

This guide is intended to give you the tools to regain and keep the focus on your child during and after your divorce. You'll learn to recognize emotionally abusive behavior and prevent yourself from engaging in it.

On this journey, the choices parents make that have the greatest negative impact on a child include *open conflict* between parents, *negative talk* about the other parent, and letting the child get *caught in the middle* between two warring parents.

Examples of Divorce Abuse

- Putting your child in the middle of a conflict
- Using your child to manipulate the other parent
- Talking openly about putting the other parent in jail or taking him or her back to court
- Involving the police when there is no physical threat
- Involving your child in the legal aspects of the divorce
- Leaning on your child for emotional support
- Continuously blaming the other parent for the divorce or its results
- Playing the victim
- Using your child to communicate messages between you and the other parent
- Neglecting your child's physical and emotional needs
- Overindulging your child or avoiding discipline in order to become the "preferred" parent
- Ignoring the other parent (giving him or her "the silent treatment") when your child is present
- Having arguments with the other parent when your child is present
- Interrupting or blocking your child's time with their other parent
- Withholding your child's possessions, such as a musical instrument or sports equipment, to control or punish the other parent
- Neglecting to take your child to activities just to hurt the other parent
- Interrogating your child to get information about the other parent
- Withholding information so that your child misses opportunities to share activities with both parents



REFLECTIVE LISTENING PRACTICE

Directions: For each of the following examples, reflect back what the speaker is saying. Do not add to or remove anything from the person's comments. Remember, you are not agreeing with the speaker when you reflect the person's thoughts and ideas. Finally, don't fall into the trap of trying to solve the problem—just reflect it.

Example #1

Your child says,

"I hate it when Daddy asks me questions about you and your boyfriend. Daddy wants to know every time you two are together. And he bugs me about how much money you're spending on me. I don't know what to say. If I tell him anything I feel like I'm a spy or something. If I don't answer him, he gets mad at me and I feel bad. He said I act like I love you more than him! I hate being divorced!"

Reflect back your child's concerns:

"So, you're feeling _____
when _____
What you'd really like is _____
_____. Is that right?"

Example #2

Your co-parent says,

"You never keep your word! You are always changing your plans. Don't you care what a poor example you're setting for our son? Don't you care how your behavior makes him feel? He cries when you forget to call and when you change your plans at the last minute. I'm the one who has to pick up the pieces when you hurt him. He needs for you to be involved and dependable."

Reflect back your co-parent's concerns:

"So what you're saying is you feel _____
when _____
What you'd really like is _____
_____. Is that right?"