

Parental Conflict in Divorce: Impact, Solutions & Support

[Nick Coffey]

Hello and welcome to TW Law Talk from Taylor Walton Solicitors. I'm Nick Coffey, broadcaster and of particular use in today's episode, Family Mediator. We'll be talking about parental conflict, more about that in a moment.

We brought you 10 episodes in series one, covering a wide range of topics, from family law to commercial property, employment law to buying a new-build home. And after the success of that first series, we're back for a new series of episodes, once again, exploring the legal issues which affect us all.

And speaking of being back, Tamara Glanville, Partner in family law at Taylor Walton. Hello again.

[Tamara Glanville]

Hello Nick.

[Nick Coffey]

Last time around, many of you needed, shall we call it, gentle persuasion, to sit behind this microphone. This time around, you've been literally banging down my door. The serious point of which is that these episodes are a great way of communicating what you do and what you're about.

[Tamara Glanville]

Yes, I agree. I think people don't necessarily always understand what lawyers are doing, and they might automatically assume that we're going to take the matter to court. And it's much more high level. But we're very, very adept at identifying the right approach to deal with a conflict.

[Nick Coffey]

And that's what we'll be talking about today, because we are looking at one of the key issues in divorce, parental conflict. Even when things are amicable, when you're getting divorced, it's often hard to keep things measured and calm all the time. We are human, after all, but what happens when things veer into higher conflict? Why does this happen? How can it be managed? And, most importantly, what is the impact on the children caught in the middle? Spoiler alert, it can be deep and long term.

Joining us today is Tom Nash, also known as Mr. Divorce Coach. He's an accredited coach, hypnotherapist and NLP practitioner. And as I guess we all do in this room, he works with couples at the very worst of times, helping them to find a way through to the other side. Tom, hello.

[Tom Nash]

Hello. Thank you for having me.

[Nick Coffey]

Nice to have you on the episode. Tamara, no pun intended. Let's start with this - does this not go to the very conflict at the heart of your own role? Because you're there to act for your clients, you're there to defend their positions, ensure they're heard. Which can, in some instances, be quite a conflictual process by its nature. And yet I know you really well, and you're passionate about parents divorcing well with reduced conflict. How are we squaring that circle?

[Tamara Glanville]

The two things don't always sit squarely with me because I am actually quite conflict averse, but I do recognise the need for people to have a safe space in order to say what they need to say. And they want me to tell them the truth. And what they want isn't always necessarily what the outcome would be. So, part of my job is steering my clients, with or without other supporting professionals, to understand what ultimately will work best for their family.

[Nick Coffey]

And is part of it about being realistic? That there's no benefit in you not telling them the reality of where this is going. For example, you know, letting them think they're going to move from a four-bedroom house into a six-bedroom mansion and have twice as much money than when they started.

[Tamara Glanville]

Yeah, managing expectations is a huge part of what I do. And I think because I also bring lived experience to my role, and my parents divorced "well", to use that well, well used phrase. I can see that it can be done. I've seen it being done through my own experience, but also many clients along the way. And court processes are probably the worst place in which to deal with these issues. They're very, very difficult. And most of the people that I see need to have experts supporting them.

[Nick Coffey]

So, Tom, gloves off, I'm giving you the hardest part here. Parental conflict. We can talk about it as a concept, we can make it sound like a thing, but the reality is the impact is quite serious. So serious point to start with. How bad can that conflict get? And, perhaps more importantly, how bad does that then get for the children?

[Tom Nash]

Well, if I want to focus mainly on the children. When I'm working with individuals or couples as a divorce coach, my role is supporting them through the emotional mindset and practicalities. The lived experience of it. I actually quite often say to my clients that I'm actually working with you, but on behalf of your children. My role here is to help kind of broaden the horizons, open up the periphery, and help them think longer term, as opposed to what's immediately right in front of them, which is typically anger, rage, upset, hurt, a whole host of different emotions that are going through for them. As it pertains to their kids,

the impacts, unfortunately, can be very detrimental. Various studies about this and research, go and have a look and google around for it, lots and lots of white papers, But there was a piece of research done about a year to maybe two years ago that highlighted that children from a high-conflict family environment, be that even if their parents are still together, but typically, if they're separated or divorcing, can have an impact of up to 16% increase of quote-unquote emotional problems and distress. And there could be a whole host of things. That could be from anxiety and depression. We can actually start to see early forms of PTSD. Right through to things like underage drinking, drug and alcohol abuse, teen pregnancy. They actually also have a lower educational or poor educational outcome. So that's going to be setting them up for the rest of their lives.

