

**ROEDER AND POLANSKY FAMILY AND CHILD ASSOCIATES**

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I. Optimal conditions to facilitate a child's post-divorce adjustment are these  
Four Critical factors-

- Low parental conflict
- High parental cooperation
- Ongoing relationships with both parents
- Parental encouragement of the child's relationship with the other parent

(See attached)

II. Concepts regarding conditions when there is High Parental Conflict and when a child refuses or resists contact with a parent are as follows:

Parent Alienation is often the label given to the condition when a child refuses contact.

Original Formulation by Richard Gardner, M.D.- described it as a campaign of denigration against a parent that has no justification and that results from the combination of two contributing factors: the programming or brainwashing by one parent and the child's own contributions to the vilification of the target parent.

Reformulation by Joan Kelly and Janet Johnston- Essentially advances the theory that there are additional and more complex reasons that a child may refuse contact with a parent. They have advanced the following typologies:

Affinity- Child has a preference for one parent

Alienation- Child's relationship has been damaged by action from the other parent- "the alienating parent".

Enmeshment- Overly “close” relationship between parent and child. Boundaries between the parent and child are not adequately established making separation difficult.

Estrangement- Behaviors that are directly and/or indirectly exhibited by a parent that creates resistance in the child to being with them.

Alliance- Child demonstrates a loyalty to one parent.

Alignment- Parent has created a closeness with a child that has often historically precluded closeness with the other parent.

Kelly and Johnson have also described reinforcing behaviors of the rejected parent that may strengthen the child’s resistance.

Passivity and Withdrawal- Responds with decreasing contact and/or interest in child.

Counter rejection- Due to hurt and/or rejection, parents respond with rejection of child.

Rigid Parenting- Lack of empathy, harshness toward child.

Because of the complexity of the variables now hypothesized to be involved in a child’s resistance, it is most reasonable to proceed first with a comprehensive assessment of all family members before any intervention. Further, it is clear that the sooner the assessment, the sooner the intervention, and timely intervention leads to a greater possibility of positive outcomes.

In this assessment, a mental health professional, trained in family systems therapy and knowledgeable about the effects of divorce on children, would consider all of the above. In addition, if separation has already occurred, the assessment would also focus on the “gatekeeping” behavior of the parents.

(see attachment)

## **Co-Parenting The Four Critical Factors to a Child's Positive Post-Divorce Adjustment**

- Low parental conflict
- High parental cooperation
- Ongoing relationships with both parents
- Parental encouragement of the child's relationship with the other parent

These four factors are the most critical elements to a child's divorce adjustment. This finding is the primary conclusion of every major study conducted on the effect of divorce on children. It has also been the overwhelming finding experienced by therapists dealing with divorce. It is not divorce itself, but the degree that parents can create these positive factors for children that will determine the child's adjustment to divorce. Therefore, it is rather how the parents handle the divorce that will most influence their child's experience.

The effect of chronic extreme conflict on children is well documented. It can destroy self-esteem, gender identification and socialization. It can teach children maladaptive ways of handling anger and conflict; it can undermine their chance of ever having loving, intimate relationships. It can damage the child's development. In order to develop normally, children need to be with and love both parents and they need the permission and approval of both parents to do so freely. Conflict destroys them internally with anger, anxiety and depression, and externally as they do not benefit from the involvement of both parents.

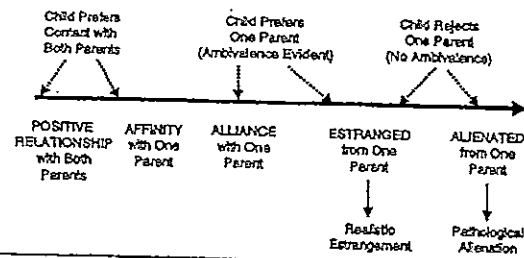


Figure 1. A continuum of children's relationships with parents after separation and divorce.

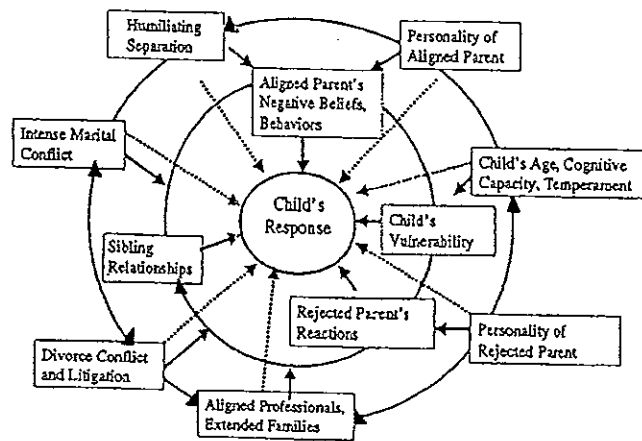


Figure 2. Background factors, intervening variables, and the child's response.

