

# Parental resilience when partnerrelationship fails.

dr. Ilse Janssen, Alephtherapie.be / Interactie-Academie

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1

## introduction

- Docent at the Interaction-Academy, Antwerp
- Clinical psychologist, therapist at Aleph
- Mother in blended family (mostly resilient 😊)



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2

## Partner separation

- Major family transition => wanted vs unintentional
- complex emotions
- many practical arrangements
- Parental reorganisation
- for the parents as well as for the children
- many are affected



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## Effects of parental separation

- 70 000 a 80 000 youngsters experience a separation between their parents (CBS 2016)
- Several studies show:
  - Increased risk for problems in development and daily functioning, in both the short and long term
  - more emotional and behavioural problems than peers from intact families
  - reduced well-being, lowered self-esteem, more problems in relationships and poorer school performance
- In about 80%, the situation improves after two years.



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## when things remain difficult

- Solidified problem stories
- Attention on the ex-partner themes
- Chronic conflict dynamics between the ex-partners
- The cause of the conflict lays IN the other parent. He/she is the cause of all trouble
- Polarisation, demonisation
- Gaze has narrowed

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## when things remain difficult

- Thinking in terms of rights and duties, doing justice
- No longer thinking in terms of welfare and care

=> it creates a great imbalance on the personal level that inevitably infiltrates the parentel level



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## Dominant social discourses on the topic: parenthood after divorce

- Parents must continue to communicate well
- Parents must continue to raise their children together
- Children must not experience any burdens
- Ex-partner themes and parent themes are unsuitable for children's themes
- The best interests of the child are at the heart of parenthood



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9



## Focused on the children

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# Parenthood under high pressure

- Parents are feeling targeted
- Parents feel judged in their parenthood
- Parenthood = parenting



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# Focus on the parent



- how can we let the parent speak as a parent
- If we want to take good care of the children, we have to take good care of the parents.

Attention: pitfall!

Don't focus on the child through the conversation with the parent. Really focus on the parent, his wellbeing and his parenthood.

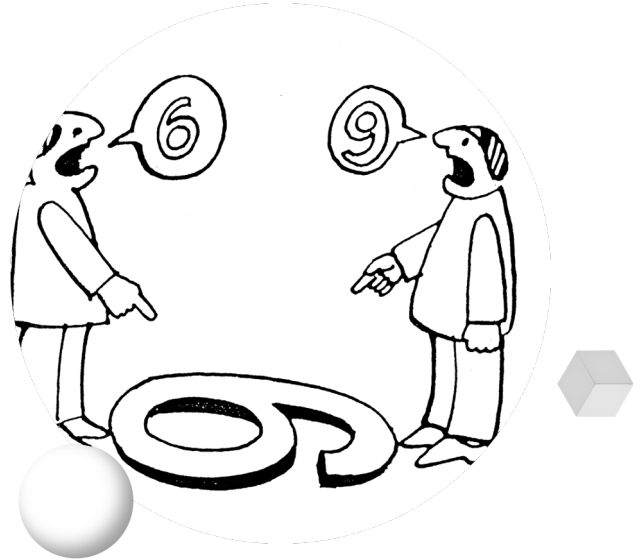
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12

## Conflict from system theoretical view

- Conflict as an interpersonal, relational phenomenon
- the conflict has several truths. Every parent has his or her reality.
- no parent is guilty of the fight they are involved in. They are both victims of the battle spiral



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## repositioning the conflict

- We externalise the conflict (the fight, the fuss,...)
- we position ourselves outside the battlefields so that we can observe the effects of the battle.
- Both parents are sucked into the conflict, like in a vortex. They can no longer see how to get out of it. They lack the feeling of influence.

