

## *Symptoms of Emotional Damage to Children of High-Conflict Divorce*

The short-term symptoms of emotional damage on a child are usually obvious. The child, caught in a conflict between warring parents, and not wishing to offend either one, daily walks a tightrope between them. Over time, children of high-conflict divorce learn what pleases each parent and conduct themselves accordingly. They say what each parent wants to hear, and it is not unusual for the child to join in criticism of whichever parent is not present at the time. It is common for such children to tell each parent that they want to live with that parent. All of the child's energy goes into surviving in the battle between the parents. Is it any wonder that teachers soon report an attention deficit and that school grades fall? Is it any surprise that the child shows great suppressed anger and starts to act aggressively toward playmates? Can you blame a child for being angry at being put in an impossible position by people over whom the child has no control?

The long-term emotional damage to children as a result of the improper conduct of their parents during a divorce inhibits their ability to lead happy and productive lives within the society. The alienated child will have a skewed view of adults and of the gender of the parent who is the victim of the alienation. The abandoned child will find it hard to fully trust as an adult, especially those who should be very close and deeply loved. Indeed some abandoned children may spend their early adult years in the unhealthy search for a mate who will serve in the role of the parent who has abandoned the child. The child who witnesses abuse, physical or verbal, is far more likely to so abuse family members later in life.

Children who walk a tightrope, telling each parent what that parent wants to hear, over time lose touch with their own true feelings and needs. They have lost part of their grasp on reality. Such a loss can produce serious emotional disorders that may — without serious therapeutic interventions — last a lifetime. At the least, it is likely that these children will find it difficult to establish a lifelong love relationship.