

When Parents Fight It Is The Children Who Suffer

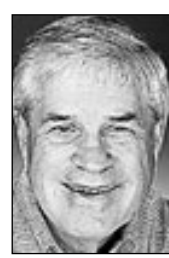
BY VAL FARMER

When parents argue in front of children, it is one of the most stressful events of childhood. It isn't the big blowout-type family argument or crisis that causes the harm. It is the daily hassles with marital conflict and family arguments that best predict whether a child will be affected. Frequent, intense and poorly resolved conflict is related to higher levels of children's problems.

Here are some findings researchers have found on the effects of marital conflict and hostility on symptoms of adolescent distress and the quality of their relationships with early teens.

1. Negative emotions spill over to relationships with children. Anger in one relationship will be a stimulus for anger and irritability in other close relationships. When parents argue with each other, they are more likely to become angry, irritating or controlling toward their children. Shifting from being angry and hostile in one relationship to being calm, deliberate and affectionate in another is difficult and improbable.

By paying close attention to their parents' conflict, a son or daughter becomes more sensitive to their parents' poor communication techniques toward him or her during disagreements. Teens' perception of parental unfairness in dis-



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cipline or logic compounds their anger and frustration when they feel frustrated in not getting their way or feel otherwise mistreated.

2. Marital fights often lead to distraction and depression in the parents. They become less effective in dealing with their children. Parents become absorbed in their marital problems and are unable to concentrate as much on their parenting practices. They have less energy, focus and patience with their children and their issues.

3. Teens feel less secure and more anxious when they are aware that their parents aren't getting along. They fear that one parent will leave the family to avoid the repetitive arguments. They also think friction with their parents is more personally threatening when they see their parents constantly fighting.

High family conflict produces low self-esteem, worries about an uncertain future and poorer coping with stress. Children experience distress over the emotional pain the parents are causing each other. Chronic strife increases frustration, anxiety and depression. They may avoid being home, spend more

time with their friends or even try using alcohol or drugs to keep from thinking about their quarreling parents. School performance also suffers.

4. Children from high conflict homes have a harder time learning to control their emotions. They are more prone to anger and violence. They may use a high conflict style to resolve problems with their peers, siblings or later in life when they become parents themselves.

If they feel helpless about their parents' conflict, they may learn to ignore or not examine the conflict. They distance themselves from it and emotionally shut down. They become desensitized to family conflict. They become less sensitive to others and learn to walk away or "clam up" in an unpleasant situation.

5. Loyalties become confused. Children can feel caught in the middle. They might side with one parent and reduce their emotional investment in the other parent. Family dynamics become really confused when parents seek allies among their children in the marital disputes.

The worst and most destructive argument parents can have in front of their kids is when they fight about each other's parenting skills. By arguing or undermining each other's authority in front of the children, parents set the

stage for manipulation and divided loyalties within the family. Short of verbal or physical abuse, parents should support each other's discipline in front of the children and negotiate their differences in private.

Some conflict is constructive, normal and OK. It is not the presence of marital disagreements that is the cause of the difficulty. It is the intensity and the frequency of the marital arguments.

Parents are role models for how to resolve problems. Children can learn to manage conflict within their own lives. However problems develop when conflict involves high levels of anger. How much anger can be tolerated is the question. Apparently not much. Children learn problem solving best in low conflict homes.

In homes with little strife, children are optimistic about getting along. They are more flexible, adaptive, and more open-minded and constructive in their approaches to problem solving. They believe in the rights and feelings of others and are more inclined to cooperate. They are more open in their communications.

The issue is not about whether marital arguments cause harm to parenting practices. The issue becomes what kinds of conflict cause harm, whether the conflict is about the children, whether it takes place in front of the

children or not, and what thresholds of intensity and frequency of arguments shift conflict from being a positive experience to a negative one.

For the sake of the children. Does all of this suggest that fighting parents should divorce for the sake of the children? No. The evidence is that divorce itself - independent of parental conflict, style of parenting or even earlier problems by children - has a negative impact in children's lives.

A remarriage can also have a negative impact. The number of major changes a child experiences has a cumulative effect on his or her psychological distress.

Better than divorce, the challenge is for parents to learn to communicate better, reduce conflict between themselves and learn to solve problems in an atmosphere of courtesy and respect. They will be happier and so will their children.

For more information on parenting and marital conflict, visit Val Farmer's website at www.valfarmer.com.

Val Farmer is a clinical psychologist specializing in family business consultation and mediation with farm families. He lives in Wildwood, Missouri and can be contacted through his website.

This column is sponsored by Lewis & Clark Behavioral Health.

'Kristin's Story' To Be Presented At The University Of South Dakota

VERMILLION — The heart-breaking portrayal of a daughter's death from suicide will be shared with students at The University of South Dakota during the program "Kristin's Story" at 7 p.m. on Thursday, Sept. 9. Presented by Nikki's Fund, "Kristin's Story" as told by her mother, Andrea Cooper, is open to the public and will be held at the Muenster University Center Ballroom on the USD campus.

