

Chapter 10-Divorced Families

While I have already discussed some examples of the way in which control can affect the family system, there still remains another very prominent example that is extremely prevalent in society today--divorce. This chapter specifically involves families that experience divorce and not couples who do not have children. Divorce is so common that it could easily be considered the norm. Much has been written on the effects of divorce on families and numerous studies have been done as well. Yet, there is still one area of divorce that is often ignored or taken for granted and it has an extremely adverse and powerful effect on the family system long after the legal battles are over and the separation (both physical and emotional) take place. When a couple divorces and a new boyfriend, girlfriend, step-dad, or step-mom comes along, care must be taken so that the natural parents still remain the primary disciplinarians. I have heard of a child accepting discipline from a non-biological parent, but what the long-term effects are on the child I do not know. If the discipline is provided in a respectful manner, perhaps it can be accomplished. However, if the biological parent who has less custody or spends less time with the child finds out that someone else is disciplining his or her child, what would the reaction be? Perhaps he or she might encourage the child not to listen to the new boyfriend, girlfriend, or step-parent, and you can imagine what chaos might unfold. What does all of this have to do with control? If a non-biological parent exerts his or her will on a child (either because he or she was asked to by the natural parent or because he or she willingly took on the role), all sorts of conflict may occur. The child may outwardly refuse it or, as mentioned, the other natural parent may encourage the child to oppose the step-parent all together. What is the end result? Conflict and fighting--a

chaotic household.

While at times it may be more appropriate for children to grow up under shared custody, it is often the biological or natural mother who becomes the primary or exclusive caretaker. Examples in which the biological or natural father assumes exclusive custody exist, but these are far more infrequent, as the father is often unwilling or unable to share custody. It is very important here to recognize the effects that roles can have on the family system itself. All of us assume many different roles. A male may assume the roles of husband, father, uncle, brother, employee, boss, etc. A female may assume the roles of mother, wife, sister, aunt, friend, employee, or boss. Couples who have had children, whether they were ever married or not, often forget that even if they break up or get divorced, they must always continue to assume the role of primary disciplinarians despite no longer having the roles of boyfriend, girlfriend, husband, or wife. They never lose the roles of biological or natural parent, whether they live together or not. They must lay down and enforce explicit rules for their children to live and grow by.