

## **Book Review\***

**Title:** **In the Name of the Child – A Developmental Approach to Understanding and Helping Children of Conflicted and Violent Divorce**

**Authors:** Janet R. Johnston, Ph.D. and  
Vivienne Roseby, Ph.D.

**Publisher:** The Free Press. 337 pgs., \$34.95

**Review:** Roxanne Rae, LCSW, BCD

This volume is based on research primarily done when the authors worked at the Judith Wallerstein Center for the Family in Transition. Far from being a dry report, Johnston and Roseby bring to life the confusion and pain of these often fragmented children. They share the experiences of one quarter to one third of divorcing couples who have significant difficulty separating, creating what the authors term a “failed divorce.” Both the context and the experience of divorce are clearly described, with focus on the individual, the family, and the “helpers” (including attorneys and mental health professionals). They offer excellent examples of useful interventions for these children and their parents, as well as a model for interdisciplinary partnerships with the court.

Of particular value is the authors’ compassionate treatment of the divorcing parent. Their mindfulness of the parents’ vulnerabilities and their clarity about how divorce triggers the parents’ issue of separation, loss, betrayal and humiliation, among others, provides a useful framework for assisting these families.

Johnston and Roseby provide a concise object relations view of development from infancy through early adolescence. They discuss the destructive impact of violent and high conflict divorce on the growth of these children at each stage. The use of realistic clinical examples poignantly enhances the material. Of further assistance is a detailed discussion of gender identity and how it may be threatened in a failed divorce for both boys and girls.

A chapter on the influence of domestic violence describes five different profiles and their implications for interventions and custodial decisions. Another chapter elucidates the process in which some children become enmeshed in their parents’ conflict to the point that they become aligned with one parent and alienated from another. The authors consider the roles of the rejected parent and the aligned one, and they delineate both the appropriate and the pathological responses of these children caught up in this process.

Johnston and Roseby have given us an informative book. It is a concise presentation of the psychodynamics involved in high conflict divorce as it affects children from an object relations developmental perspective. Their material is skillfully woven together in a manner that illuminates the developmental needs of the children, the

difficulties that arise in meeting them, and possible interventions. This is an excellent guide for those entering the work with highly conflicted divorcing families. For the experienced child and family practitioner it provides a framework to assist with assessment and treatment, as well as case management. It helps inform about the impact of divorce on issues of intimacy and trust for those treating adults who are products of these families. It also offers a review that includes recent research findings, as well as many clinical examples that provide inspiration to continue to assist these children and their families. Unfortunately, it may be a long time before this cooperative, educational and multidisciplinary approach offered by these authors is realized in most communities.

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