

# Fathers in High Conflict Divorce: The Effect on Father's Well-Being

**By:**

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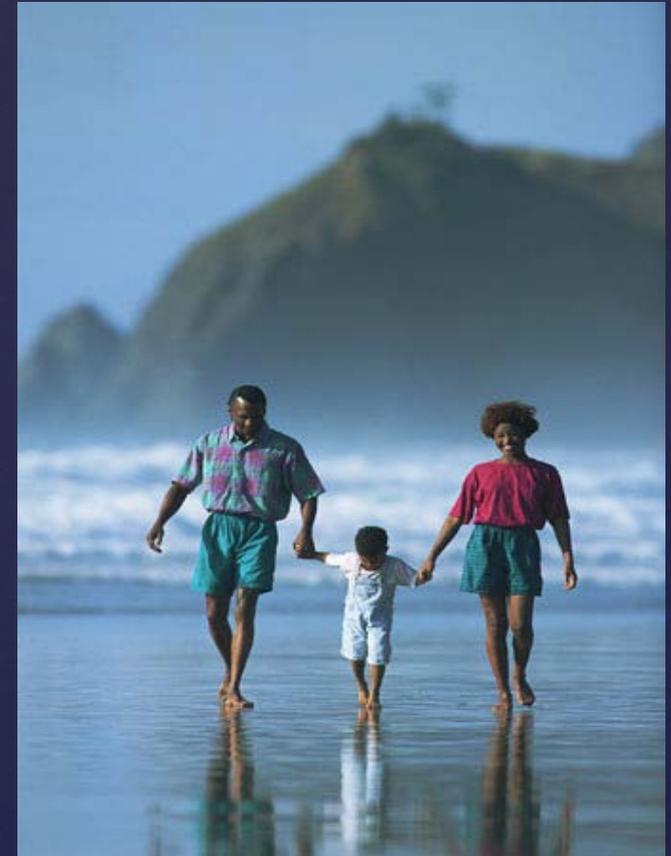
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# Fathers through divorce

## Summary of a Review of Literature

- Divorce rates have remained steady at ~50%
- 15% of father's are primary parents following divorce, and 35% see their children several times per month.
- 24% of divorces are considered chronically high conflict
- Multi-Model Family Intervention Plan (Walter, 2011).
  - Estrangement
  - Alienation



# Study Design



Qualitative Study Interviewing 4 fathers across three years

- Multiple source of data time points
  - Interview an average of 24 visits, including an initial two hour assessment, with follow-up sessions an average of twelve one hour interviews during year one, and six one hour interviews during years two and three.
  - The focus of each interview was to explore changes across time and the impact of high conflict on the father's well-being

# The Fathers' Stories

Father 1: 48 years old, married twice. He had two children from his first marriage, and five children from his second marriage (ages 18 months to 19 years). The first marriage was low conflict with collaborative parenting. The second marriage failed after 16 years, with the mother leaving unexpectedly, taking the daughter and leaving four sons with the father. Conflict arose when the mother demanded custody of all five children, requesting all five children join her in another state with her boyfriend.



# The Fathers' Stories

Father 2: 43 years old was married 13 years, with this being the first marriage for father and second marriage for mother. Mother left the marriage following an affair. The couple had one son together, age 12 at the time of the divorce, who was previously diagnosed with ASD-mild, and PTSD, with associated explosive outbursts and academic failure secondary to behavioral and emotional problems. The child transitioned back and forth from parent to parent depending on 1) the child's behavior, and 2) the parents' level of conflict. Child Welfare became involved barring father, and then mother from the child.

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# The Fathers' Stories

Father 3: Age 52 years and married for 23 years. They had two children together (ages 16 and 12 at the time of the divorce). Father originally gained full custody and 70% of parenting time with the children. Mother fought this decision, and eventually convinced the daughter (youngest child) to come live with her, and refuse to talk to or visit father. In spite of court mandated counseling and parenting time, father did not see his daughter following this action by the mother.



Father 4: 41 years of age, and was married 13 years, and had two sons ages 5 and 7 years. Following a DV incident between father and his GF three years after the divorce, the mother fought for and gained full custody and 100% parenting time. After seven years, the father has not been able to see his children.



# The Fathers' Stories



# Themes (Attrude-Stirling, 2001) . . . . .

1. Fathers recognized alienation tactics, but were helpless to stop these tactics.
2. Fathers all agreed that the high conflict and subsequent change in parenting time, whether increased or decreased, negatively impacted the father-child relationship
3. Fathers all expressed concern about their child's well being, including worsening of depression, school performance, behavior, and peer and sibling relationships

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- “Should I give up?” (after large legal fees, months of not seeing children, ongoing conflict) (3 of the fathers)
- “Why do I want to see my children? I want to read them a story, watch their sports, take them skiing, .... I want to be a father.” (Father of two sons)
- “My life is on hold until I see my children again.” (Father of one son)
- “I watch my daughter quit all that we did together; sports, school,... I am helpless to do anything about it.” (Father of two children)
- “My sons think I am a monster. These are the same children I used to spend so much time with, and having so much fun with; their mother has ruined all of that.” (Father of two sons)

# 9 The Voice of Fathers

1. Three of the four fathers filed for bankruptcy
2. Two fathers lost their jobs directly related to the high conflict divorce
3. Three of the fathers ended up living in a different city more than 60 miles away from one or more of their children.
4. One father gave up.
5. Three children refused to have anything to do with their fathers.

## Other Consequences

- Fathers' well-being is affected by high conflict divorce. The term high conflict divorce does not capture the long term consequences of alienation from a parent due to another parents' actions and hostility.
- Does our society truly embrace the idea that all children benefit from two parents actively involved in their life?
- Why does society alienate parents after divorce, but supports two parents if still married?

Future: 4 more fathers added to the study to learn more about in depth experiences of fathers experiencing high conflict divorce.

# Discussion & Summary

# References

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**Note.** This is not a complete list, but some of the hallmark studies that guided this research.