



## Divorced - happy - and good parents

Some patients come because of complaints that have arisen due to unresolved partnership conflicts. Not being aware of this at first, they expect the prescription of a remedy or a measure against the symptom, e.g. insomnia. But if the underlying cause is not eliminated, relief succeeds only for a short time. Then they try another remedy or even change the therapist. The game becomes even more difficult: The body will create another and usually even more violent physical warning signal to draw attention to the actual problem.

Here is an example: A patient named Dirk, male, 49 years old, married for 22 years, one son, 21 years old and a daughter, 8 years old, had been suffering from sleep disorders for several weeks. He had already tried a number of things, from valerian tea to relaxation baths, without any effect. He hoped to be prescribed sleeping pills "without addiction and side effects" by me. During the anamnesis, it turned out that the complaints had started when the decision to separate from his wife for good was solidifying for him. According to his statements, the relationship had not been harmonious for several years. As a child, he himself had witnessed a relationship between his parents characterized by quarrels and constant conflicts. His mother had always blamed his father for the situation he and his siblings had to suffer.

Dirk had discussed the topic with close friends, which made him feel even more insecure: "You're a bad father and a bad role model if you leave your wife and break up your family," said one. The other said, "What would people think, you've always been a great family!" The two friends had unfortunately forgotten the most important person, Dirk himself, whose well-being is of immense importance for the future of all family members.

It is a great gift for children to grow up in a family in which the relationship between parents is characterized by love, respect and attentiveness, and conflicts - which occur from time to time in every family - are resolved under these maxims. However, if these basic values are lost and parents stay together only for social and financial reasons or "because of the children," they are doing emotional damage to their children. Since 2006, I have served over 8000 children as an elementary school health promoter (children ages 6 to 10). From my experience I know: Even small children have a very fine sense when something is not right between their parents (anymore). They suffer from it, often without communicating and even sometimes feel guilty as the cause of conflicts. Children understand very well that there are different possibilities of adult relationships and that parents do not have to live together as a couple to be a good mother or father: To be there for the children materially and emotionally, to spend time with the children so they can grow up carefree, happy, loved and valued. What happens if Dirk stays in his situation?

- He harms himself, because if the insomnia is not enough of a physical indication of his unresolved conflict, more and possibly more severe symptoms will follow.
- The children continue to suffer from the tense situation between their parents. Only a healthy and happy father can be a "good" father in the long run. You can only give

what you have, and when this becomes less and less, your children will feel it. Sacrificing one's own happiness and well-being for that of the children - often demanded by partners who do not want to separate for selfish reasons - is manipulatively presented as "correct" and desirable behavior towards the children. Children are thus used as an instrument to put the partner under moral pressure in order to get one's own needs met.

- Children are given a bad role model in terms of truthfulness, self-love and actions derived from this. Since parents are role models, they will take this misbehavior and the associated problems with them into their personal future. Also the associated values.

After it became clear where Dirk's sleep disturbances came from, I initially just asked Dirk to think about these factors and questions calmly:

- Does an adult son really need the (unhappy) companionship of his parents? What can Dirk do for his son as a father quite independently of the mother? What does his son expect from his father?

- How could it be organized that his 8-year-old daughter can continue to perceive him as a father with all facets?

- Who could help as a mediator if mother and father can no longer communicate with each other constructively (sharing thoughts instead of just telling the other the result of one's own thoughts)?

It's not an easy task, and it will be a longer process if material and organizational factors make it difficult to separate quickly. But Dirk's current situation didn't happen overnight either. The challenge for both parents is to see clearly, accept and also explain to the children that humans are constantly evolving, can sometimes develop in a different way than their partner, get separated, but still remain good parents. That neither dad nor mom is therefore a bad person and is to blame for the partner's unhappiness. That adults can meet each other with respect, honesty and caring even after an "outlived" marriage.

Then parents are role models in healthy behavior. If children are later confronted with such a situation in their own partnership, they can deal with it constructively. It is about creating a better future for all involved, in which two individuals remain parents of happy children because both mother and father live sincerity, self-love and charity.