This event, which details Cooper's moving account of her 20-year-old daughter Kristin's struggle with depression following an acquaintance rape as a college student, is part of Suicide Prevention Awareness Activities

at The U. Cooper began sharing Kristin's story in 1998 with campus communities across the United States.

"By sharing her daughter's story with campuses across the country, Andrea Cooper is hoping that students suffering from depression, for any reason, will seek help," said Janine Harris, manager of the Al Neuharth Media Center at USD, whose daughter Nicole Vallie Harris committed suicide on June 15, 2005. "With suicide claiming the lives of 30,000 people each year, it's important that we reach out to programs that support suicide prevention and other mental health needs for students."

In addition to the Sept. 9 evening program, Cooper will also share "Kristin's Story" with faculty and staff members during a noon forum at the Al Neuharth Media Center on Sept. 9.

National Suicide Prevention Week is Sept. 5-11 and culminates with the fourth annual Nikki's Fund 5K Run/Walk at Prentiss Park on Saturday, Sept. 11 in Vermillion. Nikki's Fund was established in memory of Nicole Vallie Harris and all proceeds from the 5K Run/Walk will be donated to Nikki's Fund. Nikki's Fund donations support suicide prevention programs and other mental health needs for USD students.

YC Announces New Educational Partnership

Yankton College and Eden Theological Seminary have announced a partnership to revitalize and sustain lay pastoral theological education in the South Dakota Conference and the Northern Plains Conference.

This educational program is directed at those who are seeking licensing for pastoral ministry, those who are participating in the multiple paths to ordination process, for continuing education for ministers and other lay leaders, and for adult education for lay persons looking for spiritual and theological education beyond that which they receive in their local congregation.

The South Dakota program launches Oct. 1-2 at the Chamberlain United Church of Christ, and the Northern Plains program is the following weekend on Oct. 8-9 at the Bismarck

United Church of Christ. Each session begins with a Clergy and Congregational Leadership Event. "The Church in an Electronic Age," with the Rev. Gregg Brekke, news director for the United Church of Christ and editor of United Church News. His sessions are designed for helping congregations, particularly rural congregations capture a vision for the role the Internet and electronic social media can play in the life of the congregation, as well as in evangelism.

The Saturday afternoon sessions of each weekend feature the initial class meeting of the credit courses for those engaged in the Yankton College Pastoral Theology Program. In South Dakota, the courses will be "Social Media and the Local Church" with Rev. Brekke and "Introduction to the New

Testament" with Dr. Anita L. Bradshaw. In Northern Plains, the courses will be "Social Media and the Local Church" with Rev. Brekke and "Introduction to Christian Education" with Kris Potter, M.Ed., the Director of Ministries to Children and Families at Mayflower United Church of Christ in Minneapolis, Minn.

Registration includes dinner on Friday, coffee breaks, materials and instruction.

Course registration includes the Leadership Event at no extra fee. Course registration also includes lunch on Saturday for course participants.

For fees or other information, contact Dr. Anita L. Bradshaw, Director of Judiciary Based Education for Eden Theological Seminary at 612-791-8217 or 866-247-4425 (toll free) or abradshaw@eden.edu.

LABOR DAY ANNOUNCEMENTS

HHS CLOSED IN OBSERVANCE OF LABOR DAY

Heartland Humane Society will be closed on Monday, Sept. 6, in observance of the Labor Day holiday.

Regular business hours are 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday through Friday and by appointment in the evenings and on weekends.

Contact Tasha Anderson at 605-664-4244 or email hhs@midconetwork.com if you would like to make an evening or weekend appointment.

GUBERNATORIAL, CONGRESSIONAL, PUC DEBATES AT S.D. STATE FAIR

HURON — The South Dakota State Fair will host three forums for people interested in learning more about the men and women running for political office in the November election.

The "Know Your Governor" forum will be featured on Saturday, Sept. 4, and Sunday, Sept. 5, during the Fair.

The "Know Your Governor" forum will begin at 1 p.m. CDT on Sept. 4 at the NorthWestern Energy Freedom Stage and is sponsored by the South Dakota Farmers Union. Dennis Daugaard, the Republican candidate, and Democratic candidate Scott Heidepriem will discuss issues facing agriculture, which is South Dakota's No. 1 industry.

On Sept. 5 at 12 p.m. CDT, the U.S. House forum will take place in the Women's Building auditorium. Democratic candidate Stephanie Hersheth-Sandlin, Republican Kristi Noem, and independent B. Thomas Marking will discuss issues and answer audience questions as they vie for South Dakota's lone House seat.

Immediately following the U.S. House forum, Republican

PUC candidate Dusty Johnson will meet Democrat Doyle Kurpen in a forum on telecommunications, energy, and grain inspection.