[Nick Coffer]

And there is a reason, Tamara, you'll know about this, why if you look at a children's services report, the risk factors, parental hostility is now right at the top of that list.

[Tamara Glanvill]

It is. It's right at the top of the list. And rightly so, because I think parents do sometimes need to take a step backwards and recognise the role that they're playing in this and the damage it's doing to their children.

[Nick Coffer]

It's interesting that you were saying, Tom, about how you're there representing the children. There's a very well-known family therapist called Jill Gorrell-Barnes, who worked at the Tavistock in London for many years, and she specialised in high conflict families. And the line she used to use, I am told, I never witnessed this, but the line she used to use to parents was, I'm here because your children need you to agree. And that very much reflects what you're saying there. And I'm told actually that her follow up an hour later, which I could never say as a mediator, and you probably couldn't say as a coach, but if an hour later they were still fighting, apparently, she would say, I said an hour ago that I'm here because your children need you to agree.

The fact that you're still fighting leads me to question whether you love them in the way you say you do.

Now, there is actually an important point behind this, isn't there? Because when you're in the throes of divorce, you do lose sight. It's easy to lose sight of your children. And, of course, we know that most people absolutely adore their children, but they lose sight of the impact that their behavior is having directly on their children.

[Tom Nash]

Yeah. Again, another kind of little saying that I use with clients actually is about, let's just park co-parenting for a minute, right? If you're high emotion and more, if not, if you're going to be high conflict, you'd definitely be high emotion, right? If you're already in that kind of mindset and that state, right, you're not co-parenting already. In fact, you're probably parallel parenting. At best. Worst case scenario, you're counter-parenting. You're going out of your way to do absolutely polar opposite, everything you can, just to disrupt. And again, one of the things I say with a lot of clients is, let's park co-parenting for a minute. Let's go

future focus. Your three kids have three kids. You've now got nine grandchildren. How do you want to co-grandparent in 15, 20, 25 years? Who gets to pick which one of you comes to their wedding, graduation? How do you want their future relationship with their partner and their children to be, oh well, nanny can come to this one, but grandad can't, and X, Y, Z? What life lessons are we then passing down through the generations to your grandchildren about all the life lessons that we, as all parents here, want to pass down?

[Nick Coffer]

And what we're doing in divorce is we are modelling a certain kind of relationship. It is fair to say that if you're modelling that to your children, there is a chance, there's no psychologists in the room, but there is a chance that you will see your children in that exact same kind of relationship further down the line. Because it's what they will have known.

[Tamara Glanvill]

Yeah, role modelling is such a powerful tool for us to use with our clients when they are separating. Because even, I mean, I quite often have had clients in the past, not sure whether they are going to separate and they want to have that early conversation. And they'll say, well, I can't separate because of the children. And in some circumstances, I will go so far as to say, sometimes it's better to separate for the children. And if you are role modelling a really, really unhappy relationship, chances are they will think that's what normal is. It might be better to have another shot at showing them and role modelling what a good relationship might look like. And that can include a good divorce.

[Tom Nash]

And it's the same for when it comes to things like communication, where couples will say, oh, we never argue in front of them, or they don't see it. OK, but it's not just the verbal. What about the nonverbal? What about the kind of more emotive cues, like where they see that, your parents, how they're operating the house, right? That kind of looks at each other, give to each other and what they're taking from that.

[Tamara Glanvill]

Yes. And you've probably also heard when people have said that the children are too young to understand. And one of the, there's been a lot of research as you would expect, but one of the pieces of research is actually, really young children are incredibly good at understanding what's going on because they read body language and tones of voice and facial expression like nobody else.

[Tom Nash]

The research actually goes down as far as infants and newborns because they can actually pick up on it, even through mother and the stresses if they're being nursed. So actually, it goes right back.

[Nick Coffer]

And you also often see the flip of what you've described. I'm sure Tom, you see this in your work as well. Where you get, "he's only eight, but he's very wise, I mean, he gets it. He totally understands, you know" and you just want to say to them, "he's eight. That's still very, very little". I know that slightly contradicts what we were just saying about the way

they absorb stuff. But this assumption, I think you call it parentification in legal circles, but this sort of making children older than they actually are can also be really destructive.

