

live

Helping children cope with new family systems

QUESTION:

I don't know what to do about my ex-husband's relationship with our son. He is five and lives with me but stays with his father every other weekend and on Thursday nights. My ex has a two-year-old daughter with his present wife and my son tells me that his dad is showing more interest in her than in him. He often comes home from visits with his father sad and complains that his dad ignores him.

Answer:

You are describing a situation that can be quite complex of course, and there are at the moment some unknowns. There are many possible reasons for your son's perception, and his father's behaviour. I'd like to first talk about the bigger picture in the situation before I make some suggestions about what you might think about doing to help your son.

Divorced parents often run into some kind of conflict around the care and nurturing



of children, particularly when children from a new partner's family, and/or newborns become part of the newly-formed family systems. Becoming a single parent is also a new system to adjust to. The children of one or both families usually spend time with both parents and this forms yet another, larger system. This is a lot to adjust to. No matter how reasonable or how well-intended the parents may be, the stress of the adjustment and their new ex-

perience of themselves can lead to less-than-ideal behaviour that can be based on a lack of knowledge and understanding. There is stress in the adjustment to loss and change, even when it is desired. Perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and so on are shaken up and parents and children may need help finding their ground again.

For a child in the now common ongoing experience of transition between homes, one of their most important needs is to feel that ideally both, or at least one caregiver, is able to communicate their curiosity and caring about what the child is experiencing, and can take some time to be completely with them, listening — every day. This kind of empathy and attentiveness is essential to the healthy development of the child's ego-strength and resilience. Children take inside them the attitudes toward them of their caregivers and important people, like teachers and peers. For example, a child who

is criticized or ignored by a parent and does not feel heard by anyone else can unconsciously internalize a feeling of themselves as bad or useless. This burden affects their relationships with everyone, including peers, and the child's experience can become a vicious cycle of victimization.

I don't have a lot of information about the whole situation with your son's dad and step-mother, and perhaps you too need to know more. I would suggest that if at all possible you sit down with your ex and find out how he sees what's happening. Is he aware of his son's feelings? What is he noticing when his son is spending time with him? Has there been an incident that causes him to be more than usually concerned about his daughter? Are you seeing behaviour toward your son from your ex that you are familiar with or is this new?

Try to make sure you both get a full picture of what is happening from both of your

perspectives. How well is your son eating and sleeping? Is he complaining of any physical symptoms, such as headaches or stomach aches? Does he have regular playtime with friends? How far is your ex's home from yours and does your son have access to his community of friends in both places? How are your son and his step-mother getting along?

It would be a good idea, if you haven't already, to have him checked out by your GP or pediatrician, to rule out any physical causes. Your son has already experienced the loss of his family, and likely experienced some level of conflict between you and his father prior to your separation. He may need a lot of reassurance and time to process all that's happened.

If you remain concerned af-

ter talking to your ex and your son, and thinking about my questions, and others you may think of, a play therapist would be able to assess how your son is coping or not.

You may decide that some play therapy would help to get him back on track. In the meantime, encourage your son to express his feelings, verbally or in drawing.

Young children who learn how to express their feelings and how to help themselves feel better are more likely to stay mentally healthy later on in life.

Bea Donald, M.A., R.C.C., B.C.A.M.F.T., is program manager and clinical supervisor of the family counselling/employee assistance program at Family Services of the North Shore. Questions? Write onthecouch@familyservices.bc.ca or call 604-988-5281.

health notes

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ship with a young girl, Wednesday, Sept. 24, at 7 p.m. at the Leo Marshall Curriculum Centre, 810 West 21st St., North Vancouver. Info: www.bigisters.bc.ca. If you are interested in Big Brothers call 604-876-2447 or visit www.bigbrothersvancouver.com.

North Shore Disability Resource Centre: Annual general meeting Wednesday, Sept. 24, 5:30-6:30 p.m., at Lynn Valley Town Centre, 1177 Lynn Valley Rd., North Vancouver. Info: 604-985-5371.

Healing Arts for Home and Wellness Series: The Art of the Intuitive Life by Cheryl Brewster, Wednesday, Sept. 24, and The Body Knows How to Stay Young, with Caroline Sutherland, Thursday, Sept. 25. Workshops are from 7-9 p.m. at the Ferry Building Gallery, 1414 Argyle St., West Vancouver. Info: 604-925-7270 or www.ferrybuildinggallery.com.

Incorporating Living Foods Into Your Diet For Vitality and Mental Health: Presented by Katrine Volynsky, Wednesday, Sept. 24, 7 p.m., at John Braithwaite community centre, 145 West First St., North Vancouver. By donation. Info: 604-987-6959.

Healthy Brain — Reducing the Risk for Alzheimer's Disease: Telephone workshop Thursday, Sept. 25, 10-11 a.m. Online materials available at www.caringvoice.com or call 1-866-396-2433 to have them mailed. Registration required.

B.C. Cancer Agency's Community Care Award: Nominate someone who has gone above and beyond the call of duty. Info: www.bccancer.bc.ca or 604-877-6000, ext. 6216.

The Canadian Mental Health Association — North and West Vancouver Branch is seeking volunteer board members with experience in public relations, fundraising, law enforcement or community development. Info: Katie Hughes, 604-987-6959.

— Compiled by Pamela Stone and Debbie Caldwell
E-mail information for your non-profit, by donation or nominal fee event to listings@nsnews.com.

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Hope to see you there!

public notice
2008 Tax Sale

PURSUANT to Section 254 of the Community Charter and Section 405(1) of the Local Government Act, notice is hereby given that as of September 29, 2008, the following properties will be subject to Tax Sale unless the Delinquent Taxes together with interest are sooner paid.

The 2008 Tax Sale will be held in the Council Chamber of the City of North Vancouver, 141 West 14th Street at 10:00 a.m. on Monday, September 29, 2008.

LIST SUBJECT TO ALTERATION

LOT	BLOCK	DIST.LOT.	PLAN	STREET ADDRESS
A	105	550	1674	443 Lyon Place

NOTICE TO ALL PURCHASERS

Purchasers of tax sale properties should be aware that they will NOT have the right to receive title or possession until after one year following the date of the tax sale. During this period, the registered owner of the property has the right to redeem the property from the sale thus cancelling the sale. Properties sold at Tax Sale are subject to Property Purchase Tax.

In the case of all properties it is the buyer's responsibility to satisfy him/herself regarding the condition/potential of the property.

For more information please contact the Tax Department at 604-983-7316

141 West 14th Street, North Vancouver BC V7M 1H9 | Tel: 604-985-7761 | Fax: 604-985-9417



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