=> focus on the effects of the conflict

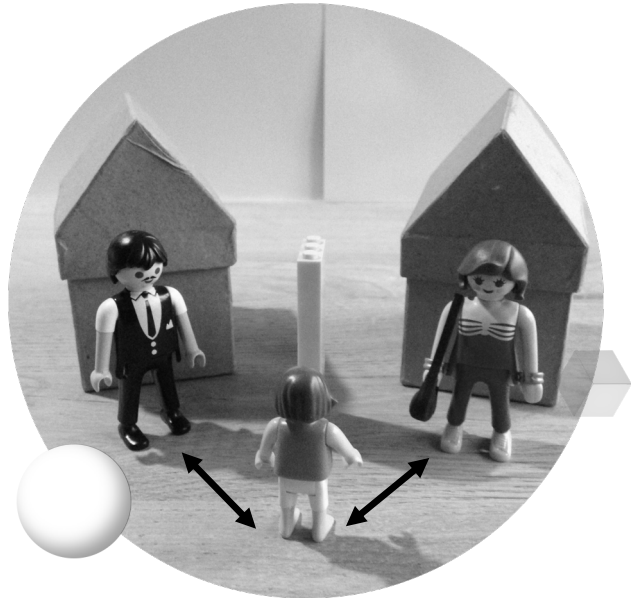
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# demarcate the conflict

- Place an imaginary "wall"
- Don't look over the wall
- focus on the parent-child-relationship
- emotion-regulating effect
- How can this person be a good parent for this child



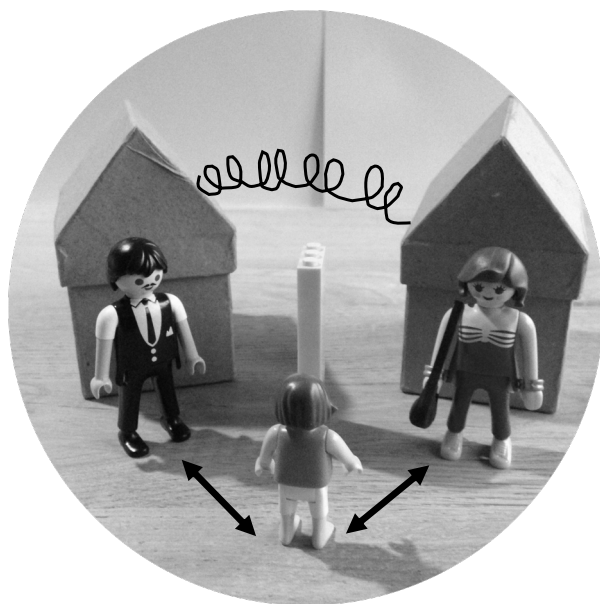
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# demarcate the conflict

- the red line is their area of interest
- the green arrow is our point of interest and our working area



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## How about us?

- We pay attention to our attitude.
- Supportive to act as a parent, no longer as an ex-partner
- aware of social discourses
- Out of the battlefield
- Focus on the parent-child-relationship



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## Strengthen the parental identity

- Identity = what is unique or inherent to something or someone.
- Parental identity: what kind of a parent am I? what kind of a parent do I want to be? What's important to me as a parent? ...
- It's a complex transformation process (Mercer, 2004)
- Grows by trial and error:
  - over time
  - out of a 'sense of responsibility'
  - From experiences
  - painful moments
  - Reflections and successes
  - In relation to the child, partner, family, network, school,....



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## Parental identity under high pressure

- *Recently I spoke to a mother of a 4 year old boy. She told me how the father of their son calls her regularly with all kinds of questions about school, fruit day, clothes, etc. She experiences his questions as proof of incompetence on his part and this is confirmed by school. The little boy's teacher tells mum when he is not okay with his things on the days he is with his daddy. this has a negative influence on daddy's parental identity. He should be given the opportunity to practice and experience how to do it properly. The boy's teacher can help him, the boy's mother can help him in order to be a proud father of the little boy, experiencing good parenthood.*

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## Our attitude

- Stand 'beside' the parent
- Be supportive in his parenthood
- Be supportive in finding alternative ways in parenthood that ensure growth and movement. Out-of-the-Box thinking!
- Make a distinction between parenting and parenthood.
- What needs this parent, to be a good parent for this child?

