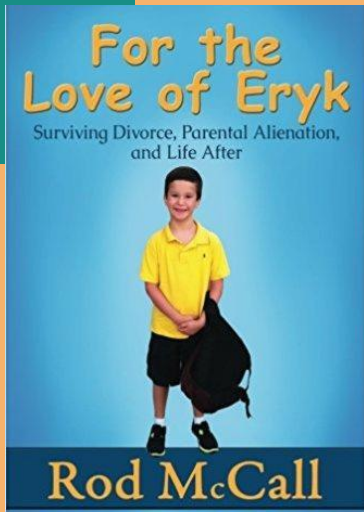


# **Death, Depression & Drugs**

**Results of High Conflict  
Divorce in Children**

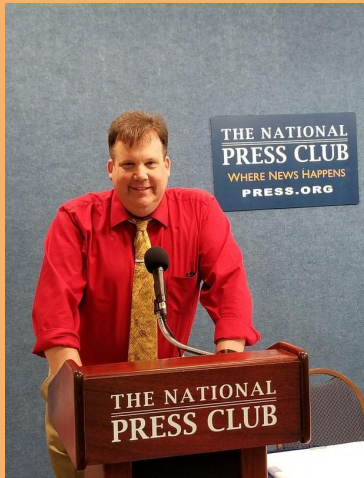
"One's experience matters. Both for how it feels in the moment and for the lasting residue it leaves behind, woven into the fabric of a person's brain and being."

-Rick Hansen



# Rod McCall

- Professional Educator for more than 20 years
- Divorced and survivor of Family Court Hell
- Author of For the Love of Eryk
- Co-Host of Home Sweet Home Podcast
- LPC Student with strong research interest in the impact of divorce on children, especially high conflict custody battles.



# Divorce Happens



- 41 % of children in 2017 transitioned from 2 parent to 1 parent households
- 5.8 Million children under 17 live with single divorced parents.
- BMC Pediatrics 2021 study stated that children of divorce have higher levels of:
  - Social fear
  - Depression
  - Social avoidance
  - Suicidal ideation

# Family Conflict Impacts Adjustment



- ACE study identifies divorce as one of the 10 events that are considered a potentially traumatic event.
- How parents decide to treat each other impacts a child's adjustment to the new lifestyle.

# So What Happens When Parents Don't Get Along?

- high-conflict divorce as relations between former partners/spouses characterized by high levels of verbal or physical aggression, overt hostility, and distrust.
- The phenomenon is multidimensional in nature:
  - domain dimension
  - tactic dimension
  - attitudinal dimension
- Research agrees that a child exposed conflict is at great risk of a **outcomes**" (Shumaker & Kelsey, 2020).



# Long Term Effects of Divorce on Children

## Identified age specific issues:

- Preschoolers manifest regression, aggression, sleep disturbances, and fantasies of abandonment
- Children aged 5-8 reveal grief, longing for the departed parent, and fantasies of replacement
- Children aged 8 1/2 to 12 evince anxiety, loneliness, and anger
- Adolescents act out, suffer depression, have suicidal thoughts, and express anxiety about having successful marriages.
  - (Marquardt, 2005)

**Parental behaviors that centers around the involvement of the children in the parental subsystem, its conflicts and various parental maters.**

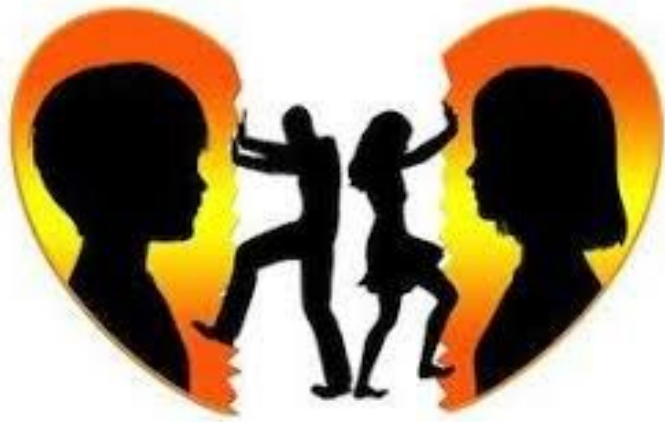
## **Consequences**

- Enmeshment of the children with the parent doing the triangulation
- Increased self blame by the children for the breakup of their parents
- Loyalty conflicts within the children
- Feeling invisible due to parents fighting, thus increasing feelings of low self-esteem
  - (VanDijk, van der Valk, Dekovic, Branje, et al., 2022)
- Feelings of self-blame can lead to limited ability to make decisions for themselves and “their own sense of powerlessness” (Wallerstein, 1987).

