

Parental Alienation International

Advancing worldwide understanding in the field of parental alienation

pasg
www.pasg.info

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Parental Alienation Study Group

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International Collaborations

By Mandy Matthewson

WELCOME TO THE THIRD ISSUE of the *Parental Alienation International* for 2021.

This issue of the *PAI* begins with a copy of a wonderfully dramatic poster that was created for Parental Alienation Awareness Day on 25th April. In honour of Parental Alienation Awareness Day Ricardo Simões, president of Parental Igualdade Portugal collected the endorsements of 54 organizations from 30 countries and creatively included their names in the poster. Several versions of the poster have been circulating social media. In this issue, I have included my favourite version.

Also, in this issue of the *PAI*, is an update on new inclusions to the PASG homepage. The PASG homepage is certainly worth a look. Included in the *PAI* is a copy of another poster that has been circulating social media. This poster highlights important differences between two recently published papers on parental alienation. This poster is also a collaboration between a number of organizations and highlights the importance of using critical thinking skills when reviewing research on parental alienation. Too often research into parental alienation is falsely accused of being “junk science” in an attempt to discredit conclusions that parental alienation exists and is a serious concern. This poster effectively challenges the “junk science” allegations.

In 2019, the PASG Research Committee awarded grant funding to two very deserving research projects. In the March issue we provided a summary of the research of Dr. Angela Morgan, Dr. Nahid Ahmad and Ms. Marilyn Webster. In this issue we hear about the exciting project conducted by our Intervention Columnists – Mary Alvarez and Chris Turner. You will hear about the important work they have been conducting addressing mild to moderate parental alienation.

Ahead of PASG 2021 in Brussels, our feature article is an interview with Marie-France Carlier – Family Law Judge in Dinant and Olivier Vanhaelen – Counsellor to the Family Court in Brussels. PASG 2021 “Protecting Family Ties After Separation” will be focused on prevention and will be held on September 9–10 in the Great Hall of the European Parliament, Brussels.

In this issue, you will read the story of Catherine in the Targeted Parents’ Column. This article tells the story of an alienated mother, her alienated daughter and the damage caused by the alienating father. To preserve the confidentiality of family members, the author of this article has not provided her surname.

Mary Alvarez and Chris Turner provide a discussion on the role of parental self-advocacy in the adversarial legal system. This is an important discussion for anyone involved in family court proceedings. In our Legal Column, Brian Ludmer provides an important discussion on the problems with judicial interviews of children in alienation cases.

As always, Robert Ferrer summarises recent publications on parental alienation. It’s fantastic to see work being published around the world and in many different languages.

I hope you enjoy the May issue of the *PAI*.

Best wishes to you all. ■



**HELP STOP
THIS VIOLENCE**
#PAAD2021

INITIATIVE_AP1PDF

INTERNATIONAL PARENTAL ALIENATION AWARENESS DAY

- April 25th 2021**
- AUSTRALIAN BROTHERHOOD OF FATHERS | AUSTRALIA
 - FAD - FATHERS AGAINST DISCRIMINATION | LUXEMBOURG
 - ACALPA - SOS ALIÉNATION PARENTALE | FRANCE
 - LYGIAVERTĖS TĖVYSTĖS ASOCIACIJA | LITHUANIA
 - PÈRE ENFANT MÈRE ASSOCIATION | FRANCE
 - SHARED PARENTING SCOTLAND | SCOTLAND
 - ASSOCIAÇÃO BRASILEIRA CRIANÇA FELIZ - ABCF | BRASIL
 - WORLD PARENTS ORGANIZATION | DENMARK
 - PARENTAL ALIENATION STUDY GROUP | USA
 - NATIONAL PARENT ORGANIZATION | USA
 - BOYS MENTORING ADVOCACY NETWORK | NIGERIA
 - ASOCIAȚIA ROMÂNĂ PENTRU CUSTODIA COMUNĂ | ROMENIA
 - HAPPY PARENTING - MALTA (FOR HAPPIER CHILDREN) | MALTA
 - ASOCIACIÓN CUSTODIA COMPARTIDA DE ALICANTE | SPAIN
 - BUBBLES OF LOVE DALLAS-FORT WORTH TEXAS | USA
 - PARENTAL ALIENATION AWARENESS | UK
 - VADER KENNIS CENTRUM | NETHERLANDS
 - FAMILIES UNITED ACTION NETWORK | USA
 - VÄTERAUFBRUCH FÜR KINDER | GERMANY
 - ALIENATED CHILDREN FIRST | IRELAND
 - FORENINGEN FAR | DENMARK
 - DOOR - DRUŠTVO ZA OTROKE, OČETOVSTVO IN RESNICO | SLOVENIA
 - LASTEN OIKEUDET | FINLAND
 - DRUŠTVO OČETOV SLOVENIJE | SLOVENIA
 - FIGLIPERSEMPRE NAZIONALE | ITALY
 - PLATFORM FOR EUROPEAN FATHERS | EU
 - VAETER OHNE RECHTE | AUSTRIA
 - INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT NETWORK OF ALIENATED FAMILIES | USA
 - FAMILY ADVOCATE NETWORK POLITICAL ACTION COMMITTEE | USA
 - AUSTRALIA | PARENTAL ALIENATION SUPPORT AND CONNECT GROUP
 - SPAIN | GENMAD ASOCIACIÓN DE VÍCTIMAS DE LA LEY DE VIOLENCIA DE GÉNERO
 - PERU | ASOCIACIÓN PERUANA DE PADRES Y MADRES SEPARADOS DE SUS HIJOS
 - SPAIN | ASOCIACIÓN PERUANA DE PADRES Y MADRES SEPARADOS DE SUS HIJOS
 - ARGENTINA | PAYAB - PADRES Y ABUELOS POR LOS NIÑOS SEPARADOS DE SU FAMILIA
 - PARENTAL ALIENATION AWARENESS INTERNATIONAL NETWORK | TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
 - ASSOCIAÇÃO PORTUGUESA PARA A IGUALDADE PARENTAL E DIREITOS DOS FILHOS | PORTUGAL
 - USA | CHICAGO UNITED PARENTS
 - SWEDEN | VBU
 - USA | VICTIM TO HERO
 - ISLAND | FORELDRAJAFNRETTI
 - USA | TOGETHER4CHANGES
 - UK | GOOD EGG SAFETY
 - UAE | FOR ANY CHILDREN
 - USA | FIND MY PARENT
 - USA | PAS INTERVENTION
 - NORWAY | MANNFORUM
 - UKRAINE | KIDS HUGS
 - USA | THE HERO'S CIRCLE
 - ITALY | COLIBRI ITALIA
 - SPAIN | PLATAFORMA DE HOMBRES POR LA IGUALDAD DE TRATO
 - S. AFR. | PARENTAL ALIENATION FOUNDATION OF SOUTH AFRICA
 - USA | FAMILY ACCESS: FIGHTING FOR CHILDREN'S RIGHTS
 - INT. | INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON SHARED PARENTING
 - BELGIUM | S.O.S. PAPA BELGIQUE



