



The Victim and the Villain

Revenge happens when one parent makes the other angry and that parent feels compelled to strike back. It's easy to get caught up in this cycle without ever intending to take part. Before you know it you quickly become both the victim and the villain. You may feel like a victim initially but if you respond in kind you become the villain. The other parent then feels like the victim and the cycle repeats itself. As resentment and anger (two by-products of this cycle) grow, offenses become more severe and more damaging to your children.

The revenge cycle may begin with something as simple as a sarcastic remark in an email from one parent to another. The one that received the email may respond to that remark (often with their own sarcasm) the next time they see the other parent. That parent may then decide that they won't be flexible the next time they are asked to change their parenting time. When one parent stops allowing flexible parenting time to accommodate their children's schedule, the other parent may then follow suit. This leads to children missing activities or important family events due to the inflexibility of their parents. Offenses continue, conflict builds, and children suffer the consequences.

People often seek revenge in an effort to right a perceived wrong. They operate under the mistaken idea that hurting the one who hurt them will fix the problem. Think about it. One country drops a bomb on another. The bombed country retaliates with its own bombs. Before you know it both countries and their allies are in an all out war. Many innocent people pay the consequence of someone's decision to bomb another – whether the initiator of the bomb or the retaliator.

Human relationship bombers tend to blame others in order to direct attention away from a problem they may have created. This may lead to different types of bombing:

Dive Bombers – zero in on a singular characteristic making the other person feel inadequate in relation to others. "I don't have this problem with anyone else!" When victims are fully convinced that they are as bad as feedback indicates they also become dive bombers and attack out of frustration.

Submarine Bombers – sneak attack, catches others by surprise. This may be confusing initially until you find yourself thinking "I've just been had." Submariners often follow with "I was only kidding."

Saturation Bombers – indiscriminately reap pain and unhappiness wherever they go. These bombers are serious and dedicated pessimists who see the bad side of everything. They often include "always and never" in their conversations.

Booby Traps or Time Bombs – often disguised as compliments. They are put-downs which draw you in and explode in your face. These bombs are dispersed graciously and people smile warmly as they chip away at your self-esteem. "He is a good dad, as long as some is around to tell him what to do."

All people have powerful human relationship bombs available to them and some trudge through life indiscriminately plopping bombs on whomever they meet. Once a bomb is dropped it is very difficult to avoid retaliation. There are other options besides being drawn into the victim/villain revenge cycle.

Remember the old adage: "It takes two to fight." If you are the victim of a relationship bomb make a conscious effort not to turn into a villain. It only takes one person to stop the revenge cycle. It only takes one to call a truce. If one is not willing to stop, you can still end the cycle by refusing to be a villain. It may not be easy to pull out of the revenge cycle, but when you do, the true winners are your children.

To avoid the revenge cycle completely, try to be sensitive to the way others might feel and keep your sense of humor. Remember – everyday your children are learning something new. How they process what they are learning depends greatly on the adults teaching them.