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## Children's Blackmail

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Every family has a hard time during a divorce or separation. Everyone hurts in their own way, on different levels. Some of the reasons may be changes, such as living in two homes, new routines and habits. It is likely that the children spend less time with one of the parents; the holidays won't be the same either.

Children may be afraid to lose a parent's love because of the distance between them, or even feel guilty for choosing to live with one parent, over the other. It's not uncommon for children to view divorce as a form of abandonment from the parent who has left the house. It is highly likely for children to develop certain behaviours after a separation that will be the expression of their suffering.

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## Suffering or Blackmail?

At first, the behaviour could have been a normal expression of grief and emotional pain over the dissolution of the parents' relationship. However, some children may later start purposely using this behaviour, as a way of getting what they want. Blackmail can only work, as long as you feel guilty and need to compensate your children for the grief you think you've caused them.

Being sad and going through their parents' separation cannot have the upside of getting their way. Even if children are sad, most rules still apply. And they can quite easily understand that, if you can be firm about it. Even though your heart may go out to your children, if you really want to help them, you need to establish firm boundaries for them. Otherwise, your children may easily start to feel lost. Naturally, boundaries, rules, and behaviour always need to be the topic of a friendly discussion between you and your children.

## **Don't Negotiate with Terrorists**

Once you've realized you've become the victim of blackmail, you need to find a way to put a stop to it. You can start by saying "no" to your children more often. It won't be easy, and there may be big temper tantrums ahead, as well as many headaches, but in the end it is for your child's good.

## **Show Them It's Not Working**

It would help both you and your children, if they understand that they won't get what they want until they start behaving as they should. It's worse on the children if they don't behave properly. Also, make sure your children understand that you feel and respect their grief, but that's not an excuse to not follow the rules. Help your children realize they will receive more, if they are being cooperative and talk to them about their behaviour.

## **Quit Rewarding Blackmail**

When we're hurting, we get more attention from others. Your children may have realized that acting hurt results in more pampering. This is not to say that you should not pamper your children, but rather that you should avoid doing it when they are blackmailing you. However, also keep in mind that your child may actually be lacking attention and that could be causing his or her negative behaviour. It is crucial to know that in those cases material possessions can only increase the emotional gap. Instead, talk to your children, engage in common activities that your children enjoy, have calm and fruitful discussion together.

## **Talk to Your Children**

Emotions are to be processed and talked through, not to be compensated with gifts or anarchy at home. You don't want to become your child's slave, instead of their parent. But it's also important to spend time talking to your children about their feelings and behaviour, as well as teaching them how to deal with their feelings.

## **Compromise**

Your children need to learn that blackmail is not the way to go. Talk to them about their options and help them understand that mutual cooperation is much better for all of you. You may even negotiate some rules with them, but not the fundamental ones, and there may be room for compromise, only if there is no blackmail. Whatever you do, make sure your children understand your decisions, so that they can learn to base their behaviour on mutual trust and

understanding.

## **Talk to Your Ex, Teachers, or a Psychologist**

There's no shame in asking for help if you have doubts or need advice. You don't have to face the situation alone and talking to others can give you the confidence you need in your parenting skills.

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