[Tom Nash]

Yeah, Nick, it's all about being age-appropriate in language, coming down to their age levels, think about language. How can you also help them to understand through something that might connect in an age-appropriate way? If they've had a falling out with someone at school or something like that previously, we can talk to them in different ways.

[Nick Coffey]

Just a very quick reference to family mediation, often we co-mediate in family mediation. So, we have two mediators, and I'm very conscious, obviously, because I'm a man and I'm often more co-mediate with a female co-mediator. I'm conscious that we're basically actually modeling to two people that this is how you talk to each other. And so, you might find yourself in a co-mediation scenario saying, "yes, as my co-mediator just said", and you're modeling, listening and actually, you know, working together and working collaboratively. But on the working collaboratively bit, which is a key part of conflict, you mentioned parallel parenting. And I'm really interested in this, Tom, because I wonder whether either of you think that we set the bar too high with this notion of co-parenting. Whether, actually, and we hear about it all the time, we are co-parenting. Actually, when you're separating, when you're divorcing and there's all the stress and everything involved, is it really too high a bar to think that you're, because formerly you were a home team, you parented together in the same house. Co-parenting for me seems quite difficult in many circumstances.

[Tamara Glanville]

I think it is very difficult in the early days. I think it gets easier. And one of the things that I hope that people are able to take away from early conversations with me is the importance of communicating with their children together, what is going to happen next. Because if they start that way, however difficult it is. If they can have that conversation with their children in an age-appropriate way together at the beginning, it stops them creating these separate camps. Because as far as the children are concerned, there mustn't be a side. They just need to believe that both of their parents are on their side and they're going to sing from the same hymn sheet. Because if they're not singing from the same hymn sheet, it creates all sorts of problems further down the line. When mum says X, dad says Y, and they don't think that the parents are going to talk.

[Nick Coffey]

And in both of your experience, is it fair to say that it almost doesn't matter what mum and dad agree, as long as they do agree on plans, arrangements, and that is communicated to the children? Is that the most important thing?

[Tom Nash]

Actually, conflict's a really good thing. This is another one of those examples of modeling, where actually it's a good example that we can set for our children, even going through an emotionally, physically draining process like a divorce or separation, actually, to show that we're not always going to get exactly what we want, either one of us. And I've got four kids, and I can promise you they don't always get what they want. There's always going to be

someone that comes away a little bit bruised from what they wanted. What they actually get to see is that, yes, there can be disagreements, but it's, OK, how do we create acknowledgement, understanding, not agreement? And then how do we come back, maybe come away from situations, let things cool down, find a better strategy and a way to communicate more effectively? And find the level ground or whatever that might be? And help people to be looking at the solution, not the problem. And again, it just goes to life skills that we want to pass down to our children. If they can see that, they can then take that on. What I would say as a caveat, and I know I did this to my dad when I was growing up and to my mum, they will play you off on each other. They are going to test the boundaries as all kids do, and that's their job. Yeah. Like I said, with my dad, I always used to go, "Dad, can I have a chocolate bar before dinner?" He'd go, no, of course you can't. Dinner's in an hour. I'd go and ask my mum, and she'd be like, what did dad say? He said, it's fine. They're going to play you off on each other. So, if, again, not even in a co-parenting situation, even still in a parallel parenting situation, if you're still sharing the subsequent data, then you can find a way to show them a better way to resolve conflict.

[Nick Coffey]

Tamara, I wonder whether this is an appropriate point to, I'm picking up on what you said there, Tom, because it interests me about not all conflict is bad. If you're listening to this right now and you're right in the heart of it. And you're really stressed about the conflict, even if it's relatively low. But you're stressed about the conflict, and you're worried about the impact on your children. Is this the moment to say that actually demonstrating to your children that you have both got through it, to the other side, is actually, and I'm kind of repeating what you said Tom, but with a little bit on top that it is actually really good modeling. Mummy and daddy are no longer together. We still love you both, or three of you, or four of you in your case, we still love you, but we're not together. We have had a tough time of it, but look, we are now on the other side. Is that also a really important message?

[Tamara Glanville]

Well, it's a really important message, but it also demonstrates to the children that you can get through difficult times. And when everybody is flailing about, not quite sure how the land is lying underneath them, it's really, really powerful to be able to say, we will get through this. And children will have seen conflict, and they will see conflict, even where the parents are still together. So, some of the things that they struggle with, they would have struggled with even if they'd remained together. But it's very easy to blame that particular issue on the fact that they have separated. So, I think sometimes parents need to take a step back and not be too hard on themselves. That their separation has led to X, Y or Z happening. It may have happened anyway.

