

**Helping families navigate divorce and separation**  
**LawCast BC podcast**  
**Law Society of British Columbia**

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**Vinnie Yuen:**

Welcome to LawCast BC, a podcast produced by the Law Society of British Columbia. The Law Society regulates lawyers in BC. Our mandate is to protect the public. I'm Vinnie Yuen, host and producer.

Today we're talking about how health and justice intersect when a family goes through divorce or separation. Divorce and separation can be a very stressful event for families, especially for families with children. It also has serious impacts for a family. It has legal implications and implications for the mental or physical health of everyone involved. The Health Justice Alliance was formed in 2022 as a partnership between physicians and lawyers. Through this alliance, physicians and lawyers come together to learn from each other and work together to help patients and clients going through high conflict separation and divorce. Today, we've invited Dr. Ramneek Dosanjh and family lawyer, Tanya Chamberlain, to come speak about their experiences in working with families who are going through separation and how parents can help their kids navigate this stressful life change.

Dr. Ramneek Dosanjh is a family physician, hospitalist and child and youth mental health advocate. She is currently the president of the Federation of Medical Women of Canada and has been a participant at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women for the last two years. Dr. Dosanjh has been involved with the Health Justice Alliance since its inception. Her full biography is available in our show notes. Tanya Chamberlain is a family law lawyer who was called to the bar in BC in 1995. Tanya's family law practice is focused on consensual dispute resolution. She is a collaborative lawyer, family law mediator, arbitrator and parenting coordinator and prepares Hear the Child reports. Here's our discussion.

Thank you so much for joining me today.

**Ramneek Dosanjh:**

Thanks for having us.

**Tanya Chamberlain:**

Yeah, thank you, pleasure to be here.

**Vinnie Yuen:**

Let's start with talking about the Health Justice Alliance which helped develop resources for the FamiliesChange.ca website. The website was relaunched with new resources in April. Can you each speak about what motivated you to become involved in the Health Justice Alliance and their work in helping families navigate separation and divorce?

**Tanya Chamberlain:**

So I was elected as a bencher of the Law Society in 2021 and through that work, I met Justice Hamilton as she then was a bencher and then she became the president of the Law Society. She and Dr. Dosanjh had met and they had talked about this issue of adverse childhood experiences and she and I ended up having a conversation about it because she knew I was a family law lawyer but she didn't know much about my personal background and that I had a very high ACE score. My parents had a very high conflict marriage, high conflict separation. I also have a really high resiliency score so I think she brought me in to sort of talk about that at one of the meetings that they had starting this out and that's what I did. I talked a little bit about my childhood, how it all impacted me and a little bit about my work as a family law lawyer and why I do the kind of work I do because of what happened to me. And my whole work is about trying to make sure that families, and in particular children, don't have their parents' separation or divorce be an adverse childhood experience.

**Ramneek Dosanjh:**

And for me, from inception, so I had the pleasure of meeting Justice Hamilton when she was the President of the Law Society and I was the President of Doctors of BC and just

before I took office, my own world was falling apart in my personal life and I was trying to deal with the justice sector and navigating the system but I've been a long advocate for child youth mental health as well as being very cognizant of, aware of adverse childhood experiences both in my residency training and in my day-to-day work and the impact on children and society at large. And I thought what better way to bring us together to the conversation as opposed to continue to do this work in silos. I believe that intersectorial allyship is so integral for us to continue to grow our civil societies and engagement and who better to get together than lawyers and doctors in a room. But I thought you know there's incredible intelligence here, there's gifts of brilliance and ways that we navigate but the most important thing was that we're really in this together, we have a common vision of advocating for families, for children, and the wellbeing of our society and so this was a no brainer. And I think we've been so lucky to reap so many benefits of this and I think as much as physicians are helping to inform the justice sector, our lawyers and judges and those of the judicial system should be helping to influence our healthcare system because they're also recipients of the care or, in times of lack of care in our own healthcare system. So I truly believe this is a great partnership and the way things should be done moving forward.

