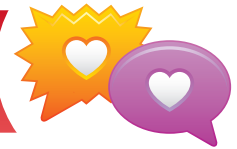




## When Couples Fight, Children Suffer



### Conflict and adults

Couples who handle conflict poorly are less likely to be happy and more likely to separate or divorce, increasing their risk for negative health outcomes such as depression, poorer general physical health, and greater use and cost of health care services.

But adults are not the only ones who are affected by conflict in their couple relationship. A family is a system, and anything that affects one part of the family is bound to impact other parts as well. A healthy, positive couple relationship can have positive impacts on children's well-being, behavior, and relationships with parents. On the other hand, when couples are distressed, children can suffer.

### When children observe conflict between parents

Conflict between parents does not go unnoticed by children. Parental conflict can impact how children feel and behave. The more parental conflict there is, the more likely children are to feel depressed, show negative emotions, yell at other family members, or act out in school. In addition, the more negative the children's reactions to their parents' conflict, the greater likelihood of other problems.

### Conflict impacts one's parenting

Children's behaviors are influenced by the quality of parenting they receive. As relationship problems increase, the quality of parenting can be diminished. For instance, declines in marital quality have been linked to fathers becoming less warm and more controlling toward their preschool-aged children.<sup>2</sup> A similar pattern also exists among unmarried parents. The more supportive the relationship between parents, the more engaged and positive mothers and fathers are with their young children.

### Learn to manage conflict

Problems between parents do not automatically indicate that parenting quality will be poor. Even when relationship conflict is high, parents who still cooperate well together can reduce the negative effects of parental conflict on the parent-child relationship. What happens between parents does not stay between parents. Children exposed to high levels of conflict between their parents are negatively impacted. *Importantly, couples can learn skills to help them manage conflict in a healthy, respectful way!* As parents work to manage their conflict effectively, positive impacts can occur in both adults and their children.



**When parents are upset, even if they try to hide their conflict, their children are affected. Verbal conflict is obvious, but children can detect non-verbal conflict, too.**



**HEALTHY  
RELATIONSHIP  
& MARRIAGE  
EDUCATION  
TRAINING**

Funding for this project was provided by the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Grant: 90CT0151. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.

[www.hrmet.org](http://www.hrmet.org)

MNG-F4 ©2013