mom and Dad are so stressed. We can't bother them with all these questions. We must be very good and very quiet, so they don't have to worry about us too. We need to forget about how we feel and make sure Mom and Dad are ok.

The children have experienced so much uncertainty and unpredictability recently that on an unconscious level they realize that they cannot predict their future. Nothing seems certain. Life used to seem certain, but not anymore. So much has changed in such a short time, it certainly seems possible to them that they could lose their mom or dad. Who will provide them with certainty, stability, and predictability?

"A nation's greatness is measured by how it treats its weakest members."

~ Mahatma Gandhi

When parents are in conflict, their children are in danger. On-going parental strife produces the single most negative impact on children for years into their future. Previously well-adjusted children can become at risk for both psychological and physical symptoms such as anxiety, depression, isolation, sleep disturbance, nausea, headaches, and the inability to focus and concentrate. These symptoms can subsequently cause a delay in children's development. Difficulties in school academically, emotionally and socially can ensue. Adult children of divorce commonly report that they felt as though they lost their childhood during and after their parent's divorce, because the toxicity of the "combat divorce" permeated every aspect of their lives, causing them to struggle with the symptoms described above and necessitating that they "grow up" before they were developmentally ready.

Just as wartime combat is a survival state, so combat divorce is an emotional, and sometimes even physical, survival state for children. Parents often need help in understanding this. They need help preventing their children from becoming the innocent casualties of their divorce. Research tells us that 80% of the issues of divorce are emotion-driven. While parents are in the midst of such emotional upheaval, even the most well-intentioned parents can become overwhelmed and lose sight of what is genuinely in their child(ren)'s best interest. Before, during and after divorce, parents and their children can benefit from the guidance and assistance of peacemaking professionals, who are focused on the well-being of their family now and into the future. Most parents with minor children are going through divorce for the first time. While negotiating this extremely difficult life transition, they have no experience from which to draw.

Collaborative Divorce and **Mediation** are **confidential, no-court divorce** options, which offer parents and children a peaceful, even transformative path for the restructuring of their family. Research shows that mediation can be beneficial for emotional satisfaction, spousal relationships and children's needs.⁵ Parents focus not on prevailing but on peacemaking, not on winning but on healing, because real winning means not wanting the other person to lose. **No-court divorce** offers divorcing parents the best possibility that they can share the joys of parenthood. Such sharing is one of the best gifts parents can give their children, because children feel and treasure their parents

experiencing this joy. **When divorcing parents learn how to prevent their children from being caught in the crossfire in the middle of a combat zone and put their children in the center of healthy interactions**, their children can remain children. They are unburdened by adult concerns. They don't have to worry about finances, how Mom and Dad are coping, fear of being loyal to one parent and not the other, being in an alliance with one parent against the other, being afraid to express their feelings for fear of hurting Dad or Mom or of having Mom or Dad be angry with them. When their life as they have known it is crumbling around them, children deserve to experience the benefits of no-court divorce.

Consider these two stories.

The first story: Two divorced parents were called to an emergency scene at a lake to rescue their child who had fallen into a lake. Rather than springing into action and coordinating the child's rescue, they immediately began arguing about whose fault it was that the child had fallen into the lake. The child drowned.

The second story: (For ease of style, I use the generic pronoun "he" and its derivatives.) Two divorcing parents were attending a co-parenting training class. Ten pairs of parents were present in the class. The instructor gave the directions for the first exercise. "Sit down across from your partner and face each other, with your right elbows on the table. Grab your partner's right hand with your own right hand and don't let go. Each parent will get one point every time the back of the other parent's right hand touches the table. The goal for each parent is to get as many points for himself or herself as possible during the exercise. Keep your eyes closed and be completely indifferent to how many points your partner gets. You will have one minute. Ready, set, go!"

For one minute, the pairs struggled as each parent tried by physical strength to force the back of the other's right hand down to the table. With much effort and against the physical opposition of each partner, almost no one got more than a point or two. There was a single exception. Almost immediately, one parent remembered that his goal was to get as many points as he could for himself, and then he became utterly indifferent to how many points his partner got. Instead of pushing on his partner's hand, he pulled it down to the table, gave his surprised partner a quick and easy point, took a quick point for himself, and then gave his partner another point. Without talking to or looking at each other, the two parents, with their elbows on the table, then swung their clasped hands harmoniously back and forth as rapidly as they could, thus collecting a large number of points for each of them.

Upon the conclusion of the exercise, each pair of parents reported to the group how many points each had collected. No one had more than three points, except for the parent pair who had cooperated, each of whom had earned more than twenty points.

Despite the directions to the parents, that used the word “partner” and despite the instructions that they were to be indifferent to how many points their partner collected, virtually all parent participants had assumed that they and the one with whom they were doing the exercise were adversaries. That adversarial assumption dominated their thinking and prevented them from getting as many points as they could have.

(*Beyond Reason: Using Emotions As You Negotiate*, by Roger Fisher and Daniel Shapiro, gave me the inspiration for this second story.)

A litigation attorney tells me that when potential clients consult with her regarding retaining her for litigation, she educates them about the reasons clients should not consider litigation as an option to settle a dispute. She explains that, if they value the relationship with the persons against whom they are considering bringing the lawsuit, litigation is likely not their best choice.

Do you think your children want you, their parents, to value your relationship with each other, just as they value and love each of you? How will they feel most secure, knowing that their parents are partners or combatants? What will they learn from you if you are engaged in combat divorce? What will they learn from you if you model cooperative problem solving with integrity and mutual respect? Who “wins” when one of your children’s parents “loses?” What is the legacy you want to co-create for them?

“I was never ruined but twice - once when I lost a lawsuit, once when I won one.”

~Voltaire

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THE POWER AND EMPOWERMENT – CHILD SPECIALIST

By Bart J. Carey, Esq., Collaborative Family Lawyer, Mediator and Adjunct Law School Professor

In speaking with a parent contemplating divorce, I always speak with the understanding that it is most likely the parents who best understand their children and what is best for themselves and the family. I assume parents are best situated to shepherd their children through life's toughest challenges, including divorce, if ...

Divorce is one of those times. It's a tough time for the whole family, parents and children – of all ages. A crisis like they've never faced before, challenging their very identity as parents, children, family and each of their places/roles/futures in and as a family. But I also know, empowered to do so, parents will do their best to meet these challenges in consideration of the best interests of their children.

For these and many other reasons, I always assure parents *I am confident, with the best advice and counsel available, they will make the best decisions regarding their children.*

Uniquely qualified to advise and to equip parents with the information and insights which, when combined with their own, will empower them to best serve the best interests of their children, here are some of the ways which I have witnessed the power of the Child Specialist (CS) in an interdisciplinary process.

- Children, both minors and adults, are stakeholders and major influences “in the room” whenever the parents meet. The Child Specialist is uniquely situated to bring them “in the room” and center the clients on family goals and consensus building;
- Children are a significant part of the divorcing family dynamic and not always in the most supportive/functional way. Children who “act out” are likely children whose voices are not being heard and/or needs are not being met. The CS, by helping parents identify these needs and address them, empowers the children with a ‘voice’. Instead of becoming more ‘needy’, demanding and self-absorbed, their experience is one of empowerment and leads to adjustment/acceptance of the new family structure.
- While the ‘Neutral’ CS, being aligned with the children of the clients, is not a true neutral, being impartial in relation to the parents powerfully amplifies the voice of the children. Having a CS present communicates that reality tangibly to the parents and moderates the conversation whether the CS speaks or not.
- Parents work directly with the Neutral Child Specialist as the voice of the child(ren). This discourages them looking to their lawyers or others as decision makers and empowers them as parents and empowers parents to focus on children’s needs and interests. In this way the CS helps all professionals value the parents role. The parents keep control of the parenting decisions.

In sum, the CS brings the children “into the room”, while empowering parents with valuable information and guidance. The CS “voice of the children” empowers parents to get [back] on common ground and focus on meeting the present and ongoing needs and interests of the children. The CS is uniquely situated to empower everyone to be able to focus on something bigger than themselves.