**Tanya Chamberlain:**

It's so important to emphasize that the intersectionality of this and the idea of not operating in silos, this idea that you would go to your lawyer and you talk to your lawyer and you would never talk to your family doctor about what you were going through in a separation. And for me too, my favorite kind of process for family dispute resolution is collaborative law and so in collaborative law, we draw in other professionals to help us in our work, mental health professionals, financials, child specialists. So this seemed so obvious to me, like it just seemed so obvious that doctors and lawyers should be partnering and learning from each other to ensure that we are offering families better.

**Vinnie Yuen:**

Could you speak a little bit about what adverse childhood experiences are and just how much impact they have on families and communities?

**Ramneek Dosanjh:**

So in, around 1995 to 1997, Vincent Felitti and Robert Anda, both with the CDC and Kaiser Permanente in California, they did one of the largest research studies done, over 17,000 participants, to look at adverse childhood experiences and they had looked at 10 categories between, I mean you can look up the ACES study in more thorough detail, but really about abuse and neglect and impacts and one of those is divorce and separation. And when we're looking at what that means is they followed these participants and the likelihood of having adult disease was very high and very clinically correlated and clinically significant. So this is the underpinning of where the study came from. Subsequently we've had you know people such as Dr. Nadine Burke Harris, which was the Surgeon General for California, speak about this and the American Academy of Pediatrics published papers. And now, it's renowned throughout the world as a way to talk about, as I mentioned earlier, one of the greatest public health threats to our time is the adverse childhood experience and what that impact can mean for children.

**Tanya Chamberlain:**

I think from a, where it shows up in separation and divorce is really abuse, neglect and household dysfunction so if parents are so busy dealing with you know the end of their relationship or they're in conflict before the relationship ends and all of that, the kids' exposure to that conflict can, in of itself, be the adverse childhood experience, just so you know growing up in a house without you know two nurturing parents who are present, having, witnessing one of your parents be violent to the other or emotionally abusive or one parent going to jail can be an adverse childhood experience, all of these kinds of things, the child being abused, the child being neglected.

The other thing I was sort of thinking about when Dr. Dosanjh was speaking, and certainly this was my own parents, my experience of having two parents going through all this, my parents would get together and then they would split up and they would get back together and finally they split up when I was, for good, when I was about 20. A lot of the times, what they would say to me is well this is what we need to do or this is what's best for us or this is what has to happen or whatever. I don't think they ever really turned, and I think this is what's hard for parents is yeah, I get that, that's what has to happen, we

have to move to two houses and you have to change schools because the only place we can buy two houses is in this new neighbourhood because it's too expensive to be in our old neighbourhood but you just have to deal with that. I get all that and they're right, there probably is no other solution in this world we live in but that doesn't mean that a child doesn't suffer, right, the consequences of that, the moving schools, the moving homes, the loss of relationships, the social connections.

Really I think the keys are children experience abuse, neglect, household dysfunction, chaos and huge disruptions and all of that can be the adverse childhood experience. And my other worry for these kids, even the ones who seem okay, and in fact sometimes really the ones who are the high achievers who seem okay, I think this is a big worry, if they don't have good connections with their mother and father and their extended family, they're so vulnerable to other people. They're so vulnerable to that person who's like I'm going to love you and look after you and so I think sometimes those kids are at risk of putting themselves in unsafe relationships and unsafe situations and they'll often do just about anything to get out of their house. And so that can make them unsafe in various ways. I think that's, that's really how I see it and certainly how my childhood was.

**Ramneek Dosanjh:**

I think you raise a really good point of high performing students. We see this way too often. I see children all the time that you know have the persona and maybe I lived that to a point too, like you have a performer role in which you try to keep things together and you hide your hurt because a stoic version of you or a pleasant version of you is better tolerated. Or just being vulnerable and emotional is difficult because you have something to keep up with you know, and that image is, it can be, it can be very alienating for so many people that are going through it and even more so because it's not expected of you. And you're right, I think the other thing we have to really impart is understanding the relationship breakdown and demise, I think understanding that people that have witnessed this are again far more likely to put themselves in a situation.

