

You Can Help Your Child

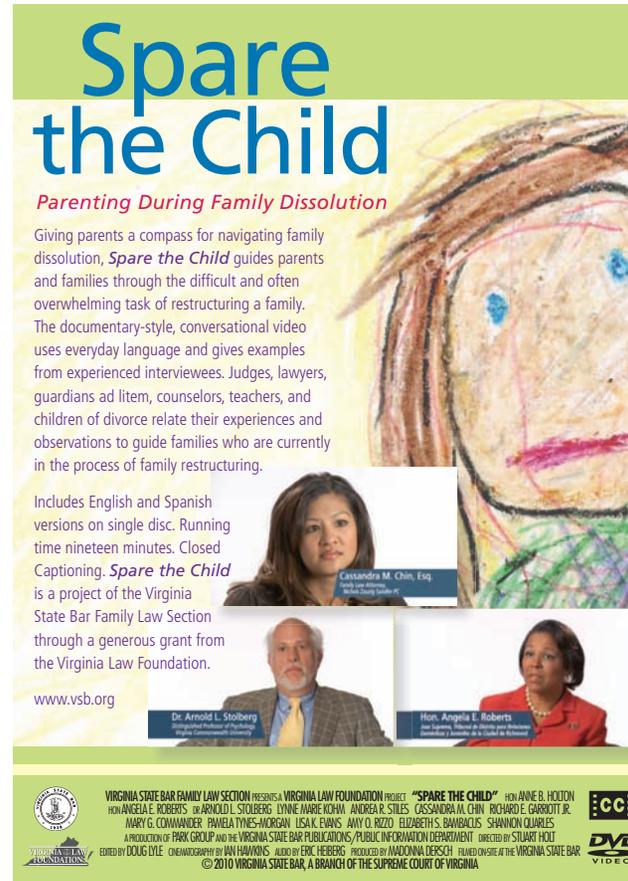
- Explain the family dissolution to your child in a neutral and age appropriate manner, without sarcasm, anger, or bitterness.
- Do not criticize the other parent in the presence of your child.
- Never ask your child to choose between his or her parents.
- Encourage a good relationship between your child and the other parent.
- Keep visitation schedules clear and understandable, while also keeping changes to a minimum.
- Assure your child that he or she is not the cause of the family dissolution.
- Do not ask your child to act as a messenger between you and the other parent. Instead, keep your child out of the middle of your adult conflict.
- Give your child consistency and firm limits.
- Reassure your children that you love them.
- Remember that your child not only has a relationship with you but has a relationship with your extended family and friends and those of the other parent.

Please

- Talk to your children and listen to their feelings.
- Do not assess blame. Children do better when their relationships with both parents remain strong.
- Do not offer false hopes of reconciliation.
- Do not put your child in the middle.
- Be as consistent as possible.
- Maintain your parental role.
- Seek support from friends, family, or professional and pastoral counselors.
- Remember, you can still be a good mother and a good father.

Spare your Child

- Ask your attorney about your options. Negotiation – Mediation – Litigation
- No matter what choice you make, think of your children.
- Lists of appropriate mediators and collaborative attorneys may be obtained from your court clerk's office upon request.



Spare the Child
Parenting During Family Dissolution

Giving parents a compass for navigating family dissolution, *Spare the Child* guides parents and families through the difficult and often overwhelming task of restructuring a family. The documentary-style, conversational video uses everyday language and gives examples from experienced interviewees. Judges, lawyers, guardians ad litem, counselors, teachers, and children of divorce relate their experiences and observations to guide families who are currently in the process of family restructuring.

Includes English and Spanish versions on single disc. Running time nineteen minutes. Closed Captioning. *Spare the Child* is a project of the Virginia State Bar Family Law Section through a generous grant from the Virginia Law Foundation.

www.vsb.org

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Hon. Angela E. Roberts
Chief Justice, Honored by Virginia Law Foundation
Presidential & Lifetime Achievement Award