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About the Author:

Bart J. Carey, Esq., is a family law Mediator and Collaborative Attorney helping families peacefully uncouple and an adjunct professor at Western State College of Law in Orange County, California.

Understanding How **Divorce** Impacts Children

By **Bart J. Carey, J.D., Collaborative Attorney and Mediator**

There is no way to keep your **divorce** from having an impact on your **children**. All research shows that **divorce** is hard for them. However, the level of conflict they experience during and after the **divorce** period is the greatest indicator of the immediate impact on them and to their later successes in life. This includes their future socialization, their future achievements in school, careers, and their overall achievement in life. All of these are impacted by the level of parental conflict during and in the wake of the **divorce** process.

Ways Children Respond to **Divorce**

There are different ways children respond while their parents are going through a **divorce**. Some of the ways are:

- **Acting out.** Voiceless and caught in the middle of the family conflict, or - worse – ignored by their overwhelmed parents, this child decides, “I’m done trying to be the well-behaved kid and do my own thing.” At least, this will get the child the parental attention he or she wants. Negative attention is attention.
- **Withdrawing.** Coping with divorce is above a parent’s paygrade. Parent’s often struggle with feeling overwhelmed. Lacking any control or power over her circumstances, this child may feel so overwhelmed that she becomes sullen, depressed and/or withdrawn.
- **Becoming a peacemaker.** Desperate to stop the family strife and wanting to restore family life, this child may try to step in and settle the arguments between the parents. This is futile, of course, because children are vastly under equipped for this job.

Parents Can Decrease the Negative Impact of Their **Divorce**

What can parents do?

- Parents can take steps to lower the conflict, especially when around the children.
- Parents can take difficult discussions outside the home. Even if the children cannot hear your words, they hear your tone and feel the tension.
- Parents can agree upon a shared narrative to give to the children, one that does not blame either parent. Regardless of any parent’s fault, when parents tell their children that this is an adult decision, it reinforces to the children that they did not cause the split.
- Parents can be truly clear the family is not ending. That Mom and Dad may not be married, but they will always be Mom and Dad, they will always be their beloved children and Mom and Dad will always have their backs.
- Parents can help the children understand it is their parents who are responsible to resolve this family matter.

- Parents can assure the children they are listening and will take their voices and best interest into consideration in making family decisions.
- Children need assurance that their parents are still going to be their parents and will work together to make decisions that are in the children’s best interest.
- When children feel their parents are working together, making decisions for their welfare, it helps them feel their parents are keeping them safe it feels “normal”.

Each of these points, when employed, helps lower the negative impact of divorce on children.

Here’s something parents can do to make all these things happen. Parents can choose a peacemaking approach to divorce, such as Collaborative Divorce, which empowers them to turn arguments into productive conversations, disagreements into solutions, and build a new future around family-oriented decisions.

Collaborative Divorce is dedicated to helping clients through the **divorce** process in a more peaceful way. Collaborative Divorce helps couples lower the present and future impact of **divorce** on their children and, in turn, gives them the best opportunity succeed in their schools, in their careers, and in their lives. And that is priceless.

About the Author:

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A Child Custody View from the Bench

In a case regarding the parents' claims for custody of their children, the presiding family court judge eloquently expressed the court's outlook as to why parents should do all that they can to resolve their issues before asking the court to decide the future of their family. We thank the Honorable Paul W. Garfinkel for his permission to reprint his words for the benefit of all parents, in South Carolina and elsewhere, who may be facing difficult choices as to what is best for their children:

I want to make a few comments to you about how important it is to your family to resolve this case. . . . I know that as both of you sit here today each of you are convinced of the merit of your own case and the rightness of your own position. However, asking your attorney to convert your convictions and beliefs into evidence that will result in a verdict in your favor is asking for what I believe the most difficult task that a trial attorney can be required to do.

A custody case is much different than any accident case or a criminal trial. In those cases, an attorney is only asked to prove what happened at a specific date and place. All of the events have been fixed and are unchanging. A custody case is much different. You are asking your attorneys not to paint a picture in time but to present a movie. The movie must show over a broad range of time how each of you parent. Then I must decide which of you is the better parent.

Can you imagine if you had to prove that DaVinci's "Last Supper" was a better painting than Michelangelo's "Creation," and say that you had to prove this to someone who had never seen either painting and you weren't allowed to show the paintings to them? I suppose you could hire the curator of the Metropolitan Museum of Art who would come to court and testify about composition, color, depth, character, and proportion. Or I suppose you could bring in some ordinary people to say which one they think is better. Maybe you could take a poll. This is what you are asking your attorneys to do in this case. They have to prove to me which is the better parent, but they have no way of showing me exactly how you parent. They can't take me to the study sessions so I can see how a good tutor Dad is. They can't bring me into your child's bedroom at 5 a.m. to see how Mom comforts the child who is awakened with a fever. I want you and I want your attorneys to bring up those incidents which show you to be caring and loving parents, and I am sure they will try. However, it is more likely that they will be forced to show the other parent at his or her worse. Neither of these efforts will work very well. In trying to prove the positives you will discover that with the passage of time, the inability of witnesses to describe the situation with the same force with which it occurred, just the difficulty of putting into words other peoples' thoughts, feelings and actions, all of these combine to make grey what you felt was vivid or blunt . . . what you thought was poignant. On the other hand, the negatives will seem to make you look like the worse parent that ever lived. Did you ever send one of your children to school without [their] lunch? Did you ever forget to give one of your children [their] medicine? Did you ever say about your child "I could have strangled her?" We probably have all done those things, and it will be presented as if you are the most neglectful or abusive parent. At the

end of the trial any goodwill each of you had for the other, if there is any, will have been totally destroyed.

It is both of you who must be parents of these children until either you or they die. Neither I nor any of these lawyers . . . will be there for you for the remainder of this long journey. We could try to do our best to get you pointed in the right direction and maybe even help you along, but it is only in the first few steps. In the end it is both of you who must raise these children.

If your children could reach into their hearts and tell you exactly what they think and feel about what is going on here, if they could get beyond the hurt we know they must feel, we all know what they would say. First they would say, "I wish Mom and Dad were back together." Knowing this will not happen, they would say, "I wish they would just stop fighting." No doubt they love you so much they are probably blaming themselves for your original breakup. It is time you get past the anger and put aside the hurt. You may even have to forgive. The pain that has been caused here arises from the conflict between each of you and has nothing to do with the children.

Your children want this conflict to end. You have the chance to leave there today with an agreement that is in the best interest of your children. But it is an agreement that you must reach together. You must be willing to put aside your differences and be willing to accommodate each other's needs. But most importantly you must be ready now to put the needs of your children first.

I know that your children want you to settle this case. You can do the right thing and you can start now. Put aside what has happened in the past. This is the judgment day for your children. It's not about you. And think about the additional damage you are going to cause to these children. I can tell you right now it has happened and it happens every time. Put aside your own egos and swallow them. Leave it is in this courtroom . . . we've had a lot of egos left in this courtroom. You don't see them but I do because I see parents who are willing to put their children's welfare above their own ego. And they leave it right here and they know and understand what is really best for the children.

~The Honorable Paul W. Garfinkel

Compliments of Carol R. Hughes, Ph.D., LMFT
Child Specialist, Collaborative Divorce Coach, and Mediator
www.DivorcePeacemaking.com
949.855.2740
drcarolhughes@me.com

How To Talk With Your Minor Children About Your Upcoming Separation or Dissolution of Marriage

by Carol R. Hughes, Ph.D., LMFT

www.DivorcePeacemaking.com

(To avoid the clumsiness of using “child/children”, I have intentionally used “children” throughout this article.)

The following are some tips for you as you prepare to talk with your minor children. It is clear that you care about doing the best you can for your children, because you are reading this article. Give yourself permission not to be perfect. No one is. Remember to keep taking slow, deep breaths...you and your children will get through this difficult time.