So when we're talking about mitigating risk, I mean there's a lot we could talk about and really discuss but I think one of the things is really understanding what healthy relationships are from a preschool level, whether it's your friendships or your kinships and the relationships at home with your caretakers and your loved one or the expectations of role models, our teachers, our coaches, there is you know many layers to this and when we think about ACES especially, mitigating the risk means as many environments that you're exposed to, the home one being you know integral to that, but if you create support networks but also on understanding of what a healthy relationship looks like, what are red flags, what are green flags, how do we trust people, how do we lean into people.

And lately I've been saying that one of the most important decisions you're going to make of your life is not what school or alma mater you're going to belong to but really the partner you choose, you know that you spend the most time with, and if you don't know and you make a quick decision or you don't know what you're getting into, or understand the familial history of understand the dynamics of that role that you're going to play, it can be very suffocating, especially if you're an overachiever or someone that is you know living part of a very proud cultural background or religious faith.

That can be very, again, alienating and disempowering and we want to ensure that we give children and adults too a fair chance you know to be human and to be fallible but to be emotional, to be vulnerable but also to understand what are the constructs of a healthy dynamic. How do we look at intergenerational trauma and recognize there's a lot of trauma that's not ours to hold but yet we hold it as children, especially as children of immigrants or you know really difficult backgrounds or if you look at our BIPOC communities as well, those adverse childhood experiences can be even worse. I want to do mention that the ACES study was, there was some people of colour but the majority was 74% of Caucasian responders and 39% of them were college educated. So imagine if we talked to people that weren't at Kaiser, you know that don't even have the ability to get healthcare or within the socialized system. We haven't even reached our rural, remote or Indigenous communities to really think about how devastating this is and we're

looking at patterns of how to improve poverty and our success and all these things but I really, truly believe that the socioeconomic evolution of our time would be paying attention to something such as adverse childhood experiences and the impact of divorce and separation or the breakdown of relationships.

**Vinnie Yuen:**

What is the role of a physician in helping families through a separation or divorce and what is the role of a lawyer in that process as well?

**Ramneek Dosanjh:**

So I believe that the role of family doctors as again, they're a clinical gatekeeper for people's health and the wellbeing of children, I think it's really important to understand that if families are going through such a process, for them to understand exactly how difficult it is, one, and two the impact that it can have and the longstanding sequelae on your physical health, your safety and your security both for your wellbeing but also of your loved ones, especially the children that are involved. I think there is an additional layer as physicians, as you know the trusted keepers oftentimes of people's health and mental wellbeing, that there should be a role for their engagement and I guess involvement, especially when the family comes to mind.

Many of my colleagues and their physician offices are looking after intergenerational families and the impact it can have on grandparents or, and their roles and participation within the children's lives as well as the grief that comes along with the toll in the change of the family dynamic is very important to understand. If there's no known resource, then it makes it increasingly difficult but if you know you've got a safe and trusted advisor, which many of us are for some of our patients, then why wouldn't they be included in this journey, especially if it's such a defining role in your life. But we haven't really looked at that impact in the midlife and exactly what does it do. We can look at studies and research that shows what happens after it but if we had a way to preventatively at least help inform or educate or guide or support even our patients or families that are going through this, I think that we would do that much better in our preventative medicine.

**Tanya Chamberlain:**

A lawyer's role in a family law matter, in a separation or a divorce, is first of all, to screen that person for signs of family law violence which can include power control dynamics to do with money and to sort of get a good sense of what the dynamic is in the relationship. And as well, to then explain to the person all of the processes that are available to them for dispute resolution. I think that is our duty under the Family Law Act and it is something that is important, that people understand all the processes and in particular what those processes cost, how long they take, and what the impact will be potentially on them and the children. And I believe the other obligation you have as a lawyer is to explain to people that if possible, you have a duty to resolve this out of court and of course, I want to preface everything I say by saying that there is a certain number of cases that will always have to be litigated and decided by a judge or some other decision maker, but the vast majority of cases do not require litigation. And so it's our job as lawyers to make sure that people understand that they need to make sure that if they can resolve it outside of court, that's what best for their kids.