VISUAL CONCEPT_CAROLINA FORTES

PHOTO_VIKTOR FORGACS

STANDING TOGETHER FOR ALL THE CHILDREN

It's Time to Check Out the PASG Homepage

WE'VE MADE SOME IMPROVEMENTS to our homepage, www.pasg.info.

A new entry says ...

FREE! Short Animated Videos

Together with The Law Center (<https://thelawcenter.net>), the Parental Alienation Study Group provides a collection of short, animated videos, which illustrate and explain the basic principles of parental alienation. [See videos on YouTube here.](#)



The link will take you to a series of YouTube videos created by PASG members Larry DeMarco and Amy Baker.

A second new entry on www.pasg.info says...

Online Education Regarding Parental Alienation

Together with the National Coalition Against Parental Alienation (NCAPA) and the National Association of Parental Alienation Specialists (NAOPAS), the Parental Alienation Study Group offers several options for learning about parental alienation. [See more information here.](#)

That link will take you to a new page that lists and describes online educational programs regarding parental alienation.

There is information about an online video cosponsored with The Center for Human Potential of America, Inc. The video consists of three parts: an explanation of the Five-Factor Model for the diagnosis of parental alienation (William Bernet); an explanation of why parents who engage in alienating behaviors are committing family violence (Jennifer Harman); and a video by an alienated parent (Ben Rodgers).

There is also a continuing education program for both attorneys and mental health professionals, which is provided by The Center for Human Potential of America, Inc. This 15-hour program was developed by PASG members Michael Bone and Robert Evans. ■

Summary of Research Funded by PASG

By Dr. Mandy Matthewson

IN 2019, PASG RECEIVED a generous donation to fund research into parental alienation. One of the recipients of this grant of funding was a group of researchers in Texas, USA. Below is a summary of the research conducted by Dr. Mary Alvarez and Chris Turner entitled “*Judicial Early Intervention program for Mild and Moderate Parental Alienation.*” I would like to congratulate Dr. Alvarez and Ms. Turner on conducting an important research project. Please read their report below:

Grant Summary

This research study funded by PASG was initiated in 2020 by Resetting the Family, PLLC. Although many of the programmatic and collaborative inter disciplinary goals of the research program have begun, the longitudinal impact and associated research will continue as part of the multi-year study.

The goals of the research program targeted families, both parents and children, who have been identified by the courts as exhibiting behaviors and tactics associated with parental alienation.

The referrals for this project were initiated by Brazoria County (Texas) Courts. Identified cases were referred to Resetting the Family, PLLC following an Initial Petition for Modification of the Parent Child Relationship Post Divorce.

The following benchmarks were attained by the Grantee during the grant year:

- 1) Ongoing training with three Brazoria County Family Court Judges to fully identify families appropriate for the study as well as reinforce previous education regarding the science and research specifically as it pertains to the identification of potential cases involving parental alienation. Additionally, Judges and Resetting the Family staff communicated on a quarterly basis in order to fine tune the accuracy of referrals as well as more fully identify the needs of the court with relation to these high conflict / parental alienation cases.

During the first half of the grant cycle, grantees conducted formal and informal training with the judges to a) further educate them on indicators of mild and moderate parental alienation; and b) develop a template for court orders that met the mutual needs of the judiciary as well as the grantees.

During the initial phase of the grant, it became apparent that ongoing training and workshops were necessary to obtain the appropriate referrals for the research participants. The role of litigation in many of these cases was so entrenched by the parties, but more importantly by their attorneys, that training workshops to educate attorneys and other professionals involved in the court case were essential to receiving referral and cooperation with the courts.

A key element in the training was knowledge shared regarding the short- and long-term effects of parental alienation on the children in these cases. Once shared, and validated by the current science and research, the weight of ensuring the best interest of the child, a primary focus of all family court proceedings, outweighed the need to litigate these cases. Professionals attending these workshops were Attorneys, Judges, and Mental Health Professionals.

Education of family court professionals included current science and research on parental alienation as well as the impact of litigation in high conflict cases. During the grant year a total of 7 training workshops were presented to family court professionals.

- 2) Concurrently with the training family law professionals, referrals for intakes of families with Resetting the Family were initiated. Parents and children participated in the intake process which included assessment, interviews and a case history. Cases were identified as preventative, mild or moderate in relation to the level of parental alienation identified through the intake process.

All research as well as programmatic activity occurred in person to ensure data collection in a consistent manner throughout the multi-year study. The data collection included in the intakes will serve as part of ongoing research.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a delay in setting class schedules with participants as well as initiating the children's program. Furthermore, the class size for all participants in the educational program had to be adapted so that in-person attendance followed CDC/COVID guidelines.

