

The Former Spouse – Dealing With Adversity

By Moe & Paige Becnel

Have you had issues with one or both former spouses?

Does a former spouse try to make waves in your family?

Do you have hard feelings toward your former spouse, or your spouse's?

We have heard from many families who call or write in about various issues that they are having with a former spouse. It is a common problem! In this article, we will look at common causes of the strife, and some reasonable solutions you might want to try.

Why the Strife?

Former spouses may be stirring up trouble in your family for one or more of these reasons:

- a.)** They are hurt from the breakup of their marriage. Rejection from a former love is a deep hurt that can take a long time to heal, especially if there was infidelity (adultery) involved. If they are still hurting, the hurt can lead to unforgiveness, bitterness, and ultimately revenge.

b.) They may sense their former spouse left them for their new spouse, which makes them bitter at both the former spouse and the new spouse involved (even if months transpired between your divorce and remarriage).
Because of bitterness and revenge, we have seen former spouses ally with their former spouse's family, alienating the extended family (parents and siblings) against their own family.

c.) Your former spouse may have had hopes of reconciling with you. If so, your remarriage has likely broken that dream, and created additional hurt.
2. Jealousy can be a big factor. The fact that you have moved forward with your life can stir up deep feelings of envy in a former spouse.
3. Perhaps prior to your remarriage you and your former spouse were reasonably working things out regarding the children. Now that you are remarried, you may have had to change your approach with your former spouse such that your new spouse does not feel threatened by this relationship.
(Your relationship with your new spouse has to take the highest place in your life, making sure your spouse feels secure in your relationship.)
4. They may sense that the stepparent in your home is trying to alienate them from their natural child, or in other ways trying to circumvent their parental relationship or authority.
The natural parent – child bond is a precious thing, and when it gets threatened by a stepparent trying to bond with their new (step) child (which is the right thing to do), the natural parent may feel threatened by this activity. Such is the case when a natural parent objects to their child calling the stepparent “Mom” or “Dad.”
[New (step)parent – new (step)child relationships need to be built in your new home for a healthy family. There needs to be effort to bond. The natural parent and the children should know that the new parent is in no way trying to replace their natural parent.]
5. The former spouse may disapprove, not like, or disagree with your way of parenting or raising the children involved in your new home. There could be something you are doing that contradicts their fundamental beliefs.

Typical Responses That Do Not Work

Ignoring them
Lashing out at them
Name calling

Stubbornness
Aggression/ arguing
Using the children

Tit for Tat; Insult for insult
Pushing their “HOT” buttons
Threats

Helpful Solutions

✓ **Realize that the former spouse is not your enemy - the devil is.**

Ephesians 6: 12 says, “*For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood (PEOPLE), but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.*”

The devil works through people to stir up trouble in our families. The devil looks for opportunities to use any of us to create division and strife in relationships. (He will sometimes have an opportunity to use you, when you are being selfish, rude, angry, critical, etc.)

✓ **Try to understand the one who is causing trouble!**

When someone is causing trouble in our lives, we become angry with them. We do not see any value in that person, and we do not want to let them off the hook.

Realize that:

a.) **Perhaps the one who offended you never intended to harm you,**

b.) **It is hurting people who hurt people!** Hurting people hurt people, and are easily hurt by people. Perhaps the presence of hurt in your offender’s life causes them to hurt you and others.

Just knowing this will help you to deal with those people in a more tolerable way.

c.) **God STILL loves that person as much as He loves you.** Jesus paid THE SAME great price to remove your offender’s sins - and your sins.

We judge ourselves by our intentions, but we judge offenders by their actions.

When we have hurt someone, we ask for forgiveness, saying that we did not mean to hurt them; our intentions were right. We want the Benefit of the Doubt for our actions.

However, when someone has hurt us, their actions speak louder than their reasoning, and we usually hold them accountable. We distance ourselves from them. We don’t give them the Benefit of the Doubt.

✓ **An apology**

IF you and your new spouse can agree on this course of action, try talking to your former spouse about why they are being difficult. (You may already know why.)

If they are reacting to pain in their life from the divorce, apologize to them for:

1. your faults/ actions that caused the former marriage to fail.
2. the hurt you have caused in their life.

The apology will need to be sincere. And it may go a long way to beginning a peaceful life.

(An alternative would be to write them a letter. However, be aware that letters can be misinterpreted by an emotional person.)

✓ **Pray for their salvation and God's blessing on their life.** We know this can be tough to do, especially praying and asking God to bless someone who is tormenting you, but with your good intentions it can do miracles.

In Matthew 5:44-45, Jesus said, “But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”

We recently met a couple who were constantly dodging bullets for the last seven years from her former spouse. When challenged to pray for his salvation and God's blessings on his life, they were very skeptical that this would even work. But after one week of praying, the former spouse called (not once, but twice) to apologize for all of his bad behavior – and complimented her on how well she had done raising their children! It was truly a breakthrough and a miracle.

You can also be a witness of God’s unconditional love to that former spouse. If you have a relationship with Jesus, you have what they need to heal their hurts.

In Luke 4: 18 Jesus said, *"The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD."*

WOW! What great love God our Father has for each of us – and that former spouse – to send His Son to meet our every need!

God just might want to use you to help them find His love and healing – what a thought!

- ✓ **Limit conversations with them.** Make your conversations with your former spouse brief and informative. If they try to start an argument, then end the conversation. They may resist this, but after a few times they will begin to realize that you will not engage their behavior.

Do not let your new spouse be your messenger with your former spouse. Doing so can irritate an already tense situation.

- ✓ **A Simple, Powerful Prayer!**

We have used a simple prayer over and over again in times when we felt that we were being attacked by others. We pray this before an encounter with someone that we know is interested in harsh and controlling words to us.

"God we command the mouth of the devil working through this person to be quiet, in Jesus' Mighty Name!"

It has always worked for us. You may want to give it a try.

(Note: DO NOT pray this verbally in the presence of that person, unless you WANT a harsh reaction!)

- ✓ **Legal Recourse**

There are times when issues can only be settled through the legal system. When the other person is continually bringing harm to your family and will not reason with you, you must take the necessary steps to protect your family from negative outside influence.

If necessary, consult your attorney for advice.

- ✓ **Pick your battles!** Some issues are not worth a fight. It is better to work around some issues than to buck them. Don't let your emotions engage you in a battle that will pay little dividends for your family.

Example: If your struggle is over getting the children for a specific holiday, choose to celebrate the holiday on a different day – and enjoy a peaceful day.

- ✓ **Above all, walk in the Character of Christ** found in Galatians 5: 22-23 (LOVE, JOY, PEACE, PATIENCE, KINDNESS, GOODNESS, FAITHFULNESS, GENTLENESS, and SELF-CONTROL.)

Do not let another person's negative emotions trigger the same in you. Maintain control of yourself, and your family.

- ✓ **Be a peace-maker**

> *"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God."* **Matthew 5: 9** (NIV)

> The same verse in the Message translation says, *"You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That's when you discover who you really are, and your place in God's family"*. **Matthew 5: 9** (MSG)

Remember that your children do not need to see their natural parents in strife. Do whatever you can do be a peacemaker, and minimize the strife.

Take the HIGH road. Do not let a person's negative action create your negative reaction.

Prayer will change the things that you cannot change!

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