

MISTAKE # 1: Focusing on What's Fair and Not What's Practical

What I want all estranged parents to be oriented toward is what works, not what's fair. With most of the families that I work with, it's really unfair.

If it were really fair, the model would be the same that it would be with a best friend, spouse or somebody else--you talk about your perspective and he or she talks about theirs. You talk about how you felt hurt or misunderstood; your kid talks about how she or he feels hurt or misunderstood. You put your heads together and make sense of it, and you move on and get closer as a result.

That is not the case once there's an estrangement. A lot of adult children say they want a relationship of equality, but in reality, it probably isn't going to be a relationship that feels very equal to you.

One of the reasons that parents make so-called mistakes with estrangement is that most of us have never encountered anything like this in our lives. The rules and guidelines that are required to deal with an estrangement are also ones that you've probably never encountered in any other relationship in your life. and therefore require a very different, even counter-intuitive approach.

If it were fair, you'd get to make demands about how much time you could visit with your children or grandchildren.

You could demand more empathy and forgiveness for whatever ways you made mistakes with your child growing up or have over this period of time.

You could demand more commitment. You actually don't get to do that during this period of time while you're working on healing the estrangement.