Two educational courses were developed for parents in the grant year:

- a) Swerve 101, an entry level prevention-based course, was developed and revised during the grant cycle year. Parties referred by the courts who were engaged in post-divorce filings for modification of custody yet were not identified as being entrenched in parental alienation tactics were placed in Swerve 101. These referrals were deemed "at risk" by the referring judges of further alienation and prolonged litigation in the absence of intervention.

Over the course of the grant year, Swerve 101 educated 44 parents who had a current court case in Brazoria or the adjacent Galveston county, and had been referred due to presence of some alienation tactics. The intent of the referral by the courts, as coordinated between the Judiciary and the Program was to intervene early in the case in order to minimize not only the time in litigation but also the impact on family members, specifically minor children. During the Grant Cycle year 6 of the Swerve 101 classes were held in person and 1 Swerve 101 class was held virtually.

- b) Swerve 201 is a more intense 7-hour course, intended to intervene in families where clear indicators of mild-moderate parental alienation is present. The program, developed and revised in the grant cycle year, began as a 3-session class and was mid-year developed into a 7-hour 6-session course in order to maximize the impact of the program and allow time for participants to internalize and act on the information presented as it related to their case. Much of the curriculum involved self-assessment by the participants, leading to the development of alternative interactions between the parents outside of litigation. These alternative interactions and self-assessments focus on the best interest of the child(ren) involved in the case, further aligning with the intent of all Family Law Cases.

The course curriculum consists of the following educational tracts:

Current Research on Impact on Children in High Conflict Families; Role of Litigation; Self-Care; Essentials of Co-Parenting and Parallel Parenting; Triggers that Impede Positive Interactions; and Establishing a New Family Model.

Due to the COVID restrictions and length of this program, class size was limited to 8 persons.

Swerve 101 and Swerve 201 classes presented the grantees with a clear understanding for the need for case management follow-up to the educational components. In the absence of case management and reinforcement of the principles promoted by Swerve 101 and 201, litigation of the case threatened and in many cases undermined progress toward the goal of diminishing the use of parental alienation tactics and behaviors.

The use of alienation tactics being reinforced by the litigation process was a common factor found in the families, as parties “made a case” against the other parent. Ongoing coordination with attorneys and all mental health professionals through case management services, was invaluable in meeting the overall goal of minimizing both the time in litigation as well as minimizing the impact of high conflict on the child(ren) involved.

Adaptation of the programs developed under the grant was modified several times over the course of the grant year. They include the following:

- Increase in educational presentations to family law professionals on the current science and research of parental alienation.
- The expansion of a 3 session to a 5-session class for parents in Swerve 201.
- The decrease in number of participants, both in Swerve 101 and Swerve 201, due compliance with CDC guidelines during COVID Pandemic.
- The increase in Case Management services in order to provide a continuum of care with all professionals in the case following completion of Resetting the Family’s educational programs. ■



Find PASG on Facebook

You can find PASG on Facebook at

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/ParentalAlienationStudyGroup/>

Visit our Facebook page, become a friend, and write a comment.

Important differences between two recently published papers regarding parental alienation, Meier et al. (2019) and Harman and Lorandos (2020)

Did the authors....	Meier et al., (2019)	Harman & Lorandos (2020)
<p><i>Post their research design on the Open Science Framework so other scientists could see what was planned and if the study was executed as planned?</i></p> <p>Lack of transparency makes it impossible to know if the Meier team changed their research design as they collected and coded data, which would lead to biases.</p>	✘	✔
<p><i>Pre-register and embargo their hypotheses so they could not adjust their hypotheses to fit their data after the fact?</i></p> <p>The Meier team could have changed their hypotheses to match their findings after running their statistics, making their study just exploratory and not a true scientific test.</p>	✘	✔
<p><i>Define in a replicable way what was meant by "alienation cases"?</i></p> <p>If it is not clear what an "alienation" case was, we cannot know what cases were actually included in the Meier team's study and whether other scientists would have agreed with the definitions used by the investigators.</p>	✘	✔
<p><i>Detail the coding process and explain how discrepancies in coding were resolved?</i></p> <p>To prevent biases, the research design should have processes in place to ensure the coders do not know the hypotheses of the study and detail how disagreements in coding were resolved. The Meier team did not provide any details about this and so the objectivity of the coders is questionable.</p>	✘	✔
<p><i>Have all their cases and coding documentation available or provided on request?</i></p> <p>Without a list of the cases included in the study, it is impossible to know whether the Meier team actually included cases where parental alienation occurred or was alleged, and verify whether the way their coders applied their codes was not biased.</p>	✘	✔
<p><i>Clearly describe why all cases were included or excluded?</i></p> <p>Without knowing what cases were excluded and clearly knowing why, the Meier team may have cherry picked the cases they wanted to include in their study to support their hypotheses. We also then don't know if the Meier team's cases are comparable to all cases at the US appellate level.</p>	✘	✔
<p><i>Show the statistical models that were used to draw conclusions?</i></p> <p>We cannot know whether the Meier team's analyses were appropriate for use with their data without seeing the models, nor can we tell how many cases were included in each analysis or what the magnitude of their effects were.</p>	✘	✔
<p><i>Thoroughly describe what variables were included in all statistical models?</i></p> <p>When you add variables to a model, it changes the outcomes. Many unethical scholars add variables to models until they get the results they want. The Meier team provides no specific information about all the variables in their models.</p>	✘	✔
<p><i>Describe the statistical results accurately and not exaggerate the findings?</i></p> <p>The Meier team often reported odds ratios as probabilities, which exaggerates the findings.</p>	✘	✔

Adapted from Harman, J. and Lorandos, D. (2020) Allegations of Family Violence in Court: How Parental Alienation Affects Judicial Outcomes. Psychology, Public Policy and Law, 1 - 25. Published online December, 2020 - <https://psycnet.apa.org/fulltext/2020-96321-001.html> Table 1.