1. Agree on a time when you both can be present to talk with your children together. Siblings need the support system that they can provide each other. Divorce is a major life crisis for all family members and should be treated as such. Ideally it is best to share the news with your children when they will have adequate time to absorb what you will be telling them, for example, when they do not have to go back to school in a day or two after hearing the news.

2. Plan your presentation to your children in advance. Make some notes about what you plan to say and review them so that you are familiar with what you intend to say. Anticipate what they may say to you. You can have the notes in front of you, if you wish, and simply say, “We have made some notes because what we are going to be talking about is very important for all of us and we don’t want to forget anything.” Remember that your children will likely be in emotional shock after you tell them your intentions to end your marriage and they will not be able to absorb everything you say this first time. Be prepared to have the same conversation with them numerous times. Their shock and grieving will interfere with them being able to fully take in all that you are sharing.

3. First, tell your children that you love them very much, that you will always love them and that you will always be their parents.

4. Tell them that the two of you have decided to live in different homes because you have adult problems between you that you have tried to solve but haven’t been able to. Avoid using the word “divorce” because it is laden with negative connotations. Also assure your children that this is NOT THEIR fault. Children often automatically assume it is.

4. Avoid saying that you don’t love each other anymore. Children then think that perhaps their parents could stop loving them one day as well. This could unsettle them and the stable foundation that having two loving parents provides.

5. Avoid blaming each other. This is the time for the two of you to have a united front with your children. Remember that this news will shatter their view of their family as they have known it. Blaming each other puts them in the middle of your pain and conflict, causes them to experience divided loyalty and feel that they need to choose sides, as well as feel guilt for loving both of you. Children often report that they hated being put in this position and feeling that each parent was attempting to form an alliance with them against the other parent.

6. Next, tell them what is going to remain the same. Tell them that you are all still family, that you will always be their parents and that you will always love them. Tell them that your intention is to be amicable so that you can both attend their activities and family gatherings and not create tension for them, for other family members or for their friends. Tell them if one of you intends to stay in the family home, etc. Assure them that they will be remaining in their same schools, same activities, etc. Also assure them that they will continue to have the emotional support of both parents in the newly restructured family.

7. Next, tell them what is not going to remain the same. Tell them if you both will be moving into new homes and that they can be involved in looking at them at the appropriate time, for example, once you have narrowed your choices down to two options. It's important to be neutral and factual. Resist being a victim or martyr. It will only make them feel guilty.

8. If they ask you a question you don't know the answer to yet, for example, "Will we stay in this house?" it's ok to tell them you don't know the answer to that question yet, and when you do, you will tell them.

9. Remember that you are still their parents. It is your job to put their feelings above yours and provide them with the support they need to hear, feel and understand what you are sharing with them. Acknowledge that you realize the announcement is a shock and that their feelings (anger, sadness, grief, shock, etc.) are normal. Focus on and be empathetic with THEIR feelings. Don't talk about your feelings, e.g., how you haven't been happy for years, how you deserve to be happy, etc. Having just received such painful news, they will be unable to express their happiness for you, and it is unreasonable for you to expect them to do so. Remember, their familial foundation has just been rocked and their family history is being rewritten. They are losing their "family nest".

10. Tell them that you still believe in family and that you hope they will too. Tell them that you don't expect them to take care of you emotionally or physically, that that is your job, not theirs.

11. Avoid telling them that you stayed together or delayed restructuring your family because of them. This will make them feel guilty for your unhappy marriage. Depending on their ages, they may already be recalling their childhood memories and wondering: "What was real and what wasn't real? Were you really happy on those family vacations?" Divorce destabilizes the family system and inevitably shakes every family member's perception of their past, their present and their future.

12. Assure them that this will be a process for all of you to move through, at your own pace and in your own way. Assure them that you will always love them and that you will always be there for them in whatever ways will be most helpful to them. You want them to know that they aren't alone, so they don't become isolated and depressed. Encourage them to speak with a counselor or youth pastor about their feelings. Tell them you have spoken with or intend to speak with a counselor as well, to talk about your feelings.

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The Overlooked Value of the Child Specialist as a Family Focused Facilitator in Collaborative Meetings presented by Bart Carey, J.D., Cathleen Collinsworth, CDF, MAFF, Bruce Fredenburg, LMFT, and Carol Hughes, Ph.D., LMFT

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Adult Children of Divorce: The Invisible Children
By Carol R. Hughes, Ph.D., LMFT
Collaborative Divorce Neutral Child Specialist and Divorce Coach
www.divorcepeacemaking.com
949.855.2740

How would it benefit your adult children to speak with a Neutral Child Specialist during your Collaborative Divorce Process? How would it benefit you, their parents?

Research indicates that divorce is life's second highest stressor, second only to the death of a loved one. If this is true, why is it so common for divorcing parents to assume that their adult children are "ok", simply because they are adults? Divorce destabilizes the family system and inevitably shakes every family member's perception of their past, their present and their future.

Experiencing their parents' divorce shatters adult children's view of their family as they have known it. They report that their familial foundation has been rocked and that their family history has been rewritten.

When their parents divorce, adult children experience most of the same feelings as minor children experience, though there is little support for them to deal with these feelings, since they are now adults and expected to be "ok" because they are adults. Adult children of divorcing parents report feeling shock, disorientation, depression, loneliness, anxiety, stress, worry about the well being of their parents, sleep and appetite disturbance, embarrassment, anger at one or both parents, grief, guilt, shame, abandonment and often role-reversal in that they feel that they now need to take charge and become a parent to their parents. They also report feeling invisible, since it seems to them that their own feelings and lives must inevitably become secondary to those of their parents. All of these feelings and experiences can take a devastating toll on adult children of divorcing parents.

Children of divorce, whether adults or minors, are experiencing multiple losses. These losses may include the loss of their parents as a co-parenting unit, the loss of their intact family, the loss of the family home where they grew up, the loss of the security and stability that their parents provided and the loss of their family as a support system, as well as the support system of family, friends and extended family members. Children who were adults when their parents divorced often report that they never felt lonelier in their lives than during the time of their parents' divorce.

Often divorcing parents inappropriately discuss with their adult children what led to their divorce and may blame each other to their adult children. Sometimes one or both parents see themselves as victims or martyrs and share that view with their adult children, causing their adult children to feel guilty or angry with their parents, thus damaging the parent-child relationship. When parents put their adult children in the middle of their pain and conflict, their adult children can feel divided loyalty and pressure to "choose sides". They may feel guilty for loving both parents and for spending time with both parents. Children who were adults when their parents divorced report that they hated being put in this position and feeling that each parent was attempting to form an alliance with them against the other parent.

Adult children of divorcing parents may feel responsible for their parents' unhappy marriage if their parents tell them that they were unhappily married for years and that they stayed together because they wanted to provide a stable home environment for their children. This can also cause them to reconsider their childhood memories and to doubt their reality. They may wonder what was real and what wasn't real. Was my childhood and adolescence a façade?

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Depending on where your adult children are in the developmental stages of adulthood, your adult children may be experiencing the following:

Post high school, college age children are especially vulnerable in that they are transitioning from adolescence into young adulthood. Divorce precipitates an uncoupling process for parents that is usually so tumultuous and painful that it impairs parents' ability to be at their best and to continue providing the customary emotional support system for their young adult children. The impact of their parents' emotional turmoil can create difficulty in focusing on their studies, their jobs and their own friend and romantic relationships. They may begin to doubt their own ability to maintain relationships and to question commitment and family. They may become isolated and have difficulty making decisions. College age adult children who are attending college are typically still financially dependent on their parents. During divorce finances may become strained and the parents may not be able to continue to pay as they have previously paid for their adult children's college expenses. This creates tremendous stress for college age adult children, who do not yet have the means to contribute to their college expenses. College age adult children may avoid spending time with their parents during their college vacations, in an effort to avoid dealing with their uncomfortable feelings and because of their conflicted feelings of loyalty to both parents, as well as the many feelings described above.

