

Inter-Parental Conflict and Family Separation Prof Gordon Harold (University of Cambridge)

A simple summary of the evidence as regards Inter-Parental Conflict and Family Separation:

- Family separation is always a stressful experience for children and teens **in the short term**. But what drives the **long term impact** on them is the level of conflict they witness before, during and following parental separation.
- It's normal for it to take about 2 years for children and teens to adjust to a family separation. The higher the levels of conflict, however, the harder it is to adjust and the longer the ripple effects continue for poor outcomes (e.g. mental health).
- High levels of conflict between parents are shown to have many poor outcomes for children. These include anxiety and depression, academic failure, substance abuse, conduct problems, criminality, peer problems and adversely affected brain development. Patterns of conflict can even be passed on to the next generation.
- These outcomes stretch on into adulthood. Acrimonious parental conflict is a common childhood factor in adults who experience mental ill health, relationship difficulties, substance abuse, homelessness, criminality.
- By contrast, actions designed to reduce the level of inter-parental conflict are associated with positive long-term outcomes. There are clear improvements in mental health, behaviour, school outcomes and long-term relationships.
- These positive outcomes have benefits not just for the individuals but for the whole of society. They produce widespread cost savings, ranging from the education system to the health and social care system, the civil and criminal justice system and they also produce positive future employment outcomes.

Bibliography

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