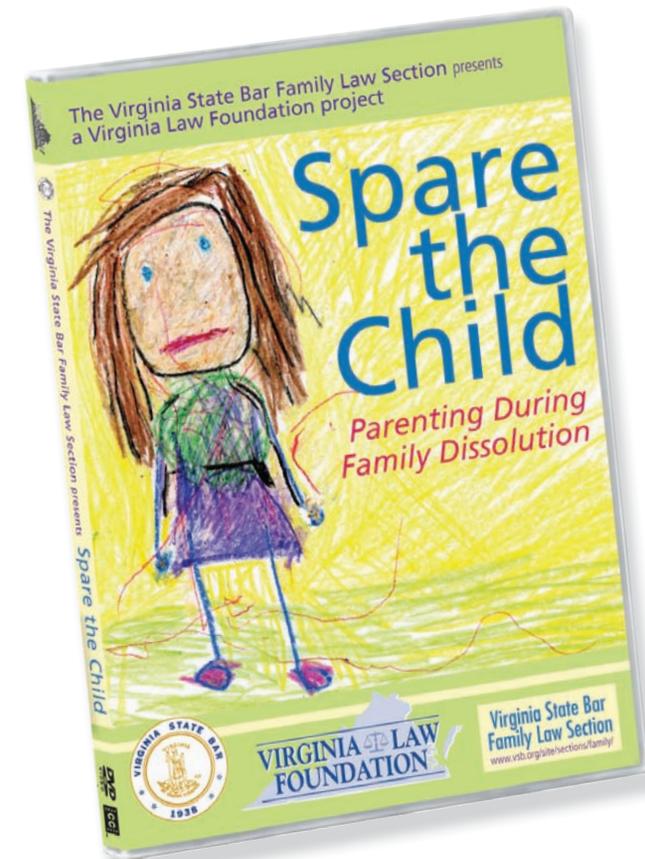
VIRGINIA STATE BAR FAMILY LAW SECTION PRESENTS A VIRGINIA LAW FOUNDATION PROJECT "SPARE THE CHILD" WITH ANNE B. HOLTON FROM ANGELO E. ROBERTS DR. ARNOLD L. STOLBERG TONYE HARRIS-KOHN ANDREA R. STILES CASSANDRA M. CHIN RICHARDE GARROTT JR. JAWRY G. CONAMANDER PAMELA TYNES-ANDREAN LISAK EVANS AMY O. RIZZO ELIZABETH S. BANBACUS SHANNON CLARLES A PRODUCTION OF PARK GROUP AND THE VIRGINIA STATE BAR PUBLICATIONS/PUBLIC INFORMATION DEPARTMENT DIRECTED BY STUART HOYT EDITED BY DOUG DYLE CINEMATOGRAPH BY IAN HAWKINS AUDIO BY ERIC HEIBERG PRODUCED BY MADONNA DERSCH FILMED ON SITE AT THE VIRGINIA STATE BAR © 2010 VIRGINIA STATE BAR, A BRANCH OF THE SUPREME COURT OF VIRGINIA

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This brochure and the *Spare the Child* video were developed by the Family Law Section of the Virginia State Bar with a generous grant from The Virginia Law Foundation. Spare the Child is available on DVD and online.

Visit www.vsb.org/site/publications/video/.

Spare the Child: A Guide to Parenting During Family Dissolution



for use in conjunction with the *Spare the Child* video

Spare the Child is a presentation by the Family Law Section of the Virginia State Bar with a generous grant from The Virginia Law Foundation.

The *Spare the Child* video was developed by judges, lawyers, family counselors, and psychological professionals who see firsthand the impact on children subjected to their parents' separation, family dissolution, and the inevitable custody litigation.

This program is designed to guide families during family dissolution, a time when children are in danger of being put in the middle of conflicts. It also reveals ways that families can spare children from being harmed by conflict.

Involving children in thoughtless and vindictive actions or conduct is destructive to children. However, sometimes people rationalize behavior by saying they have "only told the kids the truth." This conduct fails to recognize the impact on a child who is encouraged to vilify the person who, prior to the separation of the parents, was one of the two most important people in the child's life. Instead, parents need to spare their children from as much painful and harmful communication and conduct as possible.

Remember

You are creating memories for your child.

The *Spare the Child* video allows parents to see their family dissolution through the eyes of children who are now adults and provides direction for how to spare your child a great deal of pain over the decades to come.

Avoid

- Belittling, demeaning and blaming the other parent or side of the family
- 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 a controversy.
- Never say bad things about the other parent or side of family in the child's presence.
- Do not 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. In mediation, the focus is not on the parents but about making sure that the child will be okay. When parties go to court, they go to win. In mediation, the parties are going to reach an agreement.

Collaborative Law

Parents may use collaborative law as an alternative way to settle disputes in which both parties hire specially trained attorneys who work to help them respectfully resolve the conflict. Every participant in a collaborative case agrees to work together to seek a "win-win" solution to the needs of both parties and the child.

The Benefits of Settlement

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.

Guidance From Psychologists and Family Counselors

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. Whether intentional or not, children feel in the middle and want to protect both parents.

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.

When a child's family dissolves that child may experience behavior problems due to instability, depression, confusion, or anger. Children are often more deeply affected by the family dissolution or custody/visitation dispute than they say. Studies show that even five, ten, fifteen, or twenty years after the dissolution of the family a vast proportion of children still have adjustment problems, anger, depression, and loneliness.