[Nick Coffey]

Which actually leads me to ask you, Tom, and this goes off topic, so let's kind of keep this tight, but Tamara's just hit on a really important point, and you must see this as a divorce coach. The shame and the guilt that parents go through when they're divorcing. I know this is slightly away from conflict, but it is relevant because that also is going to influence how you behave. And you must see this all the time in your work.

[Tom Nash]

Yeah, and there's a whole host of different emotions going on. And people do need to be kinder to themselves, as well as being considerate, even if they're not particularly liking the other person at that time. But the other thing to remember is they don't have to have all the answers yet. Because that can actually drive conflict. The pressure and expectation, as you say, guilt and shame and a whole host of other things, that we have to be able to tell the children absolutely everything. Where they're going to be on this day, who's going to pick up there, what's going to happen, who's going to live. We don't need to have every single answer. And it's okay to tell the kids that you don't have them yet. Equally, it's also okay when you're talking to your children about... a whole host of different situations. If it is emotional for one or both of you, it's still okay to show that level of emotion. In fact, you give them agency and validity to show their own emotions as well.

[Nick Coffer]

Is it fair, Tamara, to say that divorce is a long-term work in progress?

[Tamara Glanvill]

It does take a lot of people quite a long time to get through the entire process, whether that's the legal process or just the emotional one. Increasingly, the legal process is a terribly long time, which is why the other forums for helping couples to deal with the day-to-day practicalities are much better utilised. But yes, it takes a long, long time. And just as you think that you've got the answer and you've got the platform and you've worked it all out, needs will change again. And you'll have to go and have another conversation, because that's the joy of parenting.

[Nick Coffer]

The children have started school, or there's an illness or...

[Tamara Glanvill]

There's always something around the corner that's going to change these very, very well-organised plans. And you have to be able to flex to that. And if you can't flex to it because your communication is so poor, you're going to need help with getting that right. And that sort of help can come from mediators, it can come from coaching coaches. It very rarely comes from the court.

[Nick Coffer]

I feel at this point we should make Tom earn his money, which is slightly rhetorical. But I think this is where your role as a divorce coach can be really interesting. So, we've talked about conflict. We've talked about the impact of that conflict on children. And we've talked about the impact of it on parents and adults. I really want to make sure on this podcast that we look at some clear strategies. So, let's start with de-escalating conflict. How can we dial it down? What are your, it sounds terribly trite, but your top three tips? What should we be looking at if we're in a high conflict situation? And obviously it takes two people to do this, but how can we deescalate?

[Tom Nash]

First and foremost, take a break, whatever that means. Actually, one thing I do with many people, or suggest quite often, is actually if we could have a safe word, or even a non-verbal,

a safe action, not putting your hand up in front of their face, that would be obviously quite inflammatory but trying to find something that helps the other person understand.

[Nick Coffey]

So, what could it be? I mean out of interest, could it be that we literally say the word 'grapefruit'?

[Tom Nash]

You could pick any safe word or safe action you want. Putting your hands together, right, rather than putting up kind of inflammatory kind of, or defensive or aggressive physical presence.

[Nick Coffey]

Or the timeout gesture.

[Tom Nash]

Timeout gesture. You could use a whole host of things. First and foremost is that we need to find a way for you to both be able to communicate equally, verbally or non-verbally, 'this is too much, I need to take a break.' That could also be if that conflict is even digitised, doesn't have to be in person. So, again, if we can also set some templated kind of statements that we agree on, 'this is becoming too heated for me. I need to step away for a moment. I'll call you back in an hour or I'll message you tomorrow.' One of the things with kind of, let's say, digitised communications and digitised conflicts is set some frameworks around what is urgent and what is not. Has one of the children hurt themselves at school and they need picking up? Urgent. Get on the phone, it's probably not going to cause conflicts. Is it about a question of what's missing on the Form E because of something that you're talking about with Tamara? Or something else entirely, or outside influences, which we'll probably talk about a bit later. But find those things that are setting you off, the hot buttons, the triggers as well. And if we can kind of map them out and identify them, then we can be more aware of them and set some boundaries and parameters around them. One of the things is with that online communication, or digitised communication, if it's not urgent, set a framework of we don't reply for 24, maybe even 48 hours. And even more importantly, we were talking about this earlier today, weren't we? Is use the technology that's around you, right? Write out your rah, rah, rah, angry response. Just don't send it to them. Maybe send it to me as your coach or set up your own email address and send it to yourself.

