

# GAMES PARENTS PLAY

## ♥ Loyalty Choices

Parents may demand loyalty from their children by expecting them to feel about the other parent as they do. The child's positive feelings about the other parent are seen as a betrayal. The child, fearing rejection by one or both parents, must walk between enemy camps.

## ♥ Co-Parent/Stepparent Put-Downs

A parent poisons the child's feelings and ideas about the other parent using negative comments. Parents may do this to relieve pent up anger, or because they feel they can only win the child's affection by alienating them from the other parent.

## ♥ "Parent To The Rescue"

This game supports conflict between the child and the other parent.

EXAMPLE: "If you had been with me, I would have made sure your favorite shirt was clean".

## ♥ "Sidelong Instigator"

Parent initiates conflict between the other parent and child, by pointing out the problems or inconsistencies that may have occurred, with the goal of starting an argument between the child and the other parent.

## ♥ The "Messenger"

When parents feel they can't or don't want to talk directly to each other, they may ask their children to carry messages. Parents then lose control of the content of the message, and take the chance that the children may change or distort the information, thus fueling the fire between angry parents. Making children messengers gives them too much power, and can be a painful burden for them.

## ♥ Time With Children As Reward And Punishment

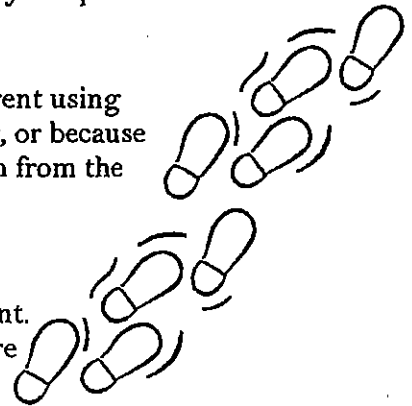
Withholding visits because you are angry with the child about something, or using visits as a reward or punishment based on behavior.

## ♥ The "Money Game"

Due to the financial crunch that occurs when parents divorce/separate, parents make their financial problems known to the children, often blaming the other parent for their difficulties. This information may scare the children or make them feel insecure.

## ♥ "Disneyland Dad" Or "Merry Mom"

As parents struggle with how to treat their children after divorce, they may, out of guilt or insecurity, try to give their children anything and everything to make up for the divorce. Children may come to expect special gifts, treats and privileges on a regular basis, and may not develop a realistic relationship with the parent or realistic view of family life.



# GAMES RESULT IN

## ♥ Parentification

Children may be given an unhealthy amount of responsibility or more responsibility than they can handle. Overburdened children are forced to grow up too fast, and may miss out on some of the important developmental stages of childhood. It is very difficult to revert back to the parent having power when suddenly you have to deal with teenage issues and limits.

## ♥ Emotional/Psychological Distress

It is very stressful to feel caught in the middle, wanting to please both parents. Because of a child's association with both parents, they often feel criticism is targeted at them as well.

## ♥ Negative Feelings Toward Parent

Children may internalize negative feelings toward one or both of their parents. As children get older, they recognize the difference between a parent who is critical and one who is supportive of the other parent.

# GAMES CHILDREN PLAY

## ♥ I'll Be On Your Side If You Give Me What I Want

Children sometimes make it a point to tell a parent what the other parent gave to them or did for them. They do this to manipulate, if it ultimately has the desired effect.

## ♥ Mom/Dad Lets Me

Children sometimes do this in order to get what they want. Parents either must communicate regularly to present a united front, or say something to the effect of: "That may be what happens when you are at your Dad's house, but at this house, the rule is . . ."

## ♥ Refusal To Spend Time/Threats To Leave

Children may also do this to get their own way or to feel safe and secure. Parents are cautioned not to react with anger, fear or hurt, but rather to talk to their child about their feelings of fear, anger, or disappointment. Respond to the anger, not the message.

## ♥ Mom/Dad's More Fun

Children may say this to get what they want or to make parents feel guilty, again so they can have special privileges or activities. As children grow, they will learn to appreciate the stable parent.