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# Be Mild

- High ideals on parenthood costs high energy
- high ideals on parenthood put strain on the morale: normalise mistakes
- do not constantly put the child first. The parent has to take care of himself too

=> Lower the bar!



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# How to increase resilience in parents?

- Alice van de Pas' buffer model

Solidarity

metaposition

Good division of tasks

good-parent



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## Good-parent experiences

- Parent must experience that he/she has influence over his/here child
- That he/she does it well
- It's about being proud of the child, and proud of oneself as a parent!!!!
- Also in the eyes of other!!

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## metaposition

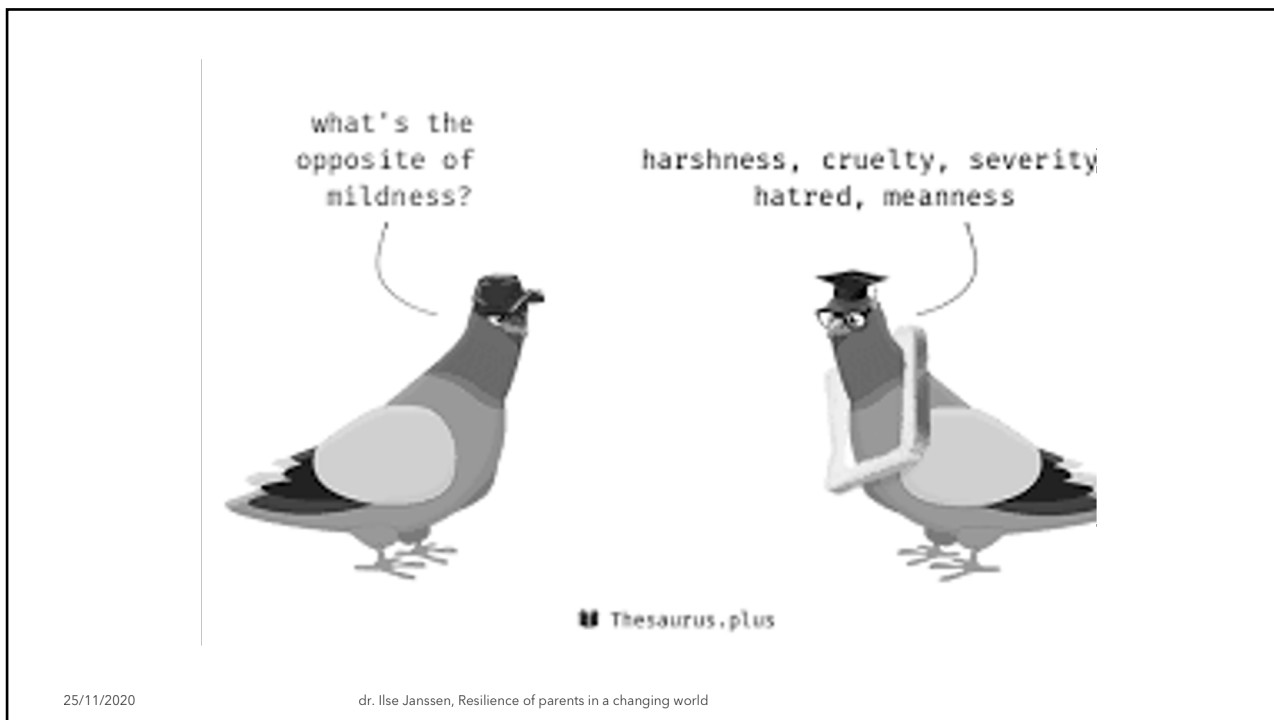
- Becoming aware of the effects of their parenting/parenthood.



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26



27



28