[Nick Coffey]

Chat GPT is quite good at dialing you down. Tamara you must see this where, especially in this world of communication, where clients come to you and they are whether it's WhatsApp and Facebook, and Snap, and iMessage and email, and every day there is 30, 40, 50 messages. And they are in the conflict, they don't even realise it.

[Tamara Glanvill]

No. We do see it a lot, and quite often they're forwarded or copied into us. And then sometimes somebody will accidentally copy all or reply all, and they didn't intend that. So, it's absolutely fraught with danger sending those emails. But there are some really good apps out there. And so, when people are, you know, quite often, people will say, when I see

his or her message come up, I immediately feel threatened. My heart rate goes up. I feel scared. And so, some of the apps that are available now can help you manage when you look at those. So that you're looking at them at a time that you can deal with your response. So obviously, with the exception of those urgent issues that Tom's identified, having that capability of being able to identify when you're going to look at it, and it might just be once a day, and then you've got time to formulate a response in a non-immediate, reactive way, is really, really powerful. And also everything is there in one place. So you're not getting a WhatsApp, followed by a text, followed by a phone call, followed by an email.

[Nick Coffey]

Read my WhatsApp, says the email.

[Tamara Glanville]

Indeed! And on some of these apps, they're very, very good now. And so, there is even a tone moderator that can say...

[Nick Coffey]

That's on 'Our Family Wizard', isn't it?

[Tamara Glanville]

It is, yeah. 'Are you sure that you want to say it like that? Can you think of a different way of putting it all? That might appear to be a little bit inflammatory.'

[Nick Coffey]

And Chatgpt does that as well. ChatGPT, if you pop your email in, it'll say, 'this is a strong start. However...'

[Tamara Glanville]

Yeah. So, I think there are really good pieces of technology that can allow you to react in a time and a space that is most conducive to reaching an agreement.

[Nick Coffey]

I wonder whether, and I don't want to sort of go into how long you've been doing this, but I suspect this has got worse with the propagation of different platforms. Because there are now six, seven, eight different ways you can communicate with someone. And even if you don't use a parenting app, just agreeing to use one app, especially, say, for example, you use WhatsApp generally. You know, WhatsApp's for friends and family and nice things. And if you're getting really stressful messages in WhatsApp, it's going to pollute your whole life.

[Tamara Glanville]

It does. And it infiltrates everywhere. And there are eyes everywhere as well. So other people are seeing that you've posted, you know, even if you've turned off your notifications, somebody else might say, oh, I saw on Facebook X or Y. And that can also lead to extra conflict. So, I think, be really, really mindful when you're particularly in those early stages where it's very, very high conflict and everybody's very emotional. Be really mindful what you put in any forum that you wouldn't want to look at again in a year's time and think, oh

my goodness, or you wouldn't want your mother to read, or you wouldn't want your best friend to judge you on.

[Nick Coffey]

My mum's pretty hardcore. You are touching on a really important point there, which is around effective communication. And Tom, I suspect this is the core of the work you do, because the written word can be misinterpreted. I've sat with people who've both quoted me the same email, and they both have completely different views on what that email was saying and how it was meant to sound. And one of them might be saying, 'No, but I was being kind' and the other one might be saying 'that felt really aggressive.' And this is a real problem. I sometimes use the W and the M image. So, if I'm sat opposite you right now, Tamara, and if I had the letter M in front of me, it would look like a W to you. So, we're looking at the same thing. So, Tom, how can we improve that dialogue while at the same time, importantly, minimise misunderstandings? We can't eliminate them, but minimise them.

[Tom Nash]

No, not at all. Because that's one of the things that we don't get with the written word is tonality, tuition, how it's coming across, not just what they're saying, but how they're saying it. So, think about kind of all the other parts of your language, other than just the words that you use as well and how you deliver that.

[Nick Coffey]

Is it an idea to start your email by saying, "I'm sending this in the spirit of....", you know, actually state your tone.

[Tom Nash]

Yeah, I have a lot of people, actually, as part of the recommendation. I actually have people where they're still maybe using WhatsApp, where actually a lot of them will use voice notes, as well as saying, 'here is the kind of bullet point summary of my voice note.' To say, pick up, drop off, whatever the actual factual points are. But at least then the actual tonality intuition is there and actually can be delivered in the purpose in which it is intended. If we're also still talking, obviously, about high conflict situations, obviously, with a lot of us in our professions that would know and be aware of about Bill Eddy and the BIFF acronym, which stands for Brief, Informative, Friendly and Firm. So, again-

[Nick Coffey]

Use it.