As well, we have to talk to them about parenting matters and explain what the law says about parenting arrangements and parenting responsibilities and the concepts of guardianship, and to explain the different kinds of schedules and to explain what the best interests of a child are and that often I think that the best interests of children don't often align with best interests of parents. So getting parents to sort of be thinking about it's actually not what's schedule you want, it's the schedule that's best for your family, primarily your children. And to really help people to understand that if there are no family violence issues, if there are no parenting capability issues, that it's probably going to be equal shared parenting and equal and shared guardianship and responsibilities because there's still a lot of people I think who don't really understand that. So a lot of it is explaining the law, which for some people is a big surprise. And then, once you've sort of dealt with the children's stuff well then it's time to deal with the money and the money is sort of impacted by the childcare arrangements, determining what your income is, determining what the assets are, the debts, explaining to people that they're going to have



to produce a lot of documents and that they're going to have to spend a lot, getting three years of tax returns and bank statements and all of these things. And for some people, many people, they, that's a lot, it's a lot to take in that they're going to have to deal with all of this.

Once we sort of deal with the disclosure piece well then you're getting into what is a possible proposal for resolving this in terms of child support, spousal support, division of assets assuming we've dealt with all the parenting arrangements which is always the first consideration. My job really is to explain all of that and then try to negotiate in some process, whether it's collaborative law, lawyer to lawyer negotiation, four way meetings, mediation, arbitration, to try to resolve how we're going to take a family that lives in one home and move them to two homes and separate their assets and work out a schedule that works for the children and try as much as possible to buffer the children from what's going on through that process.

**Vinnie Yuen:**

In your role in helping families through that separation and divorce, how have you seen, from a lawyer perspective you see health issues come up that really should be addressed by a family physician or, as you're helping them as a family physician, how you kind of see legal issues popping up and how those issues might intersect?

**Ramneek Dosanjh:**

I think even speaking from my own personal journey, so there's been quite a bit of negative sequelae I've had in my own health journey because of the stress. I've had a significant impact on my cardiac wellbeing and also thinking about women that now we're seeing, and one of our you know my well esteemed colleagues, Dr. Gabor Mate, he talks about it quite regularly, and we discuss how autoimmune diseases are stress related. And I just recently had a meta conversation with another colleague, Dr. Tara Sedlak, who works in cardiovascular especially with women's health, and discussing the impacts of trauma and the fact that we don't even have screening tools for intimate partner violence or high conflict divorce or separation when we're looking at patients, especially that have

sudden cardiac death or spontaneous coronary artery dissection or really complicated cardiac disease which is showing up in a lot younger ages than we normally would see but we really haven't looked at factors such as the stress of divorce and the grief especially if you're in a high conflict situation or if you do have safety or security issues. And we know that it's identified at a cellular level that the impact is there but yet, we don't have the research and data completely to support that because we haven't looked at it here. There have been other jurisdictions I know in the US that they've looked at the impact of trauma as well as even more than just adverse childhood experiences but really in adults in morbidity and mortality especially outcomes.

And when you think about how important that is in livelihood and you just try to reconcile that for a moment, it's that this single event in your life, and if you haven't gone through it maybe people have a harder time understanding, you really don't understand the impact that it has on your mental health, your wellbeing, your support circle. There's a lot of part of you know divorce or the nuance of separation as well that in different cultures is also very difficult to navigate. Some cultures, as myself in the South Asian culture, very difficult, it's been taboo for many years, so the optics of the divorce and that impact can also be very alienating for people in their communities, in their families, in their friends groups and we're not even talking about estate planning or the finances and what Ms. Chamberlain touched on especially about the administrative burden. You're trying to stay alive and protect your children and get through this and navigate a whole new system.