The U.S. House and PUC forums are sponsored by the South Dakota Corn Growers, the American Coalition for Ethanol, East River Electric and South Dakota Touchstone Energy Cooperatives.

FALL/WINTER HOURS BEGIN AFTER LABOR DAY CLOSING

The Yankton Community Library, 515 Walnut, will be closed on Monday, Sept. 6, for Labor Day.

Beginning on Tuesday, Sept. 7, fall/winter hours will be in effect, with the following being the library's hours of operation:

- Monday through Thursday — 10 a.m.-9 p.m.
- Friday and Saturday — 10 a.m.-5 p.m.
- Sunday — 1-5 p.m.

For further information, call the library at 605-668-5275.

SUMMIT ACTIVITIES CENTER ANNOUNCES LABOR DAY HOURS

The Summit Activities Center's adjusted hours for Labor Day Monday, Sept. 6, will be noon-5 p.m. All regularly scheduled fitness classes on Monday, Sept. 6, such as Prime Time, Yoga, Water Aerobics and Workout Express, have been canceled.

Full hours at the SAC will begin on Tuesday, Sept. 7, and will be the following:

- Monday - Friday (5 a.m.-10 p.m.)
- Saturday (8 a.m.-9 p.m.)
- Sunday (noon-9 p.m.)

SAC FALL & WINTER OPEN SWIM HOURS

- Monday & Wednesday (6:30-8:30 p.m.)
- Friday (6:30-9:30 p.m.)
- Saturday (1-5 p.m.)
- Sunday (1-5 p.m. and 6:30-8:30 p.m.)

For further information, call 668-5234 or stop by the Summit Activities Center at 1801 Summit Street, Yankton.

USD Professor Publishes Family Law Book

VERMILLION — University of South Dakota law professor Roger Baron has published a book on family law, entitled, "Cases and Materials on Family Law for the South Dakota Lawyer, 7th Edition."

This book is intended to serve as a primary resource for the student and practitioner of South Dakota family law. The majority of family law issues are considered "local" in nature and are resolved under state law. Accordingly, South Dakota law — as determined by the legislature and as found in our case law — is presented in depth. Where applicable, federal constitutional and statutory principles are addressed. Background historical information, demonstrating how the law has developed to its current state, is set forth. This book also explores the law of other jurisdictions on numerous topics. With this book as a resource, one is able to understand "South Dakota law as it is today and South Dakota law as contrasted with other approaches across the country."

The wide spectrum of issues which are addressed in this book includes the following: marriage, annulment, divorce, paternity, custody, child support, alimony, property division, jurisdictional conflicts (interstate, tribal and international), constitutional considerations, enforcement, adoptions, termination of parental rights, Indian Child Welfare Act, domestic violence, domestic torts, modification proceedings, agreements (prenuptial and postnuptial) and more.

Baron started teaching at USD School of Law in 1990. He prepared the first edition of his "South Dakota Family Law" book during the summer of 1990 for use for the Family Law course he taught that fall.

Baron is a 1976 graduate of the University of Missouri at Columbia School of Law. He is licensed in Missouri, Texas and South Dakota.

Baron has authored numerous law review articles on the topic of family law. He gained national exposure in 1993 when

his article on the PKPA was cited and quoted extensively by the Michigan Supreme court in its "Baby Jessica" decision.

Baron's various law review articles (also on Insurance and Civil Procedure topics) have been cited and quoted with approval by state supreme courts and appellate courts in Alabama, Arkansas, California, Michigan, Missouri, New Jersey, North Carolina, North Dakota, Puerto Rico, South Dakota, Texas, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin and Wyoming. On the federal level, his articles have been cited and quoted in written opinions handed down by U.S. District Courts in Nebraska, Illinois, New Jersey and Washington.

Baron was named the 1993 and 2008 recipient of the John Wesley Jackson Outstanding Faculty Award. This is an award given to a law professor at the University of South Dakota who demonstrates excellence in teaching.

KYNT Yankton's Home Team!

AM 1450

MORNING COFFEE

WEEKDAYS 7:40 AM MONDAY-FRIDAY

Thursday, September 2
Chamber, 8:15 CVB

Friday, September 3
Nathan Johnson, P&D
8:15 Pam Maylor,
Yankton Area Arts

The Surgeons and Staff at Lewis & Clark Specialty Hospital

Welcome

Dr. Christopher A. Hathaway

to Yankton and our hospital!

Christopher A. Hathaway, MD, Ph.D graduated from the University of South Dakota School of Medicine and completed his residency in Urology at the Medical College of Georgia. He joins Dr. Joseph Boudreau in practice at Yankton Urological Surgery, Prof., L.L.C., 2009 Locust, Yankton, SD.

CALL 605-689-1100
for appointments with Dr. Hathaway

LEWIS & CLARK
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