

For Immediate Release

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Handling Father's Day Post-Divorce

TORONTO, ON (June 11, 2014) — Twenty years ago on Father's Day, *Divorce Magazine* publisher Dan Couvrette received a most unexpected – and unwelcome – surprise: “The first words out of my then-wife's mouth that morning were ‘I want a divorce.’ I was speechless – in total shock,” he says. “Our marriage had our challenges, but I never thought we were anywhere near that point.” He found the first year after this bombshell devastating. “It was like my DNA had to be re-written: I had to move out and no longer had daily contact with my children.” As the father of two young boys (aged three and eight), he realized that he was going to need to have regular contact with his ex-wife in order to retain a central role in his sons' lives. “For about four years, I had to manage myself, my reactions, and my conversations with my ex to build a good coparenting relationship with her,” he says. “Now, my wife Martha and I can attend or host family events – like my sons' birthday parties, for instance – with my ex-wife and her new husband, and they can actually be fun.”



“Children treasure contact with their dads – and not just on special occasions,” says Dr. Donald A. Gordon, executive director of the Center for Divorce Education.

If this is your first Father's Day post-separation or divorce, you can expect a ride on the emotional rollercoaster. For divorced dads, family-centered holidays – like Thanksgiving or Father's Day – can intensify feelings of anger, sadness, or loss. If you're the non-custodial parent, and you and your ex have not yet cemented an agreement to put your children first, you may be dealing with an uncooperative or even vengeful ex who is willing to keep you from seeing your children to hurt you – seemingly oblivious to the fact that it will hurt the children as well.

“Children treasure contact with their dads – and not just on special occasions,” says Donald A. Gordon, Ph.D., co-founder and executive director of the Center for Divorce Education. Dr. Gordon is a 40+ year clinical psychologist and researcher with an area of expertise targeting the reduction and prevention of juvenile delinquency. “Dads are incredibly important to their children's self-esteem. Frequent contact shows that a dad loves them; a couple times a year just doesn't cut it.” Although it might not always be possible, he says that face-to-face contact is best – especially one-on-one time where Dad is paying close attention to his kids without his new partner (or his new partner's children) around.

“Both parents are part of the children,” Dr. Gordon points out. “Each gender makes unique contributions to the kids' development, so both parents' unique contributions need to be fostered and encouraged.” He says that children feel really stressed when they don't have a good relationship with one of their parents, even though they may not talk about it. “Focus on what the kids need: to have a good relationship with both parents. You're going to be parents of those kids forever, and they want to have both parents at big events like graduations, weddings, births of grandchildren.”

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Couvrette credits his divorce recovery – including maintaining strong relationships with his children – to hiring a life coach to work with him during his divorce. Working with a coach allowed him to express his painful thoughts and feelings in a way that would not negatively affect his coparenting relationship with his ex – or his relationship with his children. His coach helped him get past the stumbling blocks and reminded him to stay focused on the desired outcome in any situation rather than acting on transient feelings of anger, self-pity, or self-righteousness. “We created a manageable, workable coparenting relationship built on the pillars of cooperation and flexibility.”

If you’re angry with your ex, the first thing to do is to acknowledge your feelings, then accept those feelings non-judgmentally. “It’s your behavior – how you respond – that’s important,” says Dr. Gordon. “You’re going to feel how you feel, but if you acknowledge your feelings, they’re less likely to control you. Then you can make decisions about how you’re going to communicate with the other parent that will improve the relationship. The goal is to improve the relationship – not to seek revenge or to vent. If you vent, the person will get reactive and go into fight-or-flight mode, and things will rapidly deteriorate. Vent to a friend or counselor – not to the other parent.”

Dr. Gordon advises divorced parents to learn – or improve – their communication skills. “Also, rehearse what you’re going to say in advance, don’t assume negative motives on your ex’s part, and take deep breaths to calm yourself.” Until you can control your voice and body language, consider using email to communicate with your ex. “However, if you’re angry, wait several hours before sending the email. Don’t write an angry email and hit ‘send’ – you might regret it later.” Read it again, or have a friend read a sensitive email before you send it. Ask yourself: “Does this sound disrespectful, humiliating, angry?”

“I urge all divorced fathers to engage in as much personal development work as possible – especially if they’re dealing with a difficult ex,” says Couvrette. “Read self-help books, hire a therapist or coach, go to classes for divorced parents, join a supportive group – anything that will help you focus on the positive and manage the negative in your situation.” Before joining a Men’s Rights or Fathers’ Rights group, Couvrette suggests you check to make sure your philosophies are aligned. “Avoid the hateful groups and people,” he urges. “Choose a group that will support you in creating a successful coparenting relationship with your ex, which will help you to maintain a great relationship with your children post-divorce.”

Dr. Gordon’s top three tips for divorcing parents are:

- 1) Remember that your children are always watching, so set a good example for them.
- 2) Recognize your feelings, accept them, then bring your better self to the conversation.
- 3) Remember that your children need to know that both of you support them in having a good relationship with their other parent.

Published since 1996, *Divorce Magazine* is North America’s only magazine devoted entirely to divorce-related issues. The magazine helps divorcing individuals and families through the process in the most economical and least traumatic way possible. It offers practical help and information about divorce-related issues – from child support to visitation, mediation to litigation, divorce recovery to dating after divorce. For more articles about parenting during and after divorce, go to www.divorcemag.com/articles/Parenting_and_Step-Families