

Professionals' and Parents' Learning Guide for "3 Girls' Invisible Pain"

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We're continually struck that in just 7 minutes these sisters courageously tell us adults virtually everything we need to know about the painful and dangerous effects of parent conflict.

Should we listen carefully—and more than once?

1. Children experience attacks between their parents as attacks on them.
 - “It hurts just to hear them saying it.”
 - “Sometimes they’ll call each other names, but we came from them, too, so you’re hurting us just as much as you’re hurting each other.”
 - “If they’re saying something bad about our parent, they may as well call us that.”
2. When parents fight, and do so supposedly over children’s needs, children’s real needs can actually become invisible.
 - [What are your parents not getting?] “The fact that we’re miserable.”
3. No matter how seemingly small the topic (birthdays, holidays, pickups, etc.), parent fights leave kids badly hurt. Pettiness in the topic doesn’t equate with pettiness in the injury to children.
 - “I don’t even look forward to holidays anymore. Every Christmas I think it’s going to get better, but it never gets better.”
 - “[Holidays are] horrible; they’re just fighting over the silliest stuff.”
4. Children almost never care about the things that the parents are fighting about; often they want simpler and nobler things than the parents and professionals are arguing about.
 - “We don’t care where we are on holidays.”
 - “[What we actually care about is] our parents getting along, and us having a good time.”
 - “Just peace between them.”
 - “I just wanted them to get along.”
 - “We used to be so excited for Christmas, but now it’s just another fight—birthdays the same way.”
 - “Like communication—they need to be open with each other and talk in a calm voice and stop yelling. And just be nice to each other—have respect for each other.”
5. Parent fights can force children to try to resolve adult issues—and to blame themselves when they fail.
 - “[We’ve tried to fix the problems.] We told Mom that Dad said this and Dad said that, and we went back and told Dad that Mom said this and Mom said that. [It didn’t work.]”