

"Can My Relationship with My Child Ever Be What I Hoped For?"

Question: "So, as we progress through this estrangement seminar I am beginning to ask myself what hurts more - the actual estrangement, or the realization that the relationship will never be the close wonderful one that I dreamt of when I held her as a baby? Estrangement or no estrangement, the relationship is broken. Though I try very hard to recognize and honor my daughter's good points, (she's witty, intelligent, clever, interesting etc.), I could never like someone whose personal style involves putting others down for her own aggrandizement, raging so she can feel powerful and twisting the truth so she can feel righteous. I must love her, or I wouldn't be writing this, looking at websites or buying into your seminars. However, even if we do all the "right" things and she becomes willing to visit with us, I don't know if I'll ever be ready for a total reconciliation or that I'll ever hang up the phone without feeling a deep sense of sadness and disappointment....Yet, I'm afraid to lose her.

In short, I can't live with her and I can't live without her. Hence my question: "How do you love the child you don't like?" What do you do? What do you say? She KNOWS we don't like her. She's said it (in a rage), and we've denied it - but she was right. Do we admit it? Do we fake it forever? And how do we handle the pain? How do we keep from being hurt every time she lashes out?

A. I think it's an important question, and one that more than a few other estranged parents have wondered about. There are several issues here that are worth highlighting:

While we all wish that we'd love all of our children equally, the reality is that many parents don't love all of their children equally and that has to be okay. Some children are more lovable, engaging, rewarding, easy, and most of all from the perspective of estrangement, forgiving. So my first wish would be to help you to let yourself off of the hook for not liking a kid as much who isn't likeable.

Since she knows that you feel critical about her behavior I wouldn't try to whitewash it when it comes up. If she asks about it or criticizes

you for it, I would be very direct, but in a kindly way. "Honey, this is a part of you that I have a really hard time with. You're welcome to disagree with me, you don't have to share my values, but you can't be mad at me if I don't like your values. That doesn't mean that I don't love you or want to be close to you, but this behavior is something I have a really hard time with. I'm sure there are lots of things about me you have a really hard time with too."