[Tom Nash]

Brief is just short, sharp, punchy, nice and concise, but you can still be, not just cordial, but you can still be polite.

[Nick Coffey]

And by the way, if you say to ChatGPT, here's an email, can you check it for BIFF? It will know that you're referring to-

[Tom Nash]

It will spit it out and give you a much better example.

[Nick Coffey]

It will spit it out and say 'good try, but I've made it a bit shorter and a little bit' - and by the way, when we say friendly, to be clear about this, Tom, we're not saying nice. We're saying courteous.

[Tom Nash]

Yeah. One of the things that actually can be quite hard to remember in this high-stakes game, high emotions, high conflict, is it's actually still okay to show gratitude or even appreciation. To actually say thank you when the other person has done, acted or behaved in a certain way, or even just for little things that have been helpful to you or to the children.

[Nick Coffey]

Do either of you in your work, and I have done this, I suspect both of you do as well, ever say to parents, one or both, "tell me about them as a mum", or "tell me about them as a dad". And then when that wall comes down, and you know, it could be a high conflict situation. And I'm going to say, it's dad just for the illustrative, and dad says, "But you know what? She's a great mum", and then you see mum go, "oh, okay". And this backs up what you're saying, Tom, about the power of gratitude. Do you ever see that in your work?

[Tamara Glanvill]

Well, you probably both work with the parents together more than I do. So, I tend to only ever see one side of the coin, so to speak. But one of the strategies that we use in collaborative law quite a lot, and we don't tend to use collaborative as much for children work as we do for financial work, but is to encourage our clients to make an anchor statement. An anchor statement in its purest form is what they intend to get out of the process, and to stay away from pounds and pence and exactitudes. But more about, very often, in fact, nine times out of 10, people will say, I want us to be able to go to our children's graduation together, their wedding together. I don't want our children to be damaged by this. And it's really, really powerful when things are difficult and there is no process that won't be difficult. This is difficult. But when things do get difficult, if you can take your clients back to that, it's really powerful. Because it just resets and then they can move forward again. So, although I don't use it a lot because we don't use collaborative for this, or I haven't used collaborative work for child arrangements specifically. I think I probably do carry that with me in my practice. So, I might not call it an anchor statement, but I definitely try and get them to identify some good things.

[Nick Coffey]

To bring it back.

[Tom Nash]

See, I actually - from a more kind of emotional and mindset perspective - actually, one of the exercises or practices I get clients to do, even when it's high conflict, still when it's high

emotion, is actually get them to handwrite specifically, not laptop, not on their phone, handwrite because we connect with the words differently. I actually get them to write forgiveness letters. Again, ones that they may never send, But not just to their spouse or to the other parent, but also to themselves as well. And just help them to start letting go of a lot of the angst that sits in the background.

[Nick Coffer]

Which ties into what we said earlier on about the guilt and shame that you carry when you're separating. The guilt and shame towards your children, putting them through it. And so, you're asking your clients to write that kind letter to themselves.

[Tom Nash]

Yeah. As well as to their former partner.

[Nick Coffer]

Must be very powerful when that happens.

[Tom Nash]

Yeah. And then they get to choose what they do with it as well. They can choose to... burn it and let it go and have it as a ritual.

[Nick Coffer]

Send it?

[Tom Nash]

They could send it if they really wanted to. They could frame it, or some people just want to keep it private, I guess.

[Nick Coffer]

There's one word I want to bring in, and it's coming in soon so, I'll just leave that dangling. You both probably can guess where I'm going on this. But I just want to touch on a really important point as well, Tom, which is you're talking about being kind to yourself. And once you're kind of getting through the process, you're in it, you're towards the end, you may even be out the other side. A key part of what you do is about making sure that people look after themselves, isn't it?

[Tom Nash]

Yeah, yeah, absolutely, and all the different buzzwords and phrases. But self-care, just looking after you, like, where are you going to process this information? And having positive outside influence, be that professional or friends, family, but then also how are you looking after you? What are the things that are nourishing you in all different ways, shapes and forms, from your diet to your good sleeping patterns, right through to what brings you joy and is trying to put a smile on your face at the moment?