Meier, J. S., Dickson, S., O'Sullivan, C., Rosen, L., & Hayes, J. (2019). Child custody outcomes in cases involving parental alienation and abuse allegations (GWU Law School Public Law Research Paper No. 2019-56). SSRN. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3448062>.



www.parentalalienationuk.info

PAlienationuk

#protectingchildrenmatters

PASG 2021 BRUSSELS September 9 and 10

Interview with Marie-France Carlier (Judge) and Olivier Vanhaelen (Expert)

1. When was the first time the organisation of the 4th international conference of the PASG was initiated?

The idea was initiated very fast after Philadelphia as all the Europeans thought that Brussels was central in Europe besides the fact that Brussels is the capital of Europe. Furthermore, our European approach and vision of the breaking of family ties was a lot of more oriented prevention.

The two big differences between the 2 continents is that in Europe, there is no need to make any diagnosis nor need to prove the existence of a PA in each case. It is a gain of time to be able to work immediately to maintain the ties between the target parent and the child with the help of an expert, of the team of a meeting point, of a mediator ...

2. What was the purpose to organise the conference?

We wanted to be the first to focus on prevention. It has never been the topic before in any conference and we thought that is the most important way to get rid of PA. Once PA is present, it is important to try to reduce it with the help of specialists but the best way to eliminate it is to work upstream by informing the parents, by improving the way the judicial system and other professionals of the courts are working.

3. How did you build the team or executive board of the conference?

Olivier and Marie-France did present to the PASG board their project for the conference in Brussels and once this one was selected, they did propose to Nick Child and Silvia Danowski they had met in Philadelphia to join the Executive board. Marie-France and Silvia invited Ursula Kodjoe and Jorge Guerra, friends and specialists of prevention as experts and contact-facilitators to join their team.

4. What do you want to realize with the conference?

We want a paradigm shift, before the conference and after will be another way of thinking. It is all about perspective. Like Einstein said: "If you change the way you look at things, the things you look at will change!" That's what we want to reach with the conference. We know the knowledge of parental alienation is necessary to see the actual problem. But, there is more going on than the problem of parental alienation. Prevention is doing more than just preventing parental alienation. It is really about protecting the family ties! When we focus on that, we prevent that the ties will be broke. We don't want children to cope with the problem their parents cause with separation as partners. They are not divorcing as parents!

5. How did you manage to organise this event in the European Parliament?

We took the list of the Belgian euro deputies and wrote to them to explain our project and ask their support to organize it in one of the conference rooms. One of them was a lawyer who had already met some similar heavy family conflicts and found it interesting to change the adversarial judicial system.

6. What did Covid do to the organisation?

We had to postpone the initial September 2020 dates, because of too many Covid restrictions. The main purpose is to realize a real live event. Now we have to balance between bringing the needed content and message and the real live event. That's why we are doing a so-called "hybrid" event. So also our organisation was changing due to Covid. We realize there is more than the content and the message on the event

itself. The main focus will be during the 2 days and about what and how the presenters will bring their contribution. But the whole 2 days is part of a bigger story that we want to tell about prevention.

7. How do you see the conference to be now? Or how do you think the conference will be?

This conference will be a real game-changer. Not only because of the theme, but because of the perspectives all presenters will bring, because of the people who will attend the conference, because there will be much more than 2 days of listening to speakers. It will be a milestone for lots of people, professionals, countries... you don't want to miss this. ■



Location: Brussels, Belgium

Date: Thurs 9 – Fri 10 September 2021

Venue: European Parliament, Brussels

Theme: Protecting Family Ties After Separation NOW

www.pasg2021.eu

I am an Alienated Mother

By Catherine

I AM AN ALIENATED MOTHER of a beautiful 17-year-old and much-loved daughter. She is the victim of a father who started a smear campaign against me many years ago and she succumbed to that pressure. How he did it was classic parental alienation. Why we all ask? It's surely not because he loves her. He loves the drama and the hurt it inflicts upon me. No loving parent would knowingly do things to their own child that potentially mentally damages them for life right? Wrong. Instead of being instrumental in helping our teenage daughter mature and gain the skills she needs to become a responsible adult, he set about denigrating the relationship between mother and daughter.

We met when I was 26 and quickly moved in together. I thought he had Bipolar Disorder because he would yell for hours and hours, but he was physically and mentally abusive and the gaslight king! Coercive control appeared to be in his nature.

Our daughter was only 9 months old when the rollercoaster relationship ended. She was 11 months old when he refused to give her back from his first overnight visit and I had to seek a recovery order. After months of legal action we agreed to final court orders, which was him seeing her every second weekend, school holidays etc. From when she was 2 until 12yo he mostly stuck to every second weekend. Never doing school holiday weeks, rarely attended school or sporting events and only once did he take her to NZ (his family). This was no fault of mine. In fact I did everything I could to facilitate their relationship throughout numerous girlfriends, a variety of house and job locations, episodes of drug or alcohol addiction and absence of regular child support payments.

The relationship between my daughter and I was normal. She is an extremely loved, happy, healthy, smart and well-adjusted child. We holidayed together, our home was safe and clean, she had lots of close family and friends.

She started secondary college at 12 years' old and he moved into the same town we lived in, a mere kilometre from my home of 10 years. The change in her attitude to me and extending on to family and friends was slow at start however increasingly she began to show more and more disrespect, because "Dad said." Suddenly I could not say or do anything right. In hindsight I can see all the hallmark signs of the campaign he had started, the mental pressure she was under but I couldn't put a name to it. The catalyst was one weeknight, after learning about a 'secret safe phone' she had been provided with from her father she climbed out of her bedroom window 'escaping.' I called him to make sure she was actually there and he gleefully told me "I would never see her again because I had choked her." That was the first of many absurd and false allegations. That was 2 years and 2 months ago. She was just days away from turning 15.