Adult children **who are graduating from college or who have recently graduated from college** when their parents divorce, may experience difficulty moving out into the world toward their career and even marriage, when their familial foundations have lost their stability. They may begin to doubt their own ability to maintain relationships and to question commitment and family. They may become isolated and have difficulty making decisions. Adult children in this developmental stage of adulthood often report that they feel destabilized because it seems that, just as they are coming to terms with the reality of growing up and moving away from their family and into the world, the reality they knew growing up no longer exists. Many feel conflicted that perhaps they should delay their "launch" and move close to one or both parents to assist them during the stressful time of their divorce process.

Adult children who are established in adult life, married or single with their own career, home and perhaps with children of their own, may experience that their current life, which has roots in their familial past, may no longer feel so firmly rooted. The responsibilities of their own nuclear families, coupled with the additional responsibilities they may feel for the well-being of their now divorcing parents, can cause them additional stress. Complicated by their parents' divorce, such accumulating pressures can become overwhelming for the adult child in this stage of life. Because these adult children are in such a "mature" stage of adulthood, their world typically does not offer support to them regarding their parents' divorce. The underlying message from our culture is to deny their distress and pain regarding their parents' divorce.

When adult children have the opportunity to speak with a Neutral Child Specialist, they are able to discuss the above issues in a safe, neutral environment with a professional who has the training and expertise not only to answer their questions and provide them with information about the new life situations they are experiencing, but also to assist them plan how best to navigate their changing lives.

The benefit to you as their parents is that the Neutral Child Specialist sensitizes you, your adult children's **co-parents**, to the needs of your adult children in the context of your divorce and gives you useful information about the restructuring your family is experiencing, so you can be the best co-parents possible for your adult children. Your spousal relationship is ending, but your co-parenting relationship lasts forever, no matter how old your children are. You will always be your children's **other parent**. The Neutral Child Specialist can assist you to create the legacy you want for your adult children: a peaceful, restructured family with amicable, cooperative and respectful co-parents who understand the needs of their adult children.

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She is the co-author of the book *Home Will Never Be the Same Again: A Guide for Adult Children of Gray Divorce*. For a complete listing of her collaborative practice training and teaching workshops please visit www.CollaborativePractice.com, the website of the International Academy of Collaborative Professionals, and click on the "Locate a Collaborative Professional near you" link. In addition, please visit her website at www.DivorcePeacemaking.com.

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Adult Children Are Stakeholders in Their Parents' Divorce

The below is excerpted from *Home Will Never Be the Same: A Guide for Adult Children of Gray Divorce* by Carol R. Hughes, Ph.D., LMFT and Bruce R. Fredenburg, LMFT

Carol writes:

Almost two decades ago, Bart J. Carey, a Collaborative Divorce Family Lawyer, Mediator, and Adjunct Law School Professor, and I were attending a collaborative divorce training in Arizona. He said to me, “You know, Adult Children are stakeholders in their parents’ divorce.” This one sentence became the seminal concept for my future work with and writing about children who are adults when their parents separate and divorce. When I was conceiving the ideas for this book, I knew I wanted Bart to share some stories from his practice that would illustrate how Adult Children are stakeholders in their parents’ divorces.

Bart writes:

It began like any other consult. A woman in her late 50s called to make an appointment to inquire about mediation services. We inquired if her husband would be able to join us. She would ask but doubted it. At the appointed time, she appeared alone. However, as she was filling out an information sheet, in tramped two young men with a determination that spoke of a sense of mission. These were her sons. One was 24 years old, and the other was 31. They had followed her to our office.

One of the sons was married, and the father of the family’s only grandchild. The other was a recent college graduate still living in the family home as he attempted to launch his career and pay down student loans. And they were adamant to speak with me.

First, they wanted to be sure I wasn't a shark who was going to influence their mother to get into a litigation that would devastate the family finances—money they were sure she was going to need because, secondly, their father was to blame for all this, and was going to abandon her in mid-life and leave her destitute. She needed protection and they were going to do everything they could to protect her from their father.

While their mother remained in the waiting room, I brought the sons into the mediation room to hear their concerns. I reframed the concerns about their mother's future and that of the family, removing the judgment and blame they were expressing for their father. I focused instead on the uncertainties and questions that their mother and father would have to answer for the *entire* family, while developing a statement for their hopes for everyone to make the transition through divorce with a financial safety net and the family intact. I assured them that, if I were privileged enough to be their parents' mediator, their concerns and hopes would be shared.

This was a bit more dramatic than we typically see but serves as an example to illuminate the concerns that their parents' divorce can raise for Adult Children -- concerns which they harbor, sometimes quietly, sometimes not, but which infect the whole family. After all, Adult Children are affected by every major life transition that their parents experience. When their parents divorce, they are not in control, not decision makers, but they have a stake in the journey and the outcomes.

Adult Children are stakeholders. Parents mostly recognize this, but in the fog of war, they may still lose sight of the impacts on the family.

On occasion we get referrals from attorneys and judges. These can be the most challenging cases, because the couple may have been battling over rights and entitlements through the court system for one or more years and may be entrenched in the war. As former

Secretary McNamara reflected, in the fog of war, perspective may be lost, affecting our perceptions and judgments.

One such referral brought a couple to our office on the eve of trial. Both were in their early 60s, married for 30 years, bread-winner father and homemaker wife, with little more than their cars, family home, and husband's retirement. Their shared mentality of scarcity was supported by the realities they were facing. They were instructed by a settlement conference judge to try mediation and instructed by their attorneys to attend. They sat in my waiting room in unhappy silence.

I invited them to join me in the mediation room. The wife was the first to speak. She informed me that her husband didn't feel the need to negotiate anything because he was going to win at trial, so we'd be out of there very quickly. I asked her husband if this was true. He confirmed her statement and went further saying he would 'win everything' at trial. Asked what 'everything' means, he informed me it was his car, all 'his' house, his social security, and 'all' of his retirement. Asked what his wife would have, he said her car and her social security check. How could he be so sure? His attorney assured him of these outcomes so, no, there was no point to continuing our meeting. I asked him if he'd give me five minutes. He agreed.

At this point I asked his wife to kindly allow us to speak alone for five minutes. She returned to the waiting room.

A couple of questions confirmed that husband was certain, despite my skepticism, his attorney had assured him of the outcomes at trial. So, instead of discussing rights and entitlements and the uncertainties of trial and community property acquired during a 30-year marriage, I asked him if they had any Adult Children. They had two: a single daughter up north and a son [clearly a favorite child] living close by. He had a five-year-old grandson, who was his

fishing buddy. His retirement plan was to spend a lot of time fishing with his grandson and being involved, as he grew up, in other sports, camping, and other activities with him. We bonded over how great it is to be a grandparent. Then, we were coming up to the end of our five minutes so I asked him, before his wife came back into the room, to again confirm that she would only have her car and social security. I observed it didn't seem possible she could live on that. 'Her problem,' he said.

"One more question, I said. "Assuming you get 'everything', as your attorney has assured you, it seems improbable your son would not step up to help his mother. So, how's that going to work when you show up at his house to hang with your grandson or take him fishing, and she answers the door?"

In the fog of war, he had forgotten to consider how 'getting everything' would impact his son and perhaps his plans with his grandson. He quickly became open to 'some flexibility' and our five minutes became a much longer joint session.

I hope these examples from our work speak to the impacts of parents' divorce on their Adult Children and the power of bringing their voices and concerns into the process, while parents make decisions about, not only their own future, but the future of the *family*.

Reprinted with permission from *Home Will Never Be the Same Again: A Guide for Adult Children of Gray Divorce*, by Carol R. Hughes and Bruce R. Fredenburg

I emptied the family house after my parents' divorce and this is what I learned

By Ruben Regalado, www.eldiario.es - February 16, 2020 - translated by Patricia Garavoglia

There will no longer be a “tomorrow as in my parents’ house” nor a “let’s go to the grandparents’ house.” With each object, a dilemma: Donate? Give away? Keep? Throw out?

My parents have divorced, so the family home is no longer the family home. It has become a financial asset, and, as such, it has been sold. I have had to empty it of the things accumulated over the years; mine and theirs. Suddenly, I am facing a whole lifetime and the memories of a project, the family, that is broken.