Table 1  
Gatekeeping Continuum

Ranges in Attitudes/Behavior from Facilitative Gatekeeping (FG) to Restrictive Gatekeeping (RG)	
Very Facilitative	→ Cooperative → Disengaged → Restrictive → Very Restrictive
Proactive Toward Other Parent	→ Severely Alienating Behaviors
Inclusive of Other Parent	→ Marginalizes Other Parent
Boosts Image of Other Parent	→ Derogates Other Parent
Ongoing Efforts at Communication	→ Refuses to Communicate
Flexible Time-sharing	→ Rigid Adherence to Parenting Time Schedule
Ensures Child's Opportunity to Develop Relationship with Other Parent	→ Severe Child Alienation

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When co-parents conflict, kids...

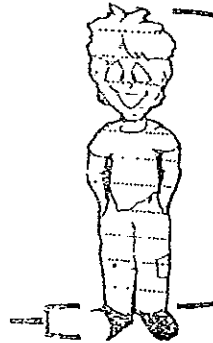
- ❖ Some children are constitutionally more "robust" or "invulnerable"
- ❖ Research has yet to clarify how duration, severity, context and other conflict variables interact with child variables (e.g., temperament, IQ, gender) to determine impact.
- ❖ Trauma research demonstrates that children who have a single consistent anchor can be enough. This is the rationale behind psychotherapy as a "port in the storm" for the child.

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But for most kids, development is compromised

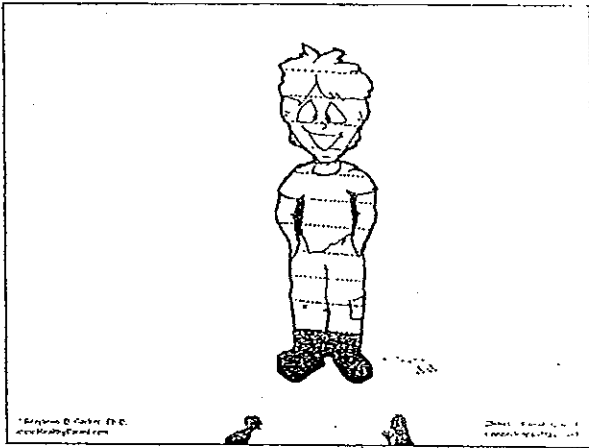
Percentage of child's finite emotional resources devoted to coping with co-parental conflict



Percentage of child's finite resources available for playing, exploring, learning and growing

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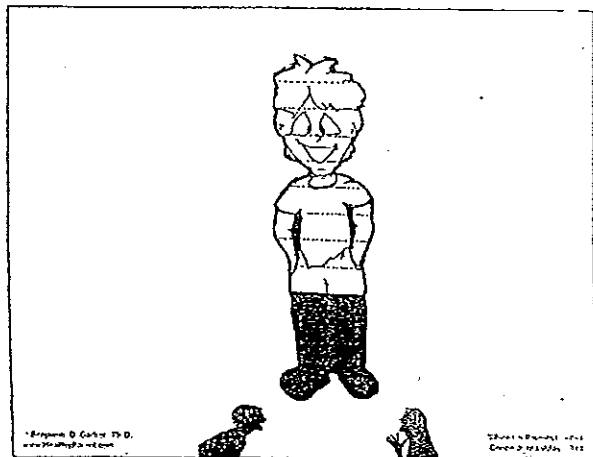
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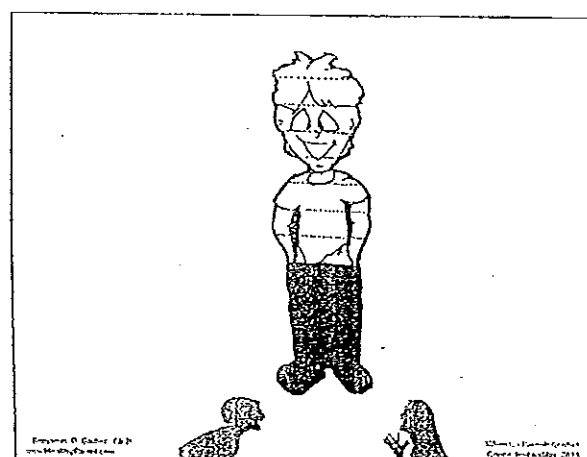
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