It was Dr. Robert Block, which was a former American Academy of Pediatrics president that had said also that the single greatest threat, unaddressed public health threat that was facing America at that time, and that was around 2018, was adverse childhood experiences and could you imagine what this means for adult life and the trajectory of your adult years? We work so hard to get to a place that you think you're going to have retirement, you know you work to build your entire career and success and then you can also live a scorched earth. You know there's just all these things that we need to be able

to talk about publicly and engage people in this discussion to make it easier for other people.

**Tanya Chamberlain:**

Yeah, I agree with everything you said, especially in terms of even assuming it's not a high conflict separation, like a lot of the families that I work with or people that I work with, they're often two people in midlife who've just decided for whatever reason, or one of them has decided that they just, the relationship has ended. And for both people, it's incredibly sad because it's the end of a dream, it's a change of your family and the challenge in a place like British Columbia to move a family to two homes is immense. We have a housing crisis, we have an affordability crisis. You add all that in and that's what I wish you know my, I have a client who's saying things like well I, you know I can't, the stress of this is so terrible I need to take a leave. And for me to have to explain to this person, look you can't take a leave. Unless you're like literally incapable of working, you can't take a leave. So what would be nice for a lawyer is to be able to talk to that person's family doctor and say look, my client's under a tremendous amount of stress right now and I'd really appreciate it if you could support me in saying to him or her listen, if you have three weeks of vacation, now would be a good time to take some time off or do you need me to write a letter to your work that you need a leave, like a paid leave or should be looking into what's possible in your work right now to relieve your stress. And also, for me to be able to explain to the doctor why this person is understand so much stress.

And then the other piece of it is I know a lot of people will say and I'll say you know it would be really helpful if you had someone to talk to through this who's a counsellor of some kind. And often people will say I just, I don't have the money for that, my insurance won't pay for it. Often the divorce coaches that I work with who are all amazing, they all are registered in some way by some, and they're all licensed by some regulator but often people's insurers will not pay for that and they just don't have the money. And so if you're going through one of the worst experiences of your life, because I think the end of any relationship that's marriage like with children, is probably going to

be one of the worst experiences of your life even if it's not conflictual, you know, it's just sad sometimes, right. But you're gonna experience sad, grief, loss, you need to have someone help you to process that because I'm a very sympathetic, empathetic lawyer but I'm a lawyer, I'm not a counsellor. And I know that people would show up so much better in the process if they had more mental health support. If a doctor would feel comfortable talking to me, right, you know, like picking up the phone and saying hey Dr. Dosanjh, I'm really worried about our mutual, your patient, my client, is there, with our client's knowledge obviously, like I would, that's, that would be part of the piece, but it would be really nice to do that so that you would understand what's going on in a better way and I would understand in terms of like what you can do to help and support.

**Ramneek Dosanjh:**

Yes, I think that's really a wonderful idea and I think, I know that we've got a constrained healthcare system but when we think about the blue sky and we think about, that's absolutely what we need to get back to is relationships and trust and support and within our own jurisdiction, we actually, as family doctors, can bill a counselling fee and we can actually, there are other programs that also exist within, that can provide cognitive behavioural therapy. I think also to think about what else is available in our wheelhouse, maybe not traditionally or conventionally we would think about it but as an opportunity for our patients to be guided towards. Even a little bit of mental health support goes a long way.

**Vinnie Yuen:**

When we're talking about separation and divorce, can we maybe touch on how that experience, how that impacts children in the process?

**Tanya Chamberlain:**

I think kids are often in the middle. I think that one of the things that our system has not been good at is getting the views of the children, even before parents, right, in terms of in collaborative sometimes we do that by getting a child specialist, but certainly when there's litigation involved or decision making. I think we also forget that for children, they're mourning a loss too right, they may have to leave their family home, they may

have to move schools. The way their family was isn't the same, right, and for most kids, they just want their lives to kind of be the way it was and I think sometimes we adults forget all the losses that they are mourning. And I'm sure that the children are attuned to how stressed their parents are. So like Dr. Dosanjh said very accurately, while you're just being a normal human being, like living your life, working at your job, raising your children, working, being in your community, trying to be a good you know family member, all of these things that you're supposed to do, and then layer a divorce or a separation on top of that, the stress of that on anybody, whether it's conflictual or not, it's enormous, right, it's just enormous. And so the children must feel that stress and I think a lot of times kids don't tell their parents because they know how stressed their parents are and they want to protect them.