The months that followed were horrendous and heart breaking. Any visit, call or text was either unanswered or met with hostility from them both. Finding the terminology parental alienation was bittersweet. How one parent could manipulate a child to hate the other parent is beyond me. He is increasingly mentally unstable and verbally and financially abusive towards me. Reading evidence based articles where it would list the factors to determine 'severe' was like ticking off a sad shopping list. He has done it all like clockwork. He has her enmeshed, brainwashed, trauma bonded, isolated, wrongly empowered, and her believing I'm unsafe. He has her believing all sorts of nonsense about the past, present and future. He clearly tasks her with things to say or do. Such as at dinner she shares the news that it's her dream to live in New Zealand (he somehow has another child there) or she will emancipate herself from me. As if suddenly uprooting to another country with a different curriculum is best in her final year of school. Occasionally she contacts me, but it's more just when she wants something

like her hair cut or a driving lesson. Sometimes the time together can be fraught however I simply drip love and support, remain calm, positive and happy.

Obviously I have done all to try to combat the situation. Lawyers, mediation, counselling, and some alternatives therapies. Appointments with specialists from around the world such as Ryan Thomas, Amanda Sillars and Linda Turner, read books and watch videos etc. Joining peer support groups and having the benefit of a strong family and friend network helps. It all helps but nothing has done the trick yet, the shark is still circling and my gorgeous girl isn't where she could be. She is paying the highest price of not being able to freely love both parents. So sad to think of what kind of guilt has been forced upon her, what mental pressure and stress to ignore her own mother in the street? Occasionally, I can see cracks in her armour and a smile creeps across her face if I manage to make her laugh. But I don't know if it's just wishful thinking. They say with maturity the child will ask questions, find the lies unsettling and learn the truth. But how and when? Hoping that day comes soon is all I have. ■



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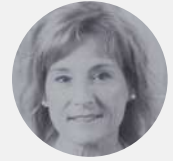


Mary Alvarez

Creating a Better Family Outcome? The Role of Parental Self-Advocacy in the Legal System

By Dr. Mary Alvarez and Dr. Chris Turner

WE HAVE FOCUSED the last several years on creating prevention and early intervention educational programs utilizing a diversion judiciary approach in order to capture high risk families and intervene with them before they substantially deteriorate into a family in which parental alienation (PA) becomes a factor and creates a damaging fracture in the parent-child relationship.



Chris Turner

Anecdotally, both in our own personal experiences interacting with the adversarial family law system, as well as in our interactions with and listening to parents describe their experiences in the legal system, we conclude, like many others before us, that the legal system is not the arena to solve complex family relationship problems. When parents try and exert some control over the process in order to move forward, spend less money, or reduce the damage to the family, they are often thwarted by their own attorney, whose paradigm and training is to litigate and win. In our educational programs, we have observed many times a point in the programming in which the parents realize that they need to much better communicate, decrease the parental toxicity, and learn how to solve their own parenting disputes.

The following are comments from parents that we have had in our programs. Some of the comments reflect their lack of knowledge about the legal system, while other comments reflect their progress in our programs and what their attorney tells them when they attempt to get out of litigation:

“I wanted to settle the case and move on, but my attorney encouraged me to keep fighting.”

“I didn’t understand what was happening (the legal process) and before I knew it, my case went from bad to worse.”

“I didn’t know about other options besides hiring an attorney for my divorce (or for my modification).”

“I want to talk to the other parent about our child, but my attorney said that I couldn’t and needed to use her for all communication with the other side.”

“I was willing to settle for less custody time in order to get out of litigation and stop spending so much money, but my attorney kept telling me that he could get me more custody time by continuing the case.”

“I had no idea that it would take so long to do anything in the legal system.”

While the family law system, attorneys, and judges have important functions, especially in families in which severe parental alienation has been determined, using the adversarial family law system as the mechanism to solve family relationship problems with at-risk families that have the initial underpinnings of parental alienation, but are not considered high moderate parental alienation (PA) or severe PA, may contribute to an escalation in alienation tactics being used by one or both parents while unnecessarily fracturing a family even more as litigation takes its toll on everyone.

We recognize that some parents fully intend to use the adversarial legal system to promote their agenda no matter the collateral damage to the child. However, in our experiences with high conflict parents who really don’t want to further damage their children, the parents: 1) have no idea or very little notion of what else to do besides abdicate their parental role in favor of allowing attorneys and judges to make family relationship deci-

sions for them; 2) don't adequately understand the legal system or process; and 3) don't understand how to be in charge of their own case since they know their children better than an attorney or judge knows them.

What if parents were educated about the family law process and the potential collateral damage and then taught how to self-advocate such that they were in much more in charge of their case, not an attorney? Herein lies the concept of self-advocacy:

Self-advocacy is an individual's ability to effectively communicate, convey, negotiate, or assert his interests, desires, needs, and rights. It assumes the ability to make informed decision and taking responsibility for those decisions (Van Reusen, 1996).

We opine that if an entity or professional that teaches parents prior to filing a case or minimally, very early on in a case: 1) how the family law system works; 2) what to expect at various points in any case, including direct and collateral psychological and neurological damage to the child and the family; and 3) other available options (e.g., mediation and conflict resolution first) besides hiring attorneys to slug it out in a courtroom; and 4) how to self-advocate for themselves to reduce the damage to the child. If parents can be educated about the points outlined above and then self-advocate for better legal outcomes and less damage to the child, they will likely spend less money and have children with less psychological damage.

It is critical to help these at-risk families avoid the escalation into more severe PA and the concomitant result: a likely more fractured family than when litigation began. We have begun to include self-advocacy into our educational curriculum and case management activities, and we will carefully monitor and collect outcome data related to high conflict parents that participate in educational classes to include self-advocacy training as compared to high conflict parents who do not receive educational and self-advocacy training.

