

***Profound Advice from a Judge  
About How a Few Words Can Hurt Your Child***

Parents involved in high conflict divorces are often so emotional that they forget the impact a few harsh words can have on their child. We hear parents daily in the courts saying terrible things about the other parent; it is often reported that, for example, a mother says to her child, "Your father is an idiot," or a father says, "Your mother is a fool." Those few words, while said about a child's parent, are also a direct criticism of the child. Lawyers, judges, therapists and child advocates tell parents not to make such statements to their child or within hearing of their child, but no one has explained why better than in the following advice from retired Minnesota Judge, Michael Hass.

Judge Haas retired in December 2002 after 26 years of service as a Judge in Cass County, Minnesota. Below are his remarks from a particularly difficult divorce case.

"Your children have come into this world because of the two of you. Perhaps you two made lousy choices as to whom you decided to be the other parent. If so, that is YOUR problem and YOUR fault.

"No matter what you think of the other party – or what your family thinks of the other party – these children are one-half of each of you. Remember that, because every time you tell your child what an 'idiot' his father is, or what a 'fool' his mother is, or how bad the absent parent is, or what terrible things that person has done, you are telling the child half of HIM is bad.

"That is an unforgivable thing to do to a child. That is not love! That is possession. If you do that to your children, you will destroy them as surely as if you had cut them into pieces, because that is what you are doing to their emotions.

"I sincerely hope that you do not do that to your children. Think more about your children and less about yourselves, and make yours a selfless kind of love, not foolish or selfish, or your children will suffer."

Judge Hass' words are well known in the family law community. Judge Haas' advice is so well regarded that his words of wisdom have been referenced in multiple appellate court decisions, law review articles and other legal publications.

Hopefully parents remember these profound words as they consider how to proceed with what no doubt is a very difficult time in their and their child's lives.