

## ***B. Ways Children Get Caught in the Middle***

Let's look at a few ways children get caught in the middle during and after a divorce. The first way is by overhearing conflict between parents.



On a new flip chart page, write:

Ways Children Get Caught in the Middle

1.) Open Conflict

If you and your co-parent allow your differences to boil over into open conflict, you will put your child at risk of long-term emotional damage. The greater the intensity of your conflict and the longer it lasts, the greater the chance of injury to your child.

Pass out Handout #1: From the Child's Point of View.

Let's take a look at video that shows how open conflict between parents affects a child. As you watch, imagine what it would feel like to be Rachel, the little girl. When we're finished watching, I'll give you a minute or two to fill in the chart on the handout I just gave you. In the two boxes next to where it says "Video #1," write down what you think Rachel is **FEELING**, then what you believe is the **REASON** she feels that way.



### ***PLAY VIDEO #1: Open Conflict***

Now fill in the two boxes next to "Video #1" on your handout. (Give them about a minute.)

Who will share what you wrote? There are no right or wrong answers.

If the group does not feel comfortable answering questions, just read the answers yourself. Also, since time is limited, you may want to read the answers when no one is forthcoming.

You can see in the scene you just watched that it's not the divorce itself that causes emotional pain for the little girl, Rachel; it's the actions of her parents.

When you imagined that you were Rachel, what were you feeling?

- Anxiety
- Fear
- Uncertainty; insecurity

Why do you think you were feeling that way?

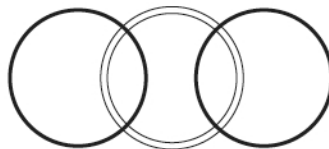
- It is upsetting to hear parents fight
- Parents aren't supposed to fight.

In understanding child development, we have established that one of the most important roles of parents is to protect children. When a child does not feel protected, she feels more anxious. If this occurs repeatedly, the child feels insecure and like she is "walking on eggshells" around her parents.

## STEP 1



On a new flip chart page, draw:



Point out the two areas where the rings overlap, and fill in one of the overlapping areas, showing that this part is damaged. (PowerPoint® users: Click to display the shaded area.)

**Think about some of the negative things that you have said about the other parent in front of your child. This is an example of divorce abuse, and it can cause emotional damage to your child.**



### ***OPTIONAL ACTIVITY: Self-Esteem Balloon***

Materials: A large, un-inflated balloon

**When you say something positive to your child, it increases her self-esteem. Think of this balloon as your child's self-esteem. Watch what happens when I feed the self-esteem.**

***“Wow, you have really done well on your report card!”***

Blow into the balloon and hold it so the air does not come out.

***“The best day of my life was when you were born!”***

Blow into the balloon and hold it.

***“You are really talented with math, just like your dad!”***

Blow into the balloon and hold it.

***“Your father is such a jerk. He is so irresponsible!”***

Let all the air out of the balloon.

**I'm sure you get the point.**

So far, we've covered two ways that a child can feel caught in the middle. Now let's talk about a third way: family members' words and actions.



Go back to the previous flip chart page and add #3 to the list:

Ways Children Get Caught in the Middle

1.) Open Conflict

2.) Negative Talk

**3.) Family Members' "Support"**