Emptying a home is like watching an Almodóvar movie. It is a mixture of drama, memories and comedy, depending on the closet you open. From the poems written to your first girlfriend, to that photograph in Ibiza, to the four of us, when divorce was what happened to everybody else. From the piece of hashish you did not finish, to the photograph with that friend who crashed a car. From the class notes to the cassette tapes.

When we moved to the house there were no mobile phones. Felipe González governed and Javier Sardà was a renowned radio journalist. It was 1994, and I was eleven-years-old with an attic to fill with toys, junk, and books. Fifteen years later, at Christmas time, my mother telephoned me: “We have sold the house, when can you come to help me empty it?” I think I am not exaggerating if I say that in that house nothing has ever been thrown out. In hindsight, we might even have an undiagnosed case of Diogenes syndrome.

A “millennial museum”

My bedroom was kept as an ode to the millennial adolescence. There remained the cassette tapes of radio recordings, the CDs, the first mp3, the collection of cigarette cartons, of beer bottles, the little box with hashish in the sock drawer... Posters of Laudrup, of Ché, of the Beatles, and the flag of the Second Republic. The Mercadona stub from the first Viña Rock festival. The sheet metal planters from which we drank Calimocho⁽¹⁾, the employee card from that summer job at the Pryca.⁽²⁾

Useless junk, yes, but also memories. And facing each object, a small dilemma: Donate? Give away? Keep? Throw out? Almost everything went to the trash, and in some way, each new bag full of junk was like killing that future which will never be. There will no longer be a “tomorrow as in my parents’ house,” nor, a “let’s go to grandparents’ house.” At the same time, each toy, each book put into a bag, was like throwing a little piece of me in the trash. As if a little bit of my childhood were dying.

Is it normal to feel like this? The psychologist Carol Hughes, a specialist in divorces with adult children and author of several studies on the subject, believes it is normal. She addresses it with her clients with an exercise: “I ask that you imagine that you find a box in a closet in the family home. The box contains an object which represents a special moment in your family life. An object that makes you happy and one you can take, touch... and, then the object dissolves into dust.” In that moment Dr. Hughes asks her clients what they feel, and the answer is always the same: “They feel a loss, as if a family member had died and they feel overwhelmed by the sadness. Everyone asks me if that’s normal. Yes, it is normal, they are grieving a profoundly significant loss in their life.”

Something akin to death

With that idea of the parallelism between death of the family project and the real death of a family member, I turn to Paco Roca, author of *La Casa*, who was elected best national comics artist in 2015. In it, Paco tells how he had tackled emptying the family home when his father died. “There is something similar in both cases in the sense that you confront yourself with the things that you had left open over the course of your life. Memories, that gift from your ex-girlfriend that you never threw away...”

Somehow, I think, it is like seeing your life pass before your eyes. The objects transport you to the past. The pre-school notebooks took me to pre-Olympic Barcelona, to Güell Park, to the 500 pesetas my father gave me when my brother was born. With the class notes I saw myself as a “botellón”⁽³⁾ at Parque del Oeste or waiting for the first bus to take me home, already daylight. The Knights of the Zodiac series took me to my cousin’s house, to Pressing Catch (WWE television program) Sunday mornings. I found the membership cards for sparks club and Kids Bank Club. The Ninja Turtle fanny-pack turned up full of marbles. My childhood’s memories are not the memories of a courtyard of Seville⁽⁴⁾ but they have a point.

It is over

But the journey is not only personal, “it is like taking a journey through family history over the years,” Paco recalls. And it is here where things get complicated. Who gets what? The community property, photos, books, paintings. Things that for me symbolize the happy years but for my parents have become reminders of pain and a possible motive for conflict. I have WhatsApp full of photos with questions: “Was this yours? “My mother/father says that as far as she/he is concerned we can get rid of it, do you want it?” And so, bag by bag, we went emptying the house, until one Wednesday evening there was nothing left.

The empty house seemed something else. It was no longer a place where I had been happy. It was a wasteland. I turned on the hall light and walked over to the living room. I heard the echo of my footsteps and I started to cry. I sat on the floor. When I stopped, I felt a bit stupid, but above all surprised, I did not expect it. Nevertheless, it is normal, “you were not crying over the

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house, the books, the toys, but for all the memories and the family union. You were crying for the broken history,” Hughes tells me.

They are difficult moments, says Paco Roca, that, despite all, took some positive things from the process: “It is difficult to empty a whole house...those are things that are not valuable and that end up in the trash but, at the same time, you realize how your parents have loved you, from all the things of yours they kept fondly through the years. I have a four-year-old girl and a seven-year-old boy, and I am saving all their drawings and school work.”

And what have I learned from all this? Of me, that I have not betrayed myself and that I am more or less where I thought I would be. Of the uselessness of keeping things, like Paco, nothing. I have the house full of my daughter’s drawings and a shelf full of work she has been bringing from preschool and her three years of school. Of how to organize life with divorced grandparents and a young daughter, it is better if we talk another day.

⁽¹⁾A wine and coke cocktail

⁽²⁾ A supermarket chain

⁽³⁾ Group drinking in public

⁽⁴⁾ Machado, Antonio, In “Retrato” Machado writes “Mi infancia son recuerdos de un patio de Sevilla”.

<https://poemsintranslation.blogspot.com/2010/02/antonio-machado-self-portrait-from.html>

How To Talk With Your Adult Children About Your Upcoming Separation or Dissolution of Marriage

by Carol R. Hughes, Ph.D., LMFT

www.DivorcePeacemaking.com

(To avoid the clumsiness of using “child/children”, I have intentionally used “children” throughout this article.)

The following are some tips for you as you prepare to talk with your adult children. It is clear that you care about doing the best you can for your children, because you are reading this article. Give yourself permission not to be perfect. No one is. Remember to keep taking slow, deep breaths...you and your children will get through this difficult time.

1. Schedule a time when you can speak with your children together and preferably in person. Siblings need the support system that they can provide each other. When you are scheduling the time to talk, tell them that you have something important to discuss with them and assure them that no one is sick or dying. If they ask you what you want to talk about, tell them that you prefer to discuss it in person when you are all together. If it isn't possible to speak in person due to residing long distances apart, then schedule a time to speak via Skype, Face Time or another video chat program. Avoid telling them via telephone or email. It is too impersonal. Divorce is a major life crisis for all family members and should be treated as such. Children who were adults when their parents divorced consistently report that the news of their parents' divorce “rocked the very foundation” of their world!

2. Plan your presentation to your children in advance. Make some notes about what you plan to say and review them so that you are familiar with what you intend to say. Anticipate what they may say to you. You can have the notes in front of you, if you wish, and simply say, “We have made some notes because what we are going to be talking about is very important for all of us and we don't want to forget anything.” Remember that your children will likely be in emotional shock after you tell them your intentions to separate and/or end your marriage and they will not be able to absorb everything you say this first time. Be prepared to have the same conversation with them numerous times. Their shock and grieving will interfere with them being able to fully take in all that you are sharing.

3. Tell them that the two of you have decided to separate and/or end your marriage because you have problems between you that you haven't been able to resolve. Avoid using the word “divorce” because it is laden with negative connotations.

4. Avoid blaming each other. This is the time for the two of you to have a united front with your children. Remember that this news will shatter their view of their family as they have known it. Blaming each other puts them in the middle of your pain and conflict, causes them to experience divided loyalty and feel that they need to choose sides, as well as feel guilt for loving both of you. Children who were adults when their parents divorced report that they hated being put in this position and feeling that each

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parent was attempting to form an alliance with them against the other parent.

5. Next, tell them what is going to remain the same. Tell them that you are all still family, that you will always be their parents and that your intention is to be amicable so that you can both attend family gatherings and not create tension for them and their significant others. If they are still in college, tell them how you will be continuing the financial arrangements you have had in place. Tell them if one of you intends to stay in the family home, etc. Assure them that they will continue to have the emotional support of both parents in the newly restructured family.

