

Parental Responsibilities

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1. Provide for their children's physical needs.
2. Protect their children from physical harm.
3. Provide for their children's need for love, attention, and affection.
4. Protect their children from emotional harm.
5. Provide moral and ethical guidelines for their children.

This list could be much longer, but these five responsibilities form the foundation of adequate parenting. When mental health issues or emotional instability are present, parents may be unavailable or incapable of meeting children's needs; and in some cases, they may expect or demand that children take care of the parents' needs.

When a parent forces parental responsibility on their child, they can distort the relationship that influences the child's emotional development, identity, and further contribute to a hostile sea of confusion. Also, when children are caught in the crossfire of their parents' hostility, it hurts not just to watch parents trade emotional shots at one another; it hurts even more when parents enlist children as allies in the battle. It hurts the most when one parent engages in a concerted campaign to turn the child or children against the other parent.

During times of marital discord, crisis, emotional pain and distress these parental responsibilities may get displaced or lost. In families where relationships have become strained highly conflicted, estranged, or alienated, these need patterns often shift in unhealthy ways. When children become burdened with the fallout of these overwhelming emotions, then dysfunctional family system patterns can result. In these cases, it is necessary to intervene in order to change these patterns and provide antidotes to combat the dysfunctional patterns.

Possible negative patterns include bad-mouthing a spouse, brain-washing kids with negative statements about one's spouse, false accusations/allegations against one's spouse, emotional coercion/manipulation by a parent, and using children as a way to gain control, power, or superiority. In cases that have reached a measure of some or many of the previously mentioned patterns, professional intervention may be necessary in order to begin to mitigate the damage to persons in the family system, to help negotiate more effective relationships among family members, and hopefully to address and prevent the development of a totally toxic relationship/toxic family system pattern.

Should you find that the aforementioned problems or dynamics are present in a relationship, consider consultation with a therapist who can assist and guide you in addressing some of the underlying factors that fuel these circumstances.

We at Pastoral Counseling of Northern Virginia stand ready to offer a path to healing and wholeness on this issue and a wide variety of other issues. To contact one of our counselors you may visit our website at www.PastoralCounselingNV.com or call 703.335.6172.

Reference: Divorce Poison by Richard A. Warshak

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