

Information Sheet – Conflict & Its Impact on Children

Separation and Divorce and Conflict = The “wound”

Potential Impacts:**

- Higher risk for children for depression, anxiety, self harm, academic issues, promiscuity, drugs and alcohol abuse/addiction, relationship problems, divorce, aggression and violence, increased heart disease,...
- See impacts on children through their behaviour – “externalization” also “internalized” impacts
- Greatest negative impact – HIGH CONFLICT

Why?

- Lost parental leadership – parental focus is elsewhere – not on the child

What Happens for a Child When Conflict is Not Handled Well?

- Destructive
- If the “wound” is not handled well, it becomes toxic - Examples: verbal or physical violence, High Conflict, frequency and the unpredictability leads to “fear” reaction and the level of arousal is continually high; there is no end in sight
- They are not able to process the conflict
- They go into “survival mode” that is, the “triggers” to the brain when there is a risk to them; their body releases cortisol; the amygdala is activated as a “response” to the trigger and the thinking part of their brain is not engaged
- The child cannot self regulate when there is too much stress because their cortisol levels are off balance

The Child’s Brain?

- Unresolved or Continual or Frequent Conflict actually *changes* the child’s brain; its development and functioning!
- It impacts the child’s capacity for empathy – Narcissism?

Is All Lost? Can this Potential Negative Impact be Turned Around? If so, How?

- Management and Containment of the Conflict = Constructive
- If conflict (a disagreement) is handled well, it can be a learning experience or teachable moment for a child
- If the “wound” is handled well, children adjust and heal
- Parental behaviour is critical to a child’s behaviour*

** See Adverse Childhood Experiences Study