

## Responding to A 15-Year-Old Girl's Rejection of Her Father

**Q.**

Dear Dr Warshak,

We bought your book, *Divorce Poison*, and followed your advice. We took my husband's ex back to court for an order to show cause why their 15-year-old was not going to her court ordered counseling.

The judge again ordered that it be done with an update in a month. His daughter has been to one counseling session since the court order. We decided it was a good idea to highlight some things you said in your book and give it to his ex.

Well, apparently she let the daughter see it and the daughter then wrote a nasty letter to her Dad telling him to quit bullying her family, not to push his guilt on them for leaving them, and that her Mom has not brainwashed her.

This is my husband's first contact from his daughter in almost a year. His relationship with her continues to get worse every time he and his ex go to court to now there is no contact between them--until this letter.

My question is this--in the beginning my husband took the high road and didn't badmouth his ex or their marriage and thought she would eventually come around, but she hasn't. At this point, should he answer his daughter's letter and try and explain why he left, or not?

*--Barbara from South Dakota*

**A.**

Without knowing more about your situation I can not give specific advice.

In general, though, from what you described, it is unlikely that a letter from her father explaining the reasons for the divorce will change this girl's attitude and rekindle her desire to be with her father.

A better approach would be to contact the girl's therapist and let the therapist know of your willingness to participate in the treatment. If a letter is to be written, the therapist may provide feedback about how best to discuss the divorce in a manner that avoids badmouthing the

mother and is helpful to the girl.

Given her alignment with her mother, any implied criticism of the mother will most likely make this girl feel more sympathy for her mother and more anger toward her father. Also, the therapist may be the best person to present the letter to the girl at a time when it is most likely to do good.

**When it comes to alienated children, doing nothing accomplishes nothing.**

Your unsuccessful experience with waiting for the child to "eventually come around" supports the central thesis of my book: when it comes to alienated children, doing nothing accomplishes nothing. Absence does not make the alienated child's heart grow fonder; usually it makes alienation more profound.

Incidentally, as I explain in *Divorce Poison*, children commonly will disavow any influence of the favored parent on their negative attitudes toward the other parent.

Teenagers in general resist acknowledging their parents' influence over them, and in the case of divorce poison, the process is often so subtle that children are unaware that the behavior and manipulations of the favored parent have contributed to their irrational rejection of the other parent.

This is one reason why it is so difficult to reason with children about their alienation from a parent and why special procedures, such as I discuss in my book, are necessary to unlock their hearts.

I wish you and your husband best of luck in healing the ruptured relationship with his daughter. I hope your story will have a happy ending.