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Brian Ludmer

Judicial Interviews

By Brian Ludmer

THERE ARE SEVERAL generally accepted modalities for getting the “voice of the child” before the Court in contested family law litigation or child protection litigation. Each has certain advantages and disadvantages in terms of the quality of the evidence and how the modality deals with concerns or restrictions on its use. Children’s evidence in a case involving allegations or concerns of parental alienation or simple child manipulation requires a careful analysis of the modality chosen.

There is no doubt that there has been increasing emphasis in the legal community on ensuring that the “voice of the child” is “heard” in decisions about the child’s future welfare [i.e., not slavishly followed, often phrased as a “voice but not a choice” – although careful scrutiny of many cases reveals an undue reliance on the voice of triangulated children].

This is driven in part by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (the “Convention”), although often in a mistaken way. Section 12 of the Convention provides that member states should ensure that their local legislation provides for a modality to hear the voice of the child, however, no one specific modality is recommended. The risk of triangulation and loyalty-bind is recognized through the Convention’s reference to: (I) a “*child who is capable of forming his or her own views*”; and (II) “*the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child*”.

Therefore, it is important to bear this in mind when alienating parents and their counsel assert the right of the child to have their own counsel, or to have a judicial interview. Article 12 does not say that, and the implementing local legislation almost invariably does not say that either. Only in child protection statutes is there more of an emphasis on having counsel appointed, but even then, not universally and the dynamic differs there since it is not a simple dispute between the parents but rather between the parents and the state or between one parent and the state and the other parent.

The other modalities, which I will explore in detail in a future article, include testimony from the parents themselves as well as other family members. The child’s voice can also be put forward through various non-parties, including school teachers and principals, family doctors, sports’ coaches and through therapists and perhaps through a custody access assessment/custody evaluation [a pure forensic process].

In prior and forthcoming articles, I have explored the misuse of children’s counsel by alienating parents. Judicial interviews are also put forward by alienating parents and their counsel as a requested modality to get the voice of a conflicted child before the Court. This is a more direct attempt to influence the Court to put undue emphasis on what the child says, as opposed to how the child independently feels, but is unable or unwilling or too scared to be revealing. The request for a judicial interview in the context of a parental alienation case also serves to distract the Court from advancing the best interests of the child. Therefore, for many reasons, a judicial interview is the worst of all the possible modalities to advance the voice of the child into the litigation process.

Supporting this assertion is a fundamental principle that the trier of fact must stay outside the fray and, while a certain level of questions from the bench is permissible with a view to obtaining clarity on aspects of the case that the Judge feels uncertain about, those interventions are usually immediately followed by allowing counsel who have already finished their examination of the witness to ask further questions arising out of the Judge’s questions.

That procedural protection against interventions from the trier of fact (who is supposed to stay outside the fray and not influence the course of the case) is generally not available in the case of a judicial interview. That is because judicial interviews typically take place in private in the judicial chambers, often but not always with a Court reporter present and certainly not with the parents and their counsel present.

There is therefore often little ability for counsel representing the alienated parent from challenging the specifics of what the Court was told as it unfolds and before the child's direct testimony has had a meaningful impact on the Judge's understanding of the family background. The judicial interview process does not afford counsel the opportunity to cross-examine the child witness, for example, a fundamental right and essential component of refuting the multiple false allegations frequently levied against the targeted parent.

Thankfully, however, Canadian jurisprudence has generally recognized the concerns about judicial interviews in the context of conflicted children and also the fact that Judges are rarely trained in interviewing children. Even those Judges who have prior experience as children's counsel and therefore who have received a modicum of training in this regard, will often struggle with separating their role as the trier of fact from their role as a conduit for an essential piece of evidence in the case. It would be too much to expect that the Trial Judge would be doing much forensic probing of what they are being told by the children, for example.

The Ontario Canada Courts have provided some significant guidance in this regard and now frequently reference a protocol for judicial interviews of children that serves the purpose of: (I) first providing a list of rationales for why a request for judicial interview should be denied; and (II) secondarily, if the judicial interview is to proceed, how it is to proceed in a manner that protects the integrity of the adjudicative process to the greatest extent possible.

Factors listed in the protocol which resulted from a consultation and committee process co-sponsored by The Advocates' Society (Ontario) and the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts, Ontario Chapter. [Guidelines for Judicial Interviews and Meetings with Children in Custody & Access Cases in Ontario", (2014) 36 RFL-ART 489 (WL), at p. 8 ["Guidelines"] that would suggest that a judicial interview is **inappropriate** include:

- a. There has been an assessment report or CLR which has been completed within the past year, unless that report requests a judicial interview and there is no conflicting professional recommendation against such an interaction;*
- b. The child has independent legal representation obtained through the OCL [Office of the Children's Lawyer] or otherwise privately retained by the parties;*
- c. There is independent and reliable evidence available through an independent third party regarding a child's views and preferences;*
- d. The child's age or level of development suggests that he or she does not possess a sufficient level of maturity;*
- e. The court has balanced the expected benefits of the interview against the risk that the child may be adversely affected and is satisfied, on balance, that conducting the interview would be inappropriate;*
- f. One or both parties do not consent to a judicial interview of the child taking place;*
- g. There is evidence before the court that the child does not wish to be interviewed by a judge.*

Statutory authorization generally provides that the court *may* interview the child, but allows for significant judicial discretion as to whether a judge will interview a child. In addition, other than generally specifying that the interview shall be recorded and attended by the child's counsel, if any, the legislation allows for discretion in terms of the process used to conduct an interview.