6. Next, tell them what is not going to remain the same. Tell them if you will be unable to continue the financial arrangements you had regarding college. Tell them if you intend to sell the family home. If you have been assisting them in paying off their college loans and won't be able to continue doing so, tell them that. Assure them that you will do everything you can to assist them financially, as you have in the past, while at the same time acknowledging that there will be some economic impact as the family restructures. It's important to be neutral and factual. Resist being a victim or martyr. It will only make them feel guilty.

7. Remember that you are still their parents. It is your job to put their feelings above yours and provide them with the support they need to hear, feel and understand. Acknowledge that you realize the announcement is a shock and that their feelings (anger, sadness, grief, shock, etc.) are normal. Focus on and be empathetic with THEIR feelings. Don't talk about your feelings, e.g., how you haven't been happy for years, how you deserve to be happy, etc. Having just received such painful news, they will be unable to express their happiness for you, and it is unreasonable for you to expect them to do so. Remember, their familial foundation has just been rocked and their family history has been rewritten. They have become members of the "lost nest" generation. There will be no "family nest" to return to at the holidays.

8. Tell them that you still believe in family and that you hope they will too; that this doesn't mean that they will not be able to having a strong and happy relationship. Tell them that you don't expect them to take care of you emotionally or physically, that that is your job, not theirs. Tell them that you have, or plan to have, your own support system separate from them and that you want them to establish a support system for themselves as well. For example, yahoo groups has a group for adult children whose parents are divorcing. The books *A Grief Out of Season: When Your Parents Divorce in Your Adult Years*, which is out of print, but available at libraries, and *The Way They Were: Dealing With Your Parents' Divorce After a Lifetime* will help them realize they are not alone.

9. Avoid telling them that you stayed together or delayed restructuring your family because of them. This will make them feel guilty for your unhappy marriage. They will already be recalling their childhood memories and wondering: "What was real and what wasn't real? Were you really happy on those family vacations? Has my whole life been a

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sham?” Divorce destabilizes the family system and inevitably shakes every family member’s perception of their past, their present and their future.

10. Assure them that this will be a process for all of you to move through, at your own pace and in your own way. Assure them that you will always love them and that you will always be there for them in whatever ways will be most helpful to them. You want them to know that they aren’t alone so they don’t become isolated and depressed. Encourage them to speak with a counselor about their feelings. Tell them you have spoken with or intend to speak with a counselor as well, because you have learned that, for all family members, the end of a marriage is a major life stressor, second only to the death of a loved one... This too shall pass.

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www.BottomLineInc.com

3 Landmark Square, Suite 201,
Stamford, CT 06901-3229
203-973-5900

Carol Hughes, PhD

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOUR PARENTS DIVORCE

And You're Already a Grown-Up

Heading home for the holidays is a treasured tradition in many families. But what do these families do if their aging parents divorce?

The divorce rate among couples age 50 and up more than doubled between 1990 and 2010, according to a study by researchers at Bowling Green State University, and it shows no signs of falling. It isn't just the older divorced parents who endure the emotional consequences of these splits. The dissolution of their marriages can take a toll on their adult children, too—at any time of year.

Here is what the adult children of divorced or divorcing parents need to know...

YOU MIGHT FEEL ABANDONED

It might not come as a surprise that the divorce of one's parents can be traumatic. What is surprising is that this trauma can be deeper and longer-lasting than living through a natural disaster.

Reason: People tend to get over shared traumas faster than private ones. In the wake of a shared trauma, they feel understood and supported...and they see other people coping with the same trauma and getting on with their lives. But in a private trauma, they feel alone, lost and abandoned in their pain.

This can be the case for adults whose parents divorce. Intellectually they know that other adults' parents have divorced, but the topic and its emotional consequences are discussed so rarely that they feel they are experiencing this alone. And when these adult children mention how much they are hurting, they often do not receive much sympathy. Other people don't understand how adults who most likely have been living on their own for years can be so traumatized.

In fact, these feelings of abandonment and pain are perfectly normal. Your parents' marriage forms part of the foundation of who you are. If that marriage ends, it can feel as if your foundation has crumbled, leaving you unsupported.

What to do: Find people who have endured the same trauma. Speaking with them can transform the private trauma into a shared one, likely speeding the recovery process. Start with your siblings—they are enduring your parents' divorce, too. Complex family dynamics and differing emotional responses to divorce mean that this won't be the answer for everyone, however. Other possibilities include friends whose parents have divorced...therapists or clergy members...and support groups for people experiencing grief.

IT CAN HURT YOUR MARRIAGE

People learn how to be husbands and wives in part by watching their parents during childhood. If those parents later split, it is only natural to ask yourself, *Did I really learn how to sustain a marriage? Am I good marriage material?*

Meanwhile, one or both of the divorcing parents might lean heavily on an adult child for financial or emotional support. This new demand for the adult child's time, money and/or emotional resources means that he/she has fewer resources to devote to his spouse, kids and career, opening the door to difficulties in these areas.

What to do: If you begin to question your own marriage, consider that this might be a stage in your grieving process, not a sign that you truly are headed for divorce. Speak with a therapist trained in the treatment of grief if these concerns persist.

If one (or both) of your parents leans heavily on you emotionally during or after the divorce, help that parent find a broader and more appropriate support system. Ask the parent's friends and church leaders whether they can assist...and/or help the parent find a local support group for divorced people.

If a parent leans on you heavily for financial assistance, pay a certified financial planner to determine how much support you can provide without jeopardizing your other fi-

Bottom Line Personal interviewed Carol Hughes, PhD, a psychotherapist and divorce coach based in Laguna Hills, California. She has more than 30 years of experience working with divorcing couples and their children and is one of the founding members of Collaborative Divorce Solutions of Orange County. DivorcePeaceMaking.com

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nancial responsibilities. Invite the parent to a meeting with this adviser.

CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE

Divorcing parents sometimes battle each other through their adult children. They discuss their former partners' flaws and failings with their adult children either out of spite or despair or in hopes of convincing the children that the divorce was the other parent's fault.

And sometimes children of divorcing parents argue with each other (or with other family members)—because they blame different parents for the split...or because a sibling cuts off contact with the parent who seems to be at fault while another sibling does not.

What to do: If your parents' divorce causes you to fight with your siblings, say, "Our parents are splitting up, but that doesn't mean we have to. In fact, it's more important than ever that we stick together." Say words to this effect each time anger arises between you. If you simply cannot discuss this topic calmly, agree not to discuss it any more than is absolutely necessary.

If your parents try to fight battles through you, explain that you have no interest in listening to bad things about either of them. Do not be surprised if you have to repeat this boundaries discussion many times.

THE HOLIDAYS ARE HARD

The holidays can be the time of year when the parents' divorce truly hits home for adult children if gathering together had been a tradition.

What to do: Create an entirely new holiday tradition. Take your immediate family somewhere fun and interesting for the holidays. Or invite members of your extended family—including your parents—

More from Carole Hughes, PhD

Four Ways Divorcing Parents Can Limit the Fallout for Their Adult Children

Parents' behavior during and after their divorce can significantly affect how much their adult children suffer. Parents should...

- **Break the news together**, in person and without blame or anger, if possible. Say something along the lines of, "We've decided we're not going to stay married. It's no one's fault." When pressed for reasons, simply say, "We have problems that we haven't been able to solve." This will be especially difficult if you feel that your spouse is at fault, but expressing blame and anger will only make the divorce more difficult for your adult children.

If the children already know (or are likely to find out) that one parent has clearly wronged the other, the "wronged" parent could admit that the situation is not quite as clear-cut as it seems. *Example:* "You already know that your mother had an affair, but you should know that we had been growing apart for years. Neither of us was the best spouse we could have been." This gives the children permission to continue having a positive relationship with the parent who seems primarily to blame. Even if you are very angry at your soon-to-be-ex-spouse, your kids still have a right to

have a relationship with both of their parents.

If the divorce follows from one parent coming out as gay, it's best to say this. It might be a difficult conversation, but it gives your children an understanding of who their parents truly are and why the divorce is happening.

