

May 29, 2018

Press Release – For Immediate Distribution

Psychological Benefits for Bill C-78.

APNL welcomes Bill C-78, which was tabled by the Liberal Party, for modernizing current federal divorce legislation to reflect many issues including:

- Less adversarial language by using terms “parenting time” and “parenting orders” to replace “custody” and “access”
- Focusing on defining criteria for the best interests of a child in a divorce
- Measures to address family violence.

Psychologists agree that children require the psychological protection of their parents and primary caretakers during the transition period of a divorce (Behrman, L. and Zimmerman, J., 2018). Focusing on parenting rather than custody and access ensures that the focus is on the child, rather than on the areas of conflict between parents. Furthermore, measures to address family violence may help build reliance on children. Psychologists have created evidence-based methods to help couples and families manage the process of a divorce, and are trained in creating measures and criteria for issues such as what is in the best interest of a child.

Parents play a major role in how children adjust to a divorce. Here are some strategies that can reduce the psychological toll divorce has on children (Amy Morin, 2018):

- **Co-parent peacefully.** Intense conflict between parents has been shown to increase children’s distress. Overt hostility, such as screaming and threatening one another has been linked to behaviour problems in children. But minor tension may also increase a child’s distress. If you struggle to co-parent with your ex-spouse, seek professional help.
- **Don’t put kids in the middle.** Asking kids to choose which parent they like best or giving them messages to give to other parents isn’t appropriate. Kids who find themselves caught in the middle are more likely to experience depression and anxiety.
- **Maintain a healthy relationship with your child.** Positive communication, parental warmth, and low levels of conflict may help children adjust to divorce better. A healthy parent-child relationship has been shown to help kids develop higher self-esteem and better academic performance following divorce.
- **Use consistent discipline.** Establish age appropriate rules and follow through with when necessary. Studies show effective discipline after divorce reduces delinquency and improves academic performance.
- **Monitor adolescents closely.** When parents pay close attention to what teens are doing and who they spend their time with, adolescents are less likely to exhibit behavior

problems following a divorce. That means a reduced chance of using substances and fewer academic problems.

- **Empower your child.** Kids who doubt their ability to deal with the changes and those who see themselves as helpless victims are more likely to experience mental health problems. Teach your child that although dealing with divorce is difficult, he has the mental strength to handle it.
- **Teach specific coping skills.** Kids with active coping strategies, like problem solving skills and cognitive restructuring skills, adapt better to divorce. Teach your child how to manage his thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in a healthy way.
- **Help your child feel safe and secure.** Fear of abandonment and concerns about the future can cause a lot of anxiety. But helping your child feel loved, safe and secure can reduce the risk of mental health problems.
- **Attend a parent education program.** There are many programs available to help reduce the impact divorce has on kids. Parents are taught co-parenting skills and strategies for helping kids cope with the adjustments.
- **Seek professional help for yourself.** Reducing your stress level can be instrumental in helping your child. Practice self-care and consider talk therapy or other resources to help you adjust to the changes in your family.

Divorce Statistics (Statistics Canada)

- About 1.2 million separated or divorced Canadians have children under the age of 18
- Most often the mother's home was the child's primary residence after a separation or divorce reported by 70% of separated or divorced parents. Another 15% indicated that the child mainly lived with the father, while 9% reported equal living time between the two parents' homes.
- The majority of parents whose child lived primarily with their ex-partner spent either no time or less than three months in the last year with their child: 18% had no contact with their child and 44% spent some time but less than 3 months.
- Just over one-third (35%) of parents indicated that major decisions on the health religion and education of their child were made either jointly or alternatively with their ex-partner.
- Parents often had written arrangements on child residency and time sharing at 59% and 45%, respectively. In 2011, parents were equally as likely to work with lawyers to draft the written arrangement, as they were to go to court for a judge-ordered arrangement.
- Over half (53%) of parents reported fully following the arrangements on time sharing, while another one-quarter (25%) followed them most of the time .The top reason for non-compliance cited was the ex-partner cancelling his or her own time with the child.
- About three-quarters (74%) of separated or divorced parents were satisfied with the time spent with their child. Levels of satisfaction varied based on the actual time spent with the child and the primary residence of the child

- In 2011, 21% of separated or divorced parents were paying some form of financial support for their children, while 26% were receiving child support. Payment amounts ranged from under \$1,000 to over \$10,000 a year. Most commonly, child support payments ranged from \$3,000 to \$4,999 annually, and were paid on a monthly basis
- Over half (55%) of all written arrangements on child support were registered with a maintenance enforcement program. Registration increased with the level of legal involvement, with 76% of judge ordered arrangements being registered with a program.

Useful links/resources:

Successfully Parenting Apart : A Toolkit <https://www.cba.org/Sections/Family-Law/Resources/Resources/2017/Successfully-Parenting-Apart?lang=en-CA>

My Parents Live Apart (book for ages 10-15) <http://publiclegalinfo.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/My-Parents-Live-Apart1.pdf>

Families Change – Guide for Kids, Teens and Parents <https://nl.familieschange.ca/en>

Custody and Parenting <http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/fl-df/parent/index.html>

How Children React at Different Ages and Stages <http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/fl-df/parent/mp-fdp/p8.html>

Media interviews with a Psychologist on this (or other topics), can be arranged by contacting Dr. Janine Hubbard at 682-0235 or janine@janinehubbard.com