## **Triangulation of the Children**







# Further Long Term Problems

- Poor life choices
  - Having children out of wedlock
- Distrust of others
- Cohabitation vs marriage
- Apathy or lack of commitment in relationships
- Higher rates of unemployment
- Adjustment issues
- Increased risk of suicide

# Depression Among Parents



- Depression in parents interferes with parenting quality and is associated with poor health and development
- National Comorbidity Survey Replication in 2002 reported that 17% of parents (with at least 1 kid) had major or severe depression. (England, 2009)
- When parents are depressed, kids suffer
- Depressive disorder & Depressive symptoms in parents are accompanied by comorbid disorders

# Parental Depression Impact on Their Children

- *Depression in parents, parenting, and children opportunities to improve identification, treatment, and prevention.*
  - Children can have serious biological, psychological, behavioral, and social consequences especially for children.
  - Absence of supportive parental behaviors can have lasting effects, especially if the interfere with the children getting their age development needs met.
  - Children of depressed mothers may develop vulnerabilities for depression.
- Research suggest that children of divorce are at higher risk of academic, psychological, social, and self-adjustment concerns.

# Effect of Depression on Children

The National Institute of Health considers divorce a traumatic event.

According to National Research Council & Institute of Medicine, the earlier the age that depression begins, the greater changes of its recurrence, chronicity and impairment.

“Environmental stressors associated with depression include acute life events, chronic stress and childhood exposure to adversity.”  
(England, 2009)

Depression has high comorbidity with other mental health issues including “OCD, psychotic disorder, past panic disorder, and suicidal risk.” (Ittasakul et al., 2014)

In the book published by National Research Council & the Institute of Medicine in 2009 state that depression in young people may either choose or default into “problematic environments that are stressful & may further overwhelm impaired coping capabilities”.

# Ties to the ACE Study



- ACE Study:
  - children who are exposed to traumatic events such as divorce, emotional abuse & neglect and a parent, in particular a mom, who has a mental illness are likely to engage in high risk activities.
- These high risk activities include:
  - unsafe sex, especially at an early age
  - drug and alcohol abuse,
  - Depression & anxiety,
  - poor academic performance
  - suicide.

# Increased Drug Use

- Kids from divorced families:
  - Adolescents from divorced families were more likely to experiment with drugs
  - Overall increase in adolescents and teens who begin with smoking tobacco
  - Teens were more likely to succumb to peer pressure to drink alcohol & take drugs, especially gateway drugs like marijuana
  - Divorced kids are more likely to hang out with kids who do drugs
  - If parents experiment with drugs, kids are more likely to do drugs
- Common reason for increase is due to lack of family cohesion as well as child's increased lack of social conformity.

# Increased Risk of Suicide



- A person dies by suicide in Texas apx every 2 hours
- 2nd largest cause of death of people age 10-34 in US including Texas
- 10-14 year olds successful suicide attempts from 2000-2020 increased 35%.
- 15-19 year olds successful suicide attempts increased to nearly 40% in same time period.
- 2017 saw apx 11,400 suicide attempts
- All ethnicities and races saw increase between 2000 and 2020.
- Suicide rates among males increased 35.2%, Females 39.5%

• Report on Suicide and Suicide Prevention in Texas 2022 Update

# Suicide & Suicidal Ideation Among Children of Divorced Parents



- Children of divorced adults had an increased chance of suicide.
- Children who had experience both divorce and abuse, the chances of attempting suicide is 50% greater than children who have neither.
- Add depression with the divorce, children had a strong likelihood of at least thinking about killing themselves (Fuller-Thompson & Dalton, 2011).



# What Can We Do?????

1. Parents need to put their children first and stop the fight with their ex.
2. The Court system needs to stop making the divorce process so combative.
3. Stop making our children property to be divided like they are a possession, it just might save their life.



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