- **Emphasize what won't be changing.** *Example:* "We both still love you kids, and we always will," and "We'll remain friends/friendly/amicable with each other." (Choose the most positive word you feel you can here.)

- **Seek emotional support from people other than your children.** Your kids deserve to live their own lives, not suffer through your problems.

- **Role-model effective problem solving.** When you are tempted to lament your situation or act petty toward your ex in front of your adult child, consider what lesson you wish to teach in this moment. Children learn from their parents' example even during adulthood. This is an opportunity to teach a lesson about handling difficult times with grace and maturity. That lesson could be part of the legacy you leave behind after you are gone.

over to your house. If your parents can't treat each other civilly or if it's painful for one of your parents to see the other, you could invite them on different days during the holiday season.

YOU MAY FEEL RELIEVED

When parents have been fighting for years, their adult children sometimes feel glad when they hear that

their parents are divorcing. They might then feel guilty about this initial reaction.

What to do: If you think the divorce is warranted, let your parents know this. They probably will be relieved that you are not angry with them. Your positive reaction could help other family members admit their relief, too. **BLP**

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203-973-5900

Carol Hughes, PhD ■ Collaborative Divorce Solutions

YIKES! MOM OR DAD IS DATING AGAIN

How to Avoid a Family Rift

Divorced or widowed parents might feel excitement or hope when they return to the dating world after decades away. But their adult children might feel anxiety about the parent's safety and financial security (and their own inheritance)...renewed grief over the loss of the family unit...or discomfort at seeing the parent behave in a non-parental way.

Here's what parent and child should do—and not do—to protect their relationship during these emotionally difficult times...

WHY GROWN KIDS AREN'T HAPPY WHEN MOM OR DAD DATES

Parents often cannot understand why their adult children have a negative emotional response to the news that they are dating or in a new relationship. In fact, the adult children might not completely understand their own reactions.

The parent's return to the dating world forces a role reversal. Traditionally, it is parents who are asked to be happy for their children's happiness and parents who watch and worry while their children endure the ups and downs of meeting new partners and taking chances on new romances. When a parent dates, these roles are flipped, forcing unfamiliar and difficult-to-navigate dynamics for all.

If the parent settles into a new long-term relationship, that might force the adult child to finally con-

front the difficult fact that the family unit of his/her youth is gone forever. Intellectually, this adult child, of course, understands that the family unit ended when the parent was widowed or divorced—but some adult children manage to avoid psychologically confronting this fact until the parent starts seeing someone new. (This is especially likely if the parent is divorced, not widowed. The adult child might have been telling himself that his parents would get back together eventually.)

In these cases, the adult child is looking backward and grieving the loss of the old relationship just as the parent is looking forward in excitement to a new one. That difference in perspective virtually ensures that they will struggle to see eye to eye.

WHAT PARENTS SHOULD DO

To reduce the odds that a new romantic relationship will damage your parent/child relationship...

Share the news that you are dating again—or that you are in a relationship—in a calm, private moment. Present this news in a straightforward manner, such as, "I wanted you to know that I'm dating again." Or "I wanted you to know that I'm seeing someone." And then let the adult child process what you've said and ask questions. Do not phrase this in a way that demands happi-

ness from the adult child, such as, "Isn't it wonderful—I'm dating!"

Do not find fault with your adult child's reaction to your return to dating or a new relationship even if that reaction is negative. There is nothing immature or even unusual about an adult child's less-than-positive response to this news. This is an emotionally challenging situation, so be ready to take any reaction in stride. Telling your adult child to "grow up" or asking, "Don't you want me to be happy?" only increases the odds that the parent-child relationship will suffer.

If you find someone who you think could become a long-term partner, ask your kids if they want to meet this person rather than trying to force a first meeting. Offer the option of waiting to see whether the relationship lasts a while longer before agreeing to meet. Parents often have unrealistic expectations that their new partners will instantly become part of a happy family unit. That almost certainly will take time (if it happens at all).

Also: Dissuade your new partner from pushing too hard to form close bonds with your adult children when they do meet. Your partner should be pleasant and polite but should let your adult children take the lead in these relationships.

Continue to find as much time as possible for your adult children and your grandchildren—ideally *without* a date by your side. When parents of adult children start spending time

Bottom Line Personal interviewed Carol Hughes, PhD, psychotherapist and divorce coach based in Laguna Hills, California. She has more than 30 years of experience working with divorcing couples and their children and is one of the founding members of Collaborative Divorce Solutions of Orange County. DivorcePeaceMaking.com

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dating, they often spend less time with their children and grandchildren. This gives the adult children an additional reason to find fault with the parent's return to romantic life.

Reassure your adult children that your money is safe. Your initial reaction to their financial worries might be, "My money is my business"... "My new partner loves me, not my money"...or "It's selfish of you to put your inheritance ahead of my happiness." But it is perfectly reasonable for your kids to be concerned. Relatively savvy people sometimes do fall victim to dating scams, and when they do, their entire families can pay the price. So rather than dismiss your kids' money concerns, you could reassure them that you are not splurging on extravagant gifts for this new partner...and that if you do someday remarry, you will get a prenup. Or you could agree to work with an estate planner (or some other trusted financial adviser) to make sure that your money remains in your family.

Reminisce with your adult children about the old days when your original family was intact. This subtly reinforces the sense that your search for a new relationship does not invalidate the family unit of their youth.

Do not discuss your sex life with your adult kids. It is surprisingly common for parents to share details about their revitalized sex lives with their adult children when they return to the dating scene. Doing this only makes a difficult situation even less comfortable for the adult children.

Do not denigrate your ex-spouse. Detailing everything that was wrong with your ex will not help your adult children understand why

you need someone new. It will only make them angry that they are being pushed to see their other parent in a negative light.

If you are divorced, do not ask your kids not to tell your ex that you're dating. That would put your kids in an uncomfortable position and make it harder for them to see your new partner in a positive light. One option is to contact your ex with the news around the same time you tell your kids, assuming that your lines of communication with your ex remain open.

WHAT ADULT CHILDREN SHOULD DO

To remain on good terms with your parent—and help protect your parent if necessary...

Stifle any negative initial reaction you may have. This negative reaction likely is rooted in your deep-seated emotions surrounding your childhood family unit, not in your true opinion of your parent's decision to date or of the new partner. If you can't say anything positive, say something noncommittal such as, "Thanks for letting me know. That's big news."

Raise any concerns you may have about your parent's finances in a way that does not imply that a new partner is a gold digger or scammer. Suggesting that a new partner might be after your parent's money will only make your parent rush to his defense. Instead, note that starting a romantic relationship can have financial consequences, and recommend that the parent meet with a financial adviser or estate planner.

If after getting to know a new partner, you still harbor fears that this person might be after your parent's money, discuss these concerns with one of your parent's trusted peers who has met the new partner.

A trusted peer is more likely than an adult child to be able to successfully discuss this difficult topic with the parent. Alternatively, you could discuss your concerns with an attorney who specializes in elder abuse. (You can find one through the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys at NAELA.org.)

Don't be surprised if your parent's rekindled romantic life makes you experience doubts about your own marriage—and don't overreact to these doubts. It is not uncommon for adult children to leave their spouses when their parents start dating again. Our parents are our relationship role models—whether we like it or not. When we see a parent searching for (or finding) someone new, we might feel an itch to do the same even if our relationship previously was sound. Meet with a counselor, and talk through your feelings about your parent's return to dating and your feelings about your own marriage before taking any big relationship steps.

Reassure yourself that your feelings about your parent's new relationship are completely unrelated to your feelings for your other parent. Some adult children express negative feelings about a parent's new relationship because at some level they fear that accepting this relationship would be disloyal to their other parent (or to the memory of the other parent, if deceased). Such feelings are normal, but they are not accurate and are not helpful to anyone.

If you cannot shake negative feelings about your parent's new relationship, discuss these feelings with a therapist or clergy member. BLP

You Have Chosen to Divorce: Are Your Adult Children Too Old to Hurt?