Jurisprudence generally supports the reluctance of Judges to undertake judicial interviews (even though statutorily authorized), for the following reasons:

- (I) judicial interviews *“should be limited and not seen as an opportunity to obtain vital information shielded from the knowledge of and challenge by the litigants.”*
- (II) *“The practice of interviewing children in chambers by a judge is not an ideal way to ascertain a child's wishes. The interview is conducted in an intimidating environment by a person unskilled in asking questions and interpreting the answers of children... Where other methods appear to be unavailable, the judge's interview is an appropriate last resort.”*
- (III) *“In my view it is not proper to use the judicial interview process in order to contest evidence that may be disputed. The prejudice to the litigants far outweighs any potential probative value. These children have already been excessively involved in this litigation. The care givers have talked to them and, in some cases, involved them in this litigation. They have already talked to a judge, their lawyer and a social worker on numerous occasions. I will not place Sarah in a position where, through questioning by the judge, where she will be at the centre of a storm that may go further to destroy future family relationships rather than preserve the potential of necessary familial re- integration”.*
- (IV) In another case the Judge noted that he was not trained as a psychologist or psychiatrist and was concerned that he might not appropriately interpret the answers given by the children, or even ask the appropriate questions. The court was also concerned that the children had been influenced by the father and questioned whether what they said would be their true views.

If a judicial interview is to proceed, the Guidelines suggest the following structural elements: the Judge should explain to the child that their conversation will be recorded and advise who may have access to the recording or transcript (parents and parents' counsel are often provided with same), and whether parents will at least be provided with a summary of the information. Except for special circumstances, the parties should be provided with a summary of what transpired and, if appropriate, given an opportunity to make submissions or present evidence related to what transpired.

For the foregoing reasons, judicial interviews should be used infrequently and only if there is the unavailability and/or significant evidentiary concerns about all other possible modalities of ensuring that the voice of the child is put before the Court with the requisite context to allow the Court to weigh the authenticity and reliability of the asserted voice of the child. Clearly, the preferred modality to have the voice of the child heard in context is a more forensic (custody evaluation) or experiential (reconciliation therapist) approach which avoids having the trier of fact too directly involved in how that is all presented. The weight of the jurisprudence is that judicial interviews: *“should be used very rarely and only where all other means of ascertaining the child's views are absent.”*

Compiled by Robert Ferrer, PASG Archivist

IN THIS SECTION, ROBERT FERRER, PASG Archivist, provides citations and abstracts for recently published articles related to parental alienation. The citations are entered into the searchable [Parental Alienation Database](#), also accessible from the [PASG website](#). **Many citations will provide access to the full-text version of the article.** Just click on the title to follow the link. To have an article considered for this section, email Robert Ferrer at r-ferrer@illinois.edu

ZICAP II Scale: Parental Alienation Assessment in 9 to 15 years-old children of separated parents in Chile

Escala ZICAP II: evaluación de alienación parental en niños de 9 a 15 años de padres separados en Chile (Spanish)

By: Nelson Zicavo Martínez, Ricardo Rey Clericus and Luciano Ponce (2021). *Ciencias Psicológicas*. January - June 2021, 15(1), e-2159. 15p. doi: <https://doi.org/10.22235/cp.v15i1.2159>

Abstract: The aim of this research was to build a valid and reliable instrument to evaluate Parental Alienation (PA) in Chilean kids, between 9 and 15 years. This project started by the need of an instrument to collect evidence of child/parent bond obstruction; a source of severe intra-family child abuse observed in conflictive divorce situations. The items were constructed based on theoretical conceptualization of PA and submitted to expert's judges who agreed to review and enriched them, to be later submitted to statistical analysis and successive adjustments. The final outcome consists of 29 items, 8 components and two dimensions instrument (Dimension I: Alpha value of .777, Dimension II: Alpha value of .884). This scale was applied to a sample of 1.181 children from 9 to 15 years-old with separated parents, of the south-central regions of Chile. Confirmatory Factor Analysis was performed on the theoretical structure previously proposed, observing acceptable adjustment values.

Subjects: parental alienation, psychometric properties, scale, child abuse

Parental Alienation: Targeted Parent Experience in Turkey

By: Fuat Torun, Sebahat Dilek Torun & Mandy Matthewson (2021). *The American Journal of Family Therapy*. DOI: 10.1080/01926187.2021.1895903 10pgs

Abstract: This study aimed to investigate Turkish targeted parents' experience of alienating tactics used in the process of being alienated from their child. The study also aimed to explore targeted parents' thoughts on the services they have received from mental health and legal professionals that they encountered during the process of family separation. Eighty-four targeted parents completed an online survey. The survey consisted of questions pertaining to sociodemographic information, questions developed by the researchers asking about the targeted parents' experiences, and questions regarding 13 alienation tactics described in the literature. The majority of participants were male (94%), with an average age of 42years. Participants reported they had been exposed to many alienating tactics and almost half of the participants had not seen their child despite the existence of court ordered visitation. Half of the participants had been referred to mental health professionals during the divorce process, with the majority of these participants of the opinion that these professionals had insufficient knowledge of parental alienation. Further, most participants thought that the legal professionals they encountered had insufficient knowledge of parental alienation. Participants also reported feeling hopeless, desperate, lonely, anxious, and unable to enjoy life. These findings are consistent with research with participants from other countries.

Subjects: Parental alienation; divorce; targeted parent; alienation tactics

Difference, Choice, and Punishment: Parental Beliefs and Understandings about Adult Child Estrangement

By: Kylie Agllias. Australian Social Work. 68:1, pp. 115-129, 15p. DOI: 10.1080/0312407X.2014.927897

Abstract: This article reports on qualitative research that examined the experiences of 25 Australian participants aged over 60 years who were estranged from at least one adult child. When participants were asked about their perceptions of the cause of the estrangement they described events prior to and at the time of the estrangement, possibly perceived as a form of parental rejection or relational devaluation by the estranged children. Findings suggested a complex interplay of long-term factors that appeared to contribute to an eroded relationship between parents and children, including divorce, third-party alienation, and multiple family stressors. Ultimately participants said that the adult children responded by: (1) choosing what they perceived to be a less rejecting or less dangerous relationship over a relationship with their parent; (2) choosing to stop contact or reduce emotional interactions with their parent; or (3) using estrangement to punish their parent for the perceived rejection.

