



**FAMILY RENEWAL RESOURCES PROJECT**  
parenting forever, through whatever

## **Family Renewal Resources Project (FRRP)**

*For separating and changed families*

### **An Open Letter to Separated Parents- The Medium and Long Term**

**As I am** writing this section, I have been personally reminded that a separation, especially a difficult one (most are for one or more family members), keeps on providing situations/challenges, even 25 years later, that must be managed with care, wisdom and integrity.

Once you have become a separated family, there are life events that are reminders that your journey with children took a different path than intended. Different can be as rewarding, but it is almost always more complicated and sensitive.

A family separation tests every family relationship in the short and long-term. The wounds, vulnerabilities and scars for every family member are often exposed during family events such as graduations, weddings and grandparenting to identify a few 'normal' life happenings. *Vulnerabilities* may be exposed when unexpected situations blindside us. Our built in radar, fine-tuned over the years to recognize high risk situations, has usually allowed us to manage awkward celebrations. Our most sensitive moments, however, occur when our children are involved and we measure every interaction *through the lens of a separated parent rather than through our life today.*

Remember the following rule: *as close as you may be to your child in their adulthood, their journey was and is unique to them. Each child (I have three) has a unique relationship with each parent and each grandparent.*

My adult children are now 38-45 years of age and my relationship with each has been wonderful/less complicated for many years. Yet every so often I get a glimpse that they don't see the events of the separating years in the same way. Their hidden wounds may be spontaneously revealed. Now the question becomes whether to let it slide (ignore), respond immediately, or tuck it away for a better day.

Every member of a separated family has their own narrative/interpretation for what took place. *These narratives are often incomplete or what I call without texture. Texture can sideline lingering anger and emotional pain* and help renew parent-child connections.

On occasion in the post separation life (even after 25 years), a separated parent feels a need to be given some priority. These one off 'family' celebrations for the children often reintroduce old frictions. These expectations are unfortunately rarely met because of the very nature of such events for a separated family. Most of us as parents have learned/adapted to lower our expectations- after all our adult voice reminds us that our role as a parent is to support our infant child to become a happy, resilient and loving young adult. That in the end should be our only priority, our only measuring stick.

Yet, separated families have become blended families and special occasions now include a wider set of intimate family relationships. It is easy for a parent to be reminded of earlier days when they were on the outside looking in at their child's life. It is not unusual to be set off on such occasions. Time has made other caring people less sensitive to your legitimate sensitivities. We often hear or think 'get past it'.

Earlier, I referenced my latest misstep. I made an issue of something with my daughter that was in the scheme of things less than minor. Hidden in the years of relative calm *was my need to be prioritized*. My sensitivity was understandable; but I failed to recognize/remember my child's journey and how she has had to play 'forever' a broker role learned in her childhood years and even now occasionally in adulthood.

I chose the option to immediately react when my vulnerabilities and old scars were exposed. The old rule of allowing time before speaking would have permitted time for *considered reflection. A useful tool for every separated parent.*

The FRRP is again about parents building integral relationships with each child: **completing the whole** is our role in an intact or separated family. Helping to complete the whole is the never-ending commitment made when our child was placed in our arms. It is often more difficult in a separated family.

**Remember a second rule:** *your role as a parent to your adult children may be as significant as your earlier role. It may offer the opportunity to provide support as a parent and grandparent, free from the complicated, family relationships for children that often controlled the pre-adult years.*

*Adult children of a separation still need wise counsel; still need questions to be answered; still need unconditional love and support, tempered by experience and judgment.* There is an opportunity to provide a life narrative (texture) that supports them in making sense of their past family history and works at building a present and future life *that has integrity and wholeness.*

I recall the day my son was placed in my arms as a two month old infant by the Children's Aid worker. After 10 minutes of holding him she asked if we wanted to go ahead and take him home. I thought it was a silly question for he became my son the moment I held him. *That is our common experience as parents.*

Recently, my son became a father for the first time. I witnessed that same, *common* commitment to his son that I made to him and binds all parents. **A connection made of heart and soul!** An ugly separation may test whether that connection thrives or whether the connection becomes *an unbearable loss* for a parent.

In our support groups over the years, the one characteristic/quality that we found as fundamental for every separated parent is 'resiliency'. The capacity to bounce back, to keep your eyes on the prize through all the setbacks is crucial. Resiliency may be acquired by many through childhood trauma or observing a parent who modelled such bounce back with grace and optimism. Some of us need support to acquire an approach to life that builds acceptance that there are setbacks; but each setback provides opportunity and life lessons that allow us to greet the next hurdle and barely break stride.

I used to think that I was a rock; in my separating years I immediately discovered the opposite. I spent endless hours in my rocking chair after every perceived slight or damaged relationship. I acquired

resiliency in different ways, aided by the passing of time. My recent misstep found me again in my rocking chair, twenty five years later. I needed that resiliency thing again...and again!

*"I would never want to go through what I went through on a personal level or for those that I love. Yet in saying that, I do believe that I became a more loving and dedicated parent and a more thoughtful, tolerant and caring person in every caring relationship in my life. "*

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### **Resources**

*The resources offered cover a cross section of long-term issues/concerns that are faced by most separating and changed families.*