

Signs of Restrictive Gate-Keeping that Harm Children & Adult Children of Divorce

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(NOTE: Even when dealing with untreated, diagnosed mental illness, active substance abuse, and/or abusive/neglectful behavior it is still possible to be nonjudgmental and respectful in your communications with your co-parent and with your child about your co-parent, without invalidating your child's experience.)

- Refuse to communicate, or drastically limit communication with the other parent *about the kids*
- Make negative comments about (“bad-mouth”) the other parent, within ear-shot of the kids and/or extended family and friends – blocks kids feeling free to love and respect both parents and communities
- Unreasonably inflexible with child scheduling and/or frequently make last minute child scheduling changes
- Withhold rather than share information about children, their activities, school events, needs, medical care, etc.; Shun and openly avoid/disregard the other parent at children’s events, graduations, etc.
- Actively work to exclude the other parent’s participation in said activities and/or events
- Schedule events on the other parent’s time, without first asking
- Intrude on or actively disrupt the children’s time with the other parent using non-vital phone calls, texts, or negative comments while child is with, on the phone or on speaker phone with the other parent, etc.
- Treat the other parent as overstepping or “wrong” for wanting to be a part of children’s lives
- Micro-manage children’s lives during the *other* parent’s time
- Unilaterally make important decisions about kids, without inviting the other parent’s input
- Make false allegations – particularly about verbal, physical or sexual abuse
- Create unbending or unrealistic conditions, before the other parent can spend time with children
- In the child’s view, diminish or undermine the other parent’s authority, or children’s respect for the other parent; Discourage children’s acceptance of co-parents’ different ideas, and recollections of events
- Cultivate impression of “owning” the children and/or being the “superior” parent
- In the child’s view, diminish the quality and nature of the other parent’s parenting/relationship with the child
- Act/think as if child(ren) have the same experience with the co-parent, as parent had during the marital/primary relationship
- Fail to differentiate the other parent’s treatment of you as spouse, from the other parent’s treatment of the children
- Mock, belittle, devalue, berate or otherwise disrespect the other parent to or within earshot of the children; Half the child’s DNA/life experience is from that other parent; kids feel the threat to *them*
- Share rather than protect children from the intricacies of your adult issues/divorce/custody disputes
- Convey, verbally and/or nonverbally (a vast majority of our communication is nonverbal), that the children betray or hurt you when they love, spend time, want or show signs of having a viable relationship with the other parent
- Threaten your attachment to and respect for the children (e.g. using intimidation, threats, snide comments, contempt, belittling, manipulation, guilt, etc.) when children express love, spend time, desire to have, or have a relationship with the other parent; Even saying you miss your child pulls on their heartstrings
- Convey that your reality and recollection of events is the only valid, “truthful” reality and recollection of events; model this approach with children in ways that interfere with their recognition of the present/future value *to them* of the other parent’s engagement and participation in their lives
- Place children in a position of having to figure out which parent is “lying,” rather than freeing the kids from having to hunt down the truth by not sharing divorce/custody-related matters with them in the first place
- Rehash past events or errors made by the other parent, or rehash your own negative interpretations of past events, thus inviting/encouraging children to do the same with the other parent, rather than *encouraging children to be aware of and engage the present, as the only place to rebuild or strengthen parent-child relationships damaged by divorce or past events*
- Interpret the other parent’s motives, behaviors, statements, etc. in a negative light *for the children*, rather than teaching children (*for their sakes*) to offer the benefit of the doubt and to ask direct, respectful questions of the other parent
- Endorse negative stories that cause fearful and/or phobic, hostile or contemptuous responses of children to the other parent, without real safety concerns, & without rehearsing respectful requests & limit-setting
- Discourage forgiveness/understanding towards the other parent, when even minor errors are or have been made; Share intense negative reactions to the other parent’s unfavorable impact, rather than strengthening children’s resilience and skills; They feel what *you* feel
- Fail to firmly *require and teach* children to engage the other parent in reliable and respectful ways – allow children the impression that respect and a relationship with the other parent are “optional”
- Align with the child(ren), *against* the other parent