Subjects: Aged; Family Interventions; Qualitative Research; Estrangement

The Role of the Social Worker in Preventing Child-Parent Contact Failure

By: Philip Marcus. Contemporary Family Magazine, Spring 2021, pp. 18-19, 2p.

Abstract: The present article will show how social workers, guardians ad litem, and persons in allied professions can use their skills, in all three parts of the programme, to help the children and their families when such issues become apparent.

Subjects: Contact failure; prevention; parental alienation; social worker

You're Not Crazy – Overcoming Parent/Child Alienation

By: Dr. Lynn Steinberg. Lynn Steinberg, Los Angeles, CA USA. February 19, 2021, 280 pages.

Abstract: This book was written for the Alienated Parent, whether in the beginning or advanced stages. So many reactions, such as: “You must have done something to your son/daughter to have caused them to not talk to you”. “When people get divorced, the blame is 50/50, so what did YOU do?”. In therapy: “You have to listen to your son/daughter without getting defensive or telling them what they are saying is not true. It is their reality!”. “Your child is old enough to choose not to live with you”, at times said when the child is 11, 12, 13, 14 and up years of age! Children cannot drive, drink, vote and do many other things until they reach a certain age. Why is a brainwashed child legally supported in rejecting a once beloved parent? “Your son/daughter is an adult. They couldn't still be under the influence of the other parent and his/her family”. The answer to all the above is “ALL OF THE ABOVE STATEMENTS ARE FALSE, FALSE, FALSE!”. Despite the naysayers who insist that there is no such thing as Parental Alienation, there is! It has been thoroughly well-documented and researched since the 1930's. PARENTAL ALIENATION IS CHILD ABUSE, and it is time for the Courts, Attorneys, Guardians Ad Litem, The Department of Child Protective Services, Psychologists, Psychotherapists, Physicians, Families and Friends, to recognize it for what it is and put a stop to it.

Subjects: Parenting; Family Relationships; Parental Alienation; Management

Parental Alienation on Family Contact Right Alienação Parental à Luz do Direito à Convivência Familiar (Portuguese)

By: Juliana Rodrigues de Souza. in PARENTAL ALIENATION LUSOBRAZILIAN DIGITAL MAGAZINE, 4TH EDITION. SEPT. - NOV. 2014. pp 59-103.

(https://issuu.com/sandraines3/docs/sem_t_tulo-4.____edi____o)

Abstract: This research presents the main issues addressed in the book “Parental Alienation from the perspective of the right to family contact”. It appears that despite the recognition of the right to family contact to be expressed in the Brazilian legal system, not yet achieved the necessary effectiveness. Thus, it’s intended to reflect on the changes occurring in family over time, as well as understand how children were seen before and after the Brazilian Constitution. After brief reflection on these changes, we try to analyze the right of children to live with family. In this context, will address up-to Parental Alienation in which refers to a practice that, in a forceful way, affect the healthy coexistence with family members. Thus, only analyzes of concept of Parental Alienation in the light of Law No. 12,318 / 2010, the position of the Brazilian courts and the behavior of the alienating, but especially the consequences for children and adolescents. Under this approach and with the support of existing relevant literature, the research aims to contribute to spread the practice of parental alienation and its harmful effects on the guarantee of the right to family life of many children who experience difficult family conflict which, if not early identified, leave deep consequences on their physical, emotional and social development.

Subjects: Right to Family. Children and Adolescents. Parental Alienation.

Note from R. Ferrer: Below are two articles critical of Parental Alienation. The McInnes conference paper is a reaction to Australia’s Family Law Reform Act of 1995 that provided for a rebuttable presumption of shared parenting. McInnes argues that there are not enough resources to adequately investigate allegations of child abuse therefore creating a de facto assumption that the allegations are indicative of Parental Alienation. The second article by Fersch assumes that Parental Alienation is junk science. Relying solely on Joan Meier’s problematic study, she invokes the standard rhetoric against the veracity of Parental Alienation. Readers’ comments are encouraged.

PARENTAL ALIENATION SYNDROME: A PARADIGM FOR CHILD ABUSE IN AUSTRALIAN FAMILY LAW

By: Dr. Elspeth McInnes, Lecturer, Early Childhood Education, University of South Australia. Paper presented at the Child Sexual Abuse: Justice Response or Alternative Resolution Conference convened by the Australian Institute of Criminology and held in Adelaide, 1-2 May 2003

Abstract: This paper argues that the absence of a publicly funded investigative capacity in the Family Court of Australia when there are allegations of child abuse by a parent, creates the conditions for the de facto operating presumption of the Parental Alienation Syndrome paradigm in the courts. This paradigm, at its simplest, insists that claims of serious child abuse are invented and that children’s statements and manifestations of fear are the outcome of parental coaching. Without a publicly funded professional child protection investigative service available to inform the family court, the private adversarial system of family law commonly fails to substantiate allegations of child abuse, thereby systematically producing the outcome that child abuse allegations will be deemed to be false. Safety for children in family law proceedings who are subject to abuse depends on access to a professional investigative service to inform the court, and a redefinition of a child’s best interests in the Family Law Act to give safety the highest value.

Subjects: Parental Alienation; Child Abuse; Family Law; Australia; Family Court of Australia

Parental Alienation As A Defense To Allegations Of Domestic Violence And Allegations Of Child Sexual Abuse

By: Patricia Fersch, founding partner of Fersch LLC, a family law practice in New York City. I write about family law and leadership tips for female lawyers. Forbes Magazine. March 29, 2021

Abstract: Parental Alienation is not accepted as a psychological phenomenon by the psychological community. It is used as a defense against allegations of child sexual abuse and domestic violence.

Subjects: Parental Alienation; Domestic Violence; Child Sexual Abuse ■

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