By Julie Garrison

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Children go through more heartache during divorce than I could detail on a thousand pages.

Divorcing parents can become so wrapped up in their own turmoil that the children become collateral damage.

Here are three examples of behavior that can hurt children:

- Donna has temporary custody of her 12-year-old son. She and her new boyfriend bring the child to every hearing in Donna's long, protracted divorce. At every hearing, the judge sends the child out of the courtroom to sit in the hallway before he proceeds with the parents' divorce matter on the docket.

- Jerri has uncontested custody of their children. The children visit with their dad on the weekends. Jerri has instructed her sons, age three and five, to call their father *"Half-a-Daddy,"* and they comply with their mother's command.

- Pam and Donald have had a tempestuous marriage from the beginning. They fight openly and loudly in front of their two little girls, aged four and seven. Pam threatens divorce, while Donald threatens to take the children where Pam will never find them. After they separate and file for divorce, Pam and Donald's young daughters live in fear of losing their mother forever.

The above anecdotal accounts are from the real divorces of real people. Why do parents do this to their kids?

Love v. Hate

They say that there is a fine line between the emotions of love and hate. In a divorce, many parents cross over that imaginary line and begin conducting their lives from a hateful point of view.

This is not only mentally and physically unhealthy for the parents, it can cause lifetime damage to the children they love.

Parenting Tips:
11 Ways To Keep The Children Out of Your Divorce

Moving On With Life after Divorce

Some divorced people are incapable of putting a bad marriage behind them. Physically, they are divorced, but mentally they are still fighting the battles of their now-defunct marriage.

When this happens, many of these parents are never fully able to move forward with their lives because their anger and resentment have permeated every aspect of their lives, including their children.

None of the parents in my examples are bad people. They are angry people who used their children to injure their estranged spouses.

Children in a tumultuous marriage/divorce are so proximately close to the fray that their parents often give in to the temptation to use their children as a weapon or bargaining chip.

When emotions are high, these parents are not thinking clearly and their priorities become overturned. Why else would a rational adult use his or her child to inflict near-mortal emotional wounds to an ex-husband or ex-wife?

Psychologist and noted divorce researcher Dr. Judith S. Wallerstein has this to say about divorce and its effect on children:

"Divorce is a life-transforming experience. After divorce, childhood is different. Adolescence is different. Adulthood — with the decision to marry or not and have children or not — is different. Whether the outcome is good or bad, the whole trajectory of an individual's life is profoundly altered by the divorce experience."

With over half of all marriages ending in divorce and an even higher divorce rate for couples in subsequent marriages, I wonder how those children are faring.

Are they really coping with their parents' divorces, or are they simply blunting their pain and detaching themselves from the adult conflict that they are developmentally and emotionally unable to effectively process?

Julie Garrison has been writing articles and short stories for the past 10 years and has appeared in several magazines and e-zines.