[Nick Coffer]

You've just hit on, and we're coming towards the end, and I feel like I could open up another hour. You just hit on one of the problems, which is, of course, Tamara, you surround yourself

by the people who say what you want to hear them say. If you want a high-conflict divorce, you're going to have that friend in your ear who's loving the battle. If you want a big intergenerational fight, you're going to have your parent or your aunt, or whoever it is, in your ear. Tom, you're talking about who you surround yourself with. I would say if you can do one thing, it's find one balanced person, whoever it is, whether it's your colleague at work, your GP, your friend, the person you play tennis with. It doesn't matter, that one voice, it just says 'OK but...'

[Tamara Glanvill]

It needs to be that person that is able to challenge you in a kind way, I'm sure. But as you say, there are many people that will surround ourselves who will just say what you want to hear. And you need to be sure that the people around you are going to be acting in your best interest, but they probably also know your children. And so, they will also have a separate eye on what this is doing to the children. I think it's all about what you're about to go on to, Nick, but ultimately, you need to have friends who are able to challenge you and who are able to tell you the truth that you don't necessarily want to hear.

[Nick Coffey]

How did you know I was going to talk about boundaries? And I think that we cannot do a podcast episode about conflict and communication without really zeroing on boundaries, which for many years were kind of a little bit disdainfully thought of as a little bit hippie. But actually, they are certainly the core of my work, and I'm sure they're the core of your work as well. Most importantly, they're the core of healthy family systems. And by that, I mean two divorcing people operating well, children operating well. Having boundaries, holding those lines, sticking to those lines, and ensuring that you protect the space around you with those boundaries and that you're seen to hold them. Tom, this is basically the core of this whole conversation, isn't it?

[Tom Nash]

Yep, absolutely. Boundaries are effectively ground rules. They're lines in the sand. The things that are and aren't acceptable to us. And it's about identifying for each of you what is and isn't acceptable, how to communicate that effectively, like we were talking earlier, in different ways and in those different formats of those. We gave some examples of boundaries earlier about, like, not responding within 24 or 48 hours, right? And things like that. But then also there are going to be other ones that come up. And as Tamara was saying about things ebb and flow as the children get older and new partners come in, that's going to be a big one, right? It's what information is pertinent to the other person still as well. What's still private, right? What rules do we mirror in each other's houses? But what rules might we not need to mirror? Even screen time being a big one, right? Bedtimes, like, if you're the parent that is five minutes across the road from school, but the other parent is a 45-minute drive away, it's conceivable the kid may go to bed earlier and have to get up earlier or have a very different routine. So, it's trying to explore what those needs are effectively, and then how we actually put them into place, and, more importantly, how you support them as well.

[Nick Coffey]

And I think Tamara when we talk about boundaries, it leads on to a second one, which is respect. And it's really hard in the throes of divorce to think respectfully, but somehow you in your work, Tom, in your work, you have to find a way for that little nugget of respect to stay there so that you can hear and be heard.

[Tamara Glanvill]

Respect, it's hard won and it's easy lost. So, I think part of the pulling this all back together again for the separating couple is about rebuilding trust and respect. But we have got some brilliant tools to help couples do this. And a parenting plan, and a well-crafted parenting plan is the obvious one. The obvious go-to. And the couple can do this themselves. We can give them the questions and they can formulate it together if they've got to that place. Or we can work through it with them. The mediator can do that, their lawyers can do that. But a well-crafted, well-executed parenting plan not only gives them the framework of which they're going to manage their children going forward, but it also gives them the skills in negotiating as things change.

[Nick Coffer]

But, of course, Tamara, listening to this, if you're a couple in high conflict at the moment, you're probably thinking, 'well, yeah, we could write a little parenting plan, but then how are they ever going to stick to it unless we, I don't know, put it into a court order?' But of course...

[Tamara Glanvill]

Well, the reality is, if you're part of the process and you've helped develop that parenting plan, you're much more likely to have ownership of it, and therefore, you're much more likely to implement it. When decisions are made by a third party, i.e. a judge or a panel of magistrates, you have no say in that. You might have been heard, you might have had a voice in court, but somebody else is making a decision about your children who they have never met. And that's the worst of all cases. And I have heard judges say, you're in my court because you failed as parents to reach an agreement together. That's really hard to hear. But if you tell clients that that's the ultimate outcome, they will work harder to try and reach a solution together.

[Nick Coffer]

And also, all three of us, I think, are quite strong-willed people. And I know that since the age of about two, if someone tells me to do something, there is every likelihood that I'll try and find a way not to do it. But if I feel I've had some agency in that decision, that process, there's much more chance I'm going to stick to it.