By Carol R. Hughes, Ph.D., LMFT

The effect of divorce on minor children has been a hot topic for decades. But divorce can also significantly impact adult children whose parents are divorcing. These adult children report many of the same feelings and experiences.

“My friends at college say I should be glad they didn’t divorce when I was younger because that would have been a lot worse. It’s like they expect me to just ‘get over’ what I’m feeling. I feel so sad and alone,” shared an 18-year-old college freshman.

"It’s been two years since my parents divorced. I was in shock. It was like an earthquake was shaking what I thought would always be the rock-solid foundation of my life. For almost two years, the aftershocks kept shaking me and upending everything in my life," reported a 27-year-old adult child.

“I just started sobbing out of nowhere, and I didn’t know why. Then I remembered--my family is gone. My family is dead,” recalled a 34-year-old adult child.

“There are so many ‘nevers.’ Nothing will ever be the same.”

Our cultural myth is that adult children are too old to hurt from their parents' divorce.

Recent research found that 51% of parents who were 50 years and older reported that their adult children were “unsupportive,” “somewhat upset,” or “very upset” about their divorce. Even among adult children who were supportive of their parents’ divorce, the parents perceived that 67% were very sad, and 19% were devastated.¹

Divorce is not a neutral event for children, whether they are minor or adult children.

Adult children suffer in different ways than minor children. When parents are ending decades-long marriages, a frequent refrain from their adult children is: “Home will never be the same again.” Why do they say this?

Adult children experience myriad losses when their parents divorce. Below are a few examples.

- Family relationships change. Accustomed to counting on their parents for emotional and sometimes financial support, adult children may lose this support and find themselves in a role reversal where they feel like they are the parents who are supporting their parents. One parent may call them for support and complain about their spouse. Next, the other parent does the same. Adult children feel caught in the middle and are at a loss how to handle this.
- Loyalty issues can arise when one or both parents expect them to side with them against the other parent. Or, siblings and extended family members may pressure them to take sides.
- Siblings call to talk about what is happening and how to deal with it. Life is disrupted just by talking about their parents' divorce.

- The permanence of their intact family vanishes. Unsettling concerns arise, since the accustomed family traditions, celebrations, and togetherness are no more. Stress ensues about how to handle holiday, birthday, and graduation celebrations. If they have children of their own, they worry about how all of this will affect them. Will their children be able to be with their grandparents and extended family at the same time, when their family is split down the middle?
- They begin wondering if their childhood and adolescence were based on lies and if the appearance their family showed to the world was a façade.

Divorce has many witnesses, many victims...Each divorce is the death of a small civilization. ~ Pat Conroy, American novelist

We expect to grieve when we lose a loved one. Yet, many parents and adult children are unaware that they are grieving the losses—all the ‘nevers.’ Divorce is the rock that drops into life’s lake, and the ripples of grieving wash over everyone in the family’s circle.

How Collaborative Divorce Helps

The Collaborative Divorce process helps divorcing parents understand their adult children's concerns and how to explain to them that while some things will change, not everything will. Parents need to reassure their adult children that they, the parents, will not put them in the middle of their problems. They will not share their problems with the children and ask them to take sides.

Collaborative Divorce is a family-focused process that emphasizes that you are still a family. It is a family apart, but still a family. It is an opportunity for you to minimize the emotional damage to your family, including your adult children. We help you recognize the importance of supporting your adult children through the divorce process and the value of ensuring them that you will always be a family.

We help you schedule holidays and other family events in a way that is best for everyone. We also assist you to get your adult children’s input about how they would like you to be involved in their daily lives and the lives of your grandchildren.

Your divorce will be respectful and amicable. You will have the opportunity to create your legacy about this time in your family’s lives--a legacy that will include what will be best for all family members because *you are always a family*.

References

1 Todd M. Jensen and Gary L. Bowen, “Mid- and Late-Life Divorce and Parents’ Perceptions of Emerging Adult Children’s Emotional Reactions,” *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage* 56, no. 5 (July 4, 2015): 419, doi:10.1080/10502556.2015.1046795.

Dr. Carol Hughes is a California licensed Marriage and Family Therapist and family-focused divorce professional, who works with children, adolescents, and adults. As a therapist, co-parenting and child specialist, divorce coach, and mediator, she has assisted hundreds of families experiencing separation and divorce. She is the co-author of

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Ph.D., LMFT

Home Will Never Be the Same Again: A Guide for Adult Children of Gray Divorce, published by Rowman and Littlefield Publishers and available on Amazon or directly from the publisher.

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Our Language Matters

Litigation/adversarial language

Collaborative/cooperative language

you.....	I
my children/ my house.....	our children/our house
tell	ask/request
You are entitled to	What are your hopes, concerns, interests and values?
divorce petition	transition document
child support/Disso Master.....	What it takes to pay for our children's expenses / needs and abilities
spousal support	reallocation of family resources
child custody/visitation.....	parenting time/co-parenting plan/time with the children / time w/Mom/time w/Dad
discovery/subpoenas	voluntary transparency, information gathering
exhibits/evidence	information
opposing counsel	collaborative counterpart
fair.....	What I can live with.
never/always.....	sometimes/often
I will not.....	My request is....
proposal	option
win/lose.....	mutually acceptable
negative past	positive future
recommendations	information/education

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make settlement proposals brainstorm options

I recommend that you One option to consider might be...

My legal advice is Let me give you some legal information.

I'll see you in court Clients brainstorm and craft agreements

I insist on/that..... You can bring up your concern at the team meeting.

The law saysThe law is one option to consider, and the law limits you from assessing other options that may be far better suited to you achieving success as you have defined it for yourself and for your family.

I know that under the law The law is uncertain, and what a judge will do is difficult to predict as legal professionals can and do differ.

parties/clients person's name/the person I am working with

opposing party the person's name

expert someone with expertise/experience

therapist/counselor divorce coach/communication facilitator

child therapist/custody evaluator child specialist/voice of the children

session meeting

custody evaluator's written report ... Child specialist orally shares information with parents and coaches to assist them craft their co-parenting plan.

opposing counsel/other side collaborative co-counsel/collaborative colleague

financial planner/ CPA/financial neutral financial professional
expert

I represent (client's name) I am (client's name) collaborative lawyer/divorce coach

I will protect you I will make sure that you have all of the information necessary to enable you to make good choices for your family

As your attorney I will You have a team of collaborative professionals to support you.

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I am a divorce lawyer I am a peacemaker.

I will provide you with solutions We will brainstorm together as a team.

I can get you You are supported in this process by your Divorce Coach, Neutral Financial and me so that your emotional, financial and legal needs will be met.

I know what you want or need Let's make an assessment of what will position you for success.

I am in charge of We work as a team of Collaborative Professionals.

You will end up with I will position you to achieve success as you have defined it for yourself and for your family.

You shouldWhat would it look like if...

ground rules foundations for success

professionals speak for the clients.... clients speak for themselves

clients talk to the professionals clients talk to each other

adversarial body language collaborative/cooperative body language

temporary support/child support..... income & expense sharing

Why do we use collaborative / cooperative language instead of litigation / adversarial language?

(Adapted by Carol R. Hughes, Ph.D., LMFT, and Brian Levy, J.D., with permission from Collaborative Divorce Team Trainings ©2009 and the International Academy of Collaborative Professionals Train the Trainer 2013)

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Links to *Psychology Today* Blog - Home Will Never Be the Same Again: Guidance for the Families of Gray Divorce

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/home-will-never-be-the-same-again>

COLLABORATIVE
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CONTACT INFORMATION OF PRESENTERS

Bart J. Carey, Esq.

Attorney/Mediator, Owner

Mediation and Collaborative

Family Law Offices

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These professionals also conduct Collaborative divorce cases online through virtual video conferencing and document sharing platforms.

OTHER COLLABORATIVE RESOURCES

International Organization

IACP – International Academy of Collaborative Professionals
www.collaborativepractice.com

State Organizations

CP Cal – Collaborative Practice California
www.cpcal.com

CD Cal – Collaborative Divorce California
www.collaborativedivorcecalifornia.com