

## What educators can do to help their students and help reduce family conflict

There are a number of things that educators can do to help children without getting caught “in the middle”.

- ❑ **Do not interpret a court Order or take the word of any one parent.** If a court Order does not say that a parent cannot see one of their children at school, then do not assume this. Educators should promote healthy involvement of any parent with their child.
- ❑ If there appears to be some kind of conflict between parents, then tell the parents to obtain the services of a neutral third party, such as a family coordinator or mediator. Try to keep the school out of direct negotiations between parents.
- ❑ **Never assume that a parent is a "risk" to their child.** No educator should be denying contact between a child and any one of the parents at school without a court Order specifically stating so. Parents of separation or divorce should be treated no differently than any other parent.
- ❑ **Encourage and promote parental involvement at the school.** Studies show that parent involvement at school, especially with non-custodial parents, can have a positive impact on a child's performance at school.
- ❑ **Participate on a local Family Justice Review Committee or Court Watch group in your area.** Help bring about positive change for children and families in the community.
- ❑ **If a parent insists that the school keep the other parent away, then tell the parent to produce a court Order where this is stated.** If a parent gets pushy, all the more reason to be suspicious of their motives. In that case tell them to take the matter to court and have the court be more specific. In this way, the other parent can have his/her side heard appropriately by the court.

Educators can play a vital role to reduce conflict in families going through separation or divorce by maintaining neutrality and respecting the rights of both parents to be a part of their children's lives

**Let children and families in our community know that schools are a place where a child's education comes first and that schools are not going to be used as a battleground by hostile and controlling parents.**

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For further information about the rights of children of divorce, contact the local organization indicated below

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# Information for educators concerning families of separation or divorce

*A public awareness initiative sponsored by*



**Family Justice Review Committee**

*Helping ensure fairness, justice, equality and accountability for children and families in our community*

## **KNOW THE FACTS!**

**Every year in Canada**, thousands of children and their families are devastated as a result of litigation in the family court system. Many families end up losing their homes, their children, their life savings, their jobs, their future income, and their dignity as result of the ravages in the court system. Normal, everyday families that once had a home and enjoyed the ordinary pleasures of life, find themselves in financial ruin.

Many citizens agree that in many cases the adversarial legal system itself is responsible for this devastation. Unethical and unfair court practices create unnecessary delays, deliberately intended to prevent justice and to pit one parent against the other. Parental relationships and family ties with children are often destroyed forever and often the loving relationship that a child once shared with two parents and two extended families is destroyed by the legal process with little thought for the child.

In recent years, educators have inadvertently been made unwilling participants of a family's conflict. Many educators, acting without clear policy and with little understanding of the dynamics of family conflict, have often reacted in ways which have served to intensify the family's conflict, create bad feeling between the parent and school and further cause emotional harm to children. The lack of awareness by teachers and school officials of how to effectively and fairly deal with the growing problems of families of separation or divorce has been responsible for harm to a great number of children.

The vast majority of problems involving children of separation or divorce at school are created when one parent, usually the custodial one, will attempt to manipulate teachers and

school officials into a position that supports them in their attempts to create interference with their child's relationship with the other parent or members of the other parent's extended family during the times the child is in attendance at school.

Often, the parent who is attempting to manipulate the education system is doing so out of anger and revenge against the other parent. Seldom are they acting in the interests of their child. Teachers and school officials must be vigilant to ensure that they don't get drawn into the conflict by taking sides and reacting in a manner that is damaging to the child or acting outside of the law.

### **What is the Family Justice Review Committee**

**The Family Justice Review Committee** is a group of justice minded citizens from the community whose purpose is to assist families who may be experiencing difficulties in matters involving fairness, justice, equality and accountability. A local Justice Committee works in conjunction with other committees in other communities under the umbrella of the National Association for public and private Accountability (N.A.P.P.A.)

The committee helps reduce family conflict by:

- 1) Developing educational and resource materials for members of the public.
- 2) Formulating policies and procedures that help reduce family conflict.
- 3) Arranging mediation services
- 4) Directing family members to a number of educational and health related services in the community.
- 5) Minimizing the parents involvement with the courts through research and investigation and by obtaining community input into

recommendations for each family.

Parents who alienate children from their former spouse are perpetrating a form of **CHILD ABUSE**. Educators must make themselves aware of parents who alienate children.

### **Some signs of an alienating and controlling parent:**

- Requests that the non-custodial parent not be allowed to visit the child while the child is at school (such as lunches and recesses, even though the custodial parent is not able to be there themselves.
- Tries to prevent the other parent from participating on school trips, classroom activities or other events.
- Insists that report cards and other school documents be given to them and not the other parent.
- Makes personal comments about the non-custodial parent, which are not relevant to the best interests of the child in an attempt to put the other parent in a bad light.
- Claims that the child says that they do not want to see the other parent (Never accept the word of only one parent)
- The controlling parent will try to keep the non-custodial parent isolated from teachers and school officials. These parents will attempt to prevent educators from seeing the truth about the child's relationship with the non-custodial parent. They will attempt to impede any routine communication between educators and the non-custodial parent.
- Appears to be disturbed by the other parent's presence at school functions and seem to go out of their way to avoid the other parent at such activities. They will walk away and ignore the other parent.