[Tom Nash]

Yeah.

[Tamara Glanvill]

And then you're creating a precedent, and then you're creating a way of living your life. And then actually, it starts to become second nature, and then you can start to flex it if you need to. You know, just by putting it together, you've had to communicate efficiently, you've had to listen to one another's viewpoint. You've had to compromise on some of your things, and

you've had to accept things that you don't necessarily think you would have done had you remained married. But even, you know, I've been married a long time, but there are things that my husband and I have disagreed with when it comes to bringing up our children. And so that happens in any relationship. And it's how you communicate that, and how you power through that, and what systems you develop to make sure that you're co-parenting, either together or apart.

[Nick Coffey]

And you're putting in place systems that could last generations. Can I finish with, it's almost a plea, it may sound like advice, it may sound like I'm putting words in your mouth, but I'm going to finish with this and ask you both to pick up on it. If you ignore everything else we've talked about in this whole episode, just always bring it back to the children and focus on their needs. And if you can do that, I'm going to suggest to both of you that all else will follow. Because if you're being child-focused and child-centred, and your children are front and centre in your thoughts, even in those worst moments, if you ignore everything else we've said, but you stay focused on your children, you've got half a chance.

[Tom Nash]

Yeah. Put them in the centre, not the middle. They're not in between you as a tug of war, and when we say put them at the centre, and when you say, think about your children's needs, your actual children's needs, not what you think that they are. So, again, age appropriately, talk to them.

[Tamara Glanville]

This is a big shift for them, too. So, it is really, really important that they also have a voice in this. And however you manage to extract that voice from them, make sure you hear it. There's no point asking if you don't then listen.

[Nick Coffey]

The bottom line in all of this is, be kind to yourselves because this is a horrific process. It's very, very stressful. As you said, Tamara, very difficult conversations. And as you're saying, Tom, you know, hold those boundaries, hold those lines, be open to communicating well, make sure that you don't let each other seep into your space, and keep the children front and centre. And then, I mean, it's a bit of a manifesto, but I think at that point, you do have half a chance. I'm just going to pick up on what you said a while ago in this whole conversation Tamara. You know, most people, or many people getting divorced could be, what, mid-30s, late 30s, mid-40s. You could have another 40 years here to enjoy a whole, not other life, but a whole different life.

[Tom Nash]

Yeah, I mean, it's messy and sticky, right, to get through this, and it's hard. But it's not, and again, it's not about time being the great healer, it's about what you do within that time. And one of the things I know that I did was to continually keep extending that olive branch, even the smallest and simplest of things. And at some point, there was a there was a shift, and my ex-wife said, "Okay, I'll come in for a cup of tea". And now she has a key to the house and lets herself in when she drops my kids.

[Nick Coffey]

I think we should, we should wrap it up. It is a real pleasure to be around two divorce professionals who are so dedicated to lowering the conflict. It's so easy to get involved, isn't it, Tamara? Ultimately, we as professionals are not doing favours to anyone by escalating that conflict. And it's really great, for me, to be around people like you, Tamara, and you, Tom, who are so passionate about dialing down that noise. Really, the people who are benefiting are the children. Tamara, we can find you at Taylor Walton. What's the best way to do that?

[Tamara Glanvill]

Yes, you can either call me at my office or you can email me
Tamara.Glanvill@taylorwalton.co.uk.

[Nick Coffey]

And taylorwalton.co.uk for the website. And you, Tom?

[Tom Nash]

You can find me just by googling Mr. Divorce Coach and my name, Tom Nash. You can actually book your consultations directly into my diary as well to pick a time to suit you. Or you can email me on Tom at mrdivorcecoach.co.uk.

[Nick Coffey]

You cleverly came up with a name that Google likes. So just Google. Mr. Divorce Coach, and you will find your way to Tom. So that's the first episode in this new series. Of course, in the first series, there were 10 episodes in it, really wide range of topics. I think we covered employment, commercial property, there was a double episode on landlord and tenancy regulations, finance and divorce with your colleague, Olive, where we debunked some finance myths. There was the lovely episode that you did with Julie New, all around the emotional side of divorce and how to walk down that path. You can find all of those episodes at taylorwalton.co.uk or on Spotify and Apple. Do follow the series as well because that way you'll get notified of all future episodes. But for now, from me, Nick Coffey. And Tom and Tamara, it's goodbye.