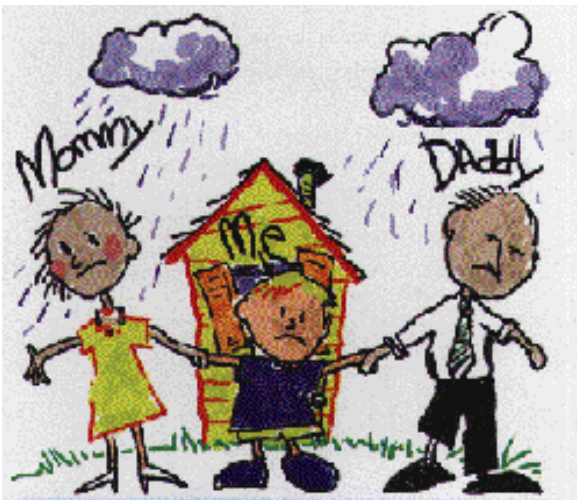


# Spare the Child



## Spare the Child

This program was designed by a subcommittee of the Family Law Section of the Virginia State Bar, comprised of judges and lawyers.

These professionals see what happens to children going through the process of parental separation, divorce, and custody litigation.

This program will show you examples of the harm that parents can cause their own children, when children are put in the middle, and ways parents can “spare the child” from being harmed by parental conflict.



## Things to Avoid

- Belittling, demeaning and blaming the other parent
- Putting the child in the middle
- Making your child a messenger or spy

### We urge you to . . .

- Be fair and reasonable
- Always keep your child out of the middle of your disputes
- Never let your child take sides in the controversy
- Never say bad things about the other parent in the child's presence
- Don't let your child be harmed in the process

## Your Options

If you can't agree with the other parent about what is best for your child, you may end up in a trial; however, there are alternatives to a trial.

### NEGOTIATION

Parents can work out differences and reach an agreement either directly or through their lawyers in four-way conferences with the parties and the lawyers.

### MEDIATION

Parents may meet with a neutral and trained third person with or without their lawyers. That trained person, a mediator, seeks to help the parties discuss their differences rationally and reach a settlement.

*A presentation by the*  
**VIRGINIA COURT SYSTEM**  
*and the*  
**FAMILY LAW SECTION**  
*of the*  
**VIRGINIA STATE BAR**

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Many parents realize that involving their children in thoughtless actions against the other parent is bad for the children.

However, many parents rationalize their actions by saying that they've “only told the kids the truth,” that their children already know how “rotten” the other parent is and that their children made their own decision to turn against the other parent.

# Settlement is Worth Something

An agreed settlement is usually faster and less expensive than a trial and can be tailored to your child. You and the other parent know your child better than any judge can ever know your child. With assistance, you and the other parent are better suited to draft your own agreement about your child's future.

## Remember

You and the child's other parent will have to keep talking about child-related issues until your youngest child is at least 18 years old. It is better to start learning the techniques now.

### PSYCHOLOGISTS and FAMILY COUNSELORS TELL US

Children experience pain, discomfort, and disorientation when their parents separate and those painful feelings are normal. Children may have the kinds of feelings associated with any major loss. Thus, they may be on an emotional roller coaster.

Children often feel neglected by the absent parent and long for him or her. Often, they feel guilty and responsible for the breakup.

These children may become behavior problems because of the depression, confusion, and anger they feel. Children are often more deeply affected by the divorce or custody/visitation disputes than they say. Studies show that even five years after the breakup of a family, a vast proportion of the children still have adjustment problems, anger, depression, and loneliness.

### YOU CAN HELP YOUR CHILDREN

- Tell the children honestly what is happening. Even small children should be told something, according to their levels of understanding. Tell them in a neutral manner—not sarcastically or vindictively.
- Don't criticize the other parent in the presence of your children.
- Don't ask your child to choose between parents.
- Encourage a good relationship between your child and the other parent.
- Keep parenting and visitation schedules clear and understandable.
- Keep changes to a minimum.
- Assure your children that they are not the cause of the breakup.
- Try not to offer false hopes of reconciliation.
- Don't ask your children to act as messengers.
- Keep your children out of the middle of adult conflicts.
- Give your children consistency and firm limits.
- Reassure your children that you love them.

## Please . . .

- Talk to your children and listen to their feelings
- Don't assess blame. Children do better when their relationships with both parents remain strong.
- Keep changes to a minimum
- Don't offer false hopes of reconciliation
- Don't put children in the middle
- Be as consistent as possible
- Maintain your parental role
- Seek support from friends, family, or professional and pastoral counselors

## Spare your Child

Ask your attorney about your options:

***Negotiation – Mediation – Litigation***

**No matter what choice you make . . .**

***THINK OF YOUR CHILDREN***

A list of certified mediators may be obtained from the clerk's office of the court

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***For additional brochures call:  
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# Virginia State Bar