

Fathers need their children

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Single fathers should never be prevented from seeing their children. Even in the toughest family conflicts, interaction should always continue between father and child according to sociologist Germain Dulac, a researcher at the Université de Montréal's Interdisciplinary Research Centre on Violence Against Women and Families.

"Every father, even the worst delinquent, must see his child once in a while. It's beneficial for both parties," says Dulac, who has studied the male condition for 20 years and analyzed the impact of broken relationships.

In cases of violence or incest, visits must obviously be highly supervised by social workers and other specialists. Yet preventing contact between father and child would be a mistake, Dulac insists. "Support groups have often proven that fathers turn out better if they stay in touch with their child."

What about the welfare of the child? "Sometimes, for the child, confronting their aggressor is necessary and beneficial," says Dulac.

In Quebec, it is estimated that a third of single fathers never see their children; a third see them sporadically and only a third have regular contact. How are those broken relationships dealt with? Dulac and his colleagues conducted in-depth interviews with 30 fathers of children younger than two, thanks to the collaboration of the Separated Fathers organization (www.separated-fathers.qc.ca). The majority of these men, for whom separation was extremely difficult, were quite bitter with the

justice system and specifically with the mediation services.

The effects of separation?

Fifty percent of marriages don't last in Quebec. Since 1997, the Government of Quebec has offered mediation services to separating couples so they can resolve their differences in a forum outside the expensive legal system. The mediator addresses issues such as custody, allocation of assets and setting up food allowances.

An article published in the December 2007 issue of *Intervention*, the official publication of the Ordre professionnel des travailleurs sociaux du Québec, Dulac and his collaborators, Sylvain Camus, Gilles Rondeau and Éric Couteau, acknowledge that most separations occur without any major problems, however, certain fathers leave with a very heavy heart.

"Daddy loves you!" That slogan has had tremendous resonance in the media in recent years as it was seen on banners and posters in several public places. The intent was to denounce the difficulties of certain fathers who feel the system favors mothers in the event of a separation.

Did these public demonstrations serve the cause of the fathers? Yes and no," says Dulac. "I believe the public was sympathetic to these extravagant demonstrations even if they deemed them appalling at first. And elected officials are very sensitive to public opinion."

Source: University of Montreal

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