**Ramneek Dosanjh:**

Yeah, and I would add to this, so I actually had the privilege of seeing children in the youth clinic setting in which you know their trusted parents had brought them to me to really deal with some of their mental health concerns. And I think being really open to understanding the dialogue that comes from kids themselves and understanding their different ages and their needs, so we've got preschool, we've got toddlers which you know Ms. Chamberlain will attest that you know you've got complex parenting plans and really down to the hours and their considerations of their feeding schedules and their parent participation, in growing into school age children, adolescents and teenagers, and then factoring in all their own growth and developmental milestones at the same time, simultaneously, as you have a large traumatic event. And I will say it's a traumatic event because we know that it's been categorized as such as close to the death of a parent, divorce is that, can be that detrimental on a child's livelihood.

And that doesn't mean that they're not going to have high resiliency as we know that you know despite your ACE score, you can have a great trajectory but when we look at it just to categorize it for this moment, we have to understand that depending on where they are in their developmental progress, this could really stunt their growth and not just physically but socially and emotionally. And if we are talking about families or children,

and no blaming or shaming to any parenting, but if they're already coming from a household that may be at some disadvantage, whether it's even from a connection perspective or they've got an incarcerated parent or there's substance abuse or abuse in general in the house, it further complicates it for that child.

For a child that already feels neglected and doesn't have support, it becomes detrimental into their growth. And we will see everything from children shutting down to you know acting out and some severe behavioural disturbances as well as nutritional deficiencies and we, we raise the question about autoimmune stressors or diseases linked to cortisol or you think about the later appearance of diabetes and the regulation of blood sugar. We know and understand that it has devastating impact but how do we support these children and how do we support the supporters of these children? So that includes peers, that includes teachers, that includes loved and cared ones that may be looking after them whether that's the daycare setting or an afterschool program or coaches, for them to understand that this child is going through something that's a lot more difficult than they can even share with you and some kids don't even have the language to articulate what they're going through. And so I think the essential part of it is that my belief is that every child that is going through separation or divorce should be entitled to have a counsellor or to have a child specialist that works with that child and that should be not just in the high conflict settings because that is obvious and you know because things are so dramatic or chaotic that they definitely need someone keeping a watchful eye.

But I still worry about the other children that we don't really check in with you know, and we assume they're okay because collaborative process but like Ms. Chamberlain touched on earlier, they've had their whole world change for them. They've gone from one household to two households, they may have gone from two parents to four parents, they may have had an addition of step-siblings or there could be all sorts of dynamics that we don't talk about, we just expect children to soldier on you know and just and get through it and it's okay, you're going to develop grit and you're going to develop resiliency. But some of these children don't have the social emotional regulation as it

stands to be able to speak up for themselves. And so that's the place where we actually even think about mental health and substance use, we think about these concurrent disorders which we see in teenagers and adolescents. We know the teenage brain is already so complex, it's already so challenged by all the hormonal changes and the implications of that but then you add this other layer, you're almost making it really ready for kids that don't know how to cope to go outside and find that mechanism. And I'm not suggesting that there's a direct correlation with divorce and substance use or concurrent disorders but I'm saying these ACEs as risk factor definitely pose a threat to the wellbeing of their children and to their develop.

So if there's a way that we can offer support in these critical milestones and offload that to children by socializing it and talking about the concepts of divorce and that it truly is this many people in the population are going through it and we can bring that into even the curriculum and normalize that you know this is relationships, the hope is that relationships will stay strong and supportive and true but the reality is different. Just talking about relationships in a whole and the differences and normalizing or socializing those concepts at an earlier age may be helpful for those that are carrying that burden.

**Vinnie Yuen:**

How do you think parents can best support their families and their children through a separation or divorce process and what types of resources would you say are available to them?

**Ramneek Dosanjh:**

The best way, this is my opinion, that a parent can support their children is to get help first, is to put the oxygen mask on themselves in the sense that they're mentally strong and mentally well and supported so they don't bleed into their children which I know parts of this, it's difficult in such a chaotic environment but if you can learn from the early stage is that getting yourself into a place where you've got a very strong support system or a mechanism in which you can obtain mental health support, legal support, whatever support you need to manage your household as it continues to fall apart is one

of the most essential and necessary things to do first. And of course, if you can, get your children into counselling but getting them into a family doctor where they can set up mental health, clinical counselling visits, where you can get virtual support from clinicians that do provide that under MSP which is available to you, but also other resources that are, we know are available. And I know our education system is also constrained but I think it's very important to talk to the principals, talk to the teachers, talk to the coaches, talk to the counsellor, the social worker you know in your community.

The other people I would seek is trying to understand if there's someone that's gone through this process. I wish I had had a community or people that I knew that had gone through this process and could tell me more and so I did seek those people as well as that I'm not completely alone, as much as you feel like you're alienated in this process, there's so much support in numbers. And whether you're going through high conflict or intimate partner violence, there are support networks and groups that will protect. But also, there are so many groups that, for parenting and resources and for children, I mean FamiliesChange. Oftentimes we feel like we have no one because it's our thoughts that are isolating us and our shame that keeps us small but really reaching out, if your physician doesn't know about it, they can't help you. And I'm hoping like over years that we can, in the next five to 10 years, really make a true difference and change and I think we will. And I know we already are because we are having these conversations and we're really rolling it forward in a way that we didn't do it before.

**Tanya Chamberlain:**

Yes, get yourself the support you need, whether that's counselling, whatever it is. And then the next piece is remember that your kids don't want to know about it so you're going to have to try to buffer them as much as you can from hearing anything about it, making sure you're not having conversations in front of them that you shouldn't be having, adult conversations. I was told literally everything about my parents' conflict and that is a terrible, terrible burden for a child because you just don't have the ability to sift through it. I think buffering them from that is key. Making sure other family members



understand that so that the kids feel like they can talk about both parents with other extended family members without it being a problem. Choosing processes that buffer them so litigation being the most conflictual process, things like collaborative law being probably the most supportive process for the children and for the parents. As Dr. Dosanjh says, if the parents are well-supported, it's a lot easier for them to be good parents. Remember that if they spend an entire day in mediation or whatever it is or four way meeting or whatever, the end of the day, they have to go back and parent.

The other thing that I think is really important is to try to keep children's lives as stable and normal as they were and to remember that all of the things that mattered to them before matter now. So you know their special birthdays still matter and their family traditions still matter. Telling the children that they don't have to worry, like basically saying to them dad and I have this or mom and I have this, you don't have to worry, and really making it clear to them how important they are to both of you and that you'll always be a family, it's just that now you're a family in two homes and that they have a home with each of you. The other thing I try to get parents to see it as your children, it's not mom's house and dad's house or mom's house and mom's house, it's mom's house with the kids, dad's house with the kids. The children need to feel like they have a home still and they still have a family. It's so important for children to feel like they belong in a family and that the relationship breakdown of their parents isn't the end of their family. If possible yes, some counselling, just even to check in with how they are in the process and to really understand, sort of going back to what I said before, that they're grieving a loss too.

**Vinnie Yuen:**

I just want to thank you both for taking the time out of your day to talk about this and I'll be sure to link to the FamiliesChange.ca website in the show notes which has resources for families.

Thank you for listening. The FamiliesChange.ca website has been relaunched with new resources to help parents support their children's wellbeing through separation or divorce. Research shows with the right strategies, families can mitigate potential harms and help children emerge from the transition more resilient. Visit FamiliesChange.ca for a variety of practical tips, tools and strategies covering topics such as helping children adapt to change, handling conflict in a healthy way, understanding legal rights and responsibilities and taking steps towards financial stability. We encourage you to share these resources with anyone going through a separation or divorce to help them navigate the significant change and stressful transition.