



## Raising Awareness of Parental Alienation

International Parental Alienation Awareness Day  
25 April 2008

### *FNF, JUMP and MATCH survey: experiences with Parental Alienation*

More and more attention is being paid to the wishes of children when it comes to decisions being made for and about them, especially during the turbulent time of relationship breakdown, and well before all family members attempt to re-build ties in ways that will be of greatest benefit to the children for life.

FNF, JUMP and MATCH welcome this, both in principle and because of its beneficial effect on parenting of children by **both** their parents.

There is, however, a downside. The more children are listened to, the greater the incentive for a hostile or intractable parent to try and induce children to say not what *they* really want, but what that parent wants. For unstated reasons of their own, they may try to influence children against the other parent, or indicate to them that out of loyalty or love or identification with their 'principal parent', the children should say that they don't want to have a relationship with the other parent.

This behaviour is widely recognised as Parental Alienation, the concept associated with Richard Gardner<sup>1</sup>.

Parental Alienation refers to a situation in which a Resident Parent (usually but not exclusively) turns their child/children against the Non-Resident Parent, intentionally or unintentionally, resulting in the child's supposed and stated desire to reject all contact with that latter parent.

It is not, of course, Parental Alienation if the child does not want to see a parent who has been abusive or neglectful, or if the child does not want to see a parent who is not child centred.

Some people prefer to use the term 'emotional abuse'. It is useful to see the government's definition of this:

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<sup>1</sup> Gardner, R.A (1992), *The Parental Alienation Syndrome; A Guide for Mental Health and Legal Professionals*. Cresskill, NJ: Creative Therapeutics, Inc.

The definition of emotional abuse as contained in 'Working Together to Safeguard Children<sup>2</sup>' is:

“Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child’s emotional development. It may involve conveying to children that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued in so far as they meet the needs of another person. It may feature age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children. These may include interactions that are beyond the child’s developmental capacity, as well as overprotection and limitation of exploration and learning, or preventing the child participating in normal social interaction. It may involve seeing or hearing the ill treatment of another. It may involve serious bullying causing children frequently to be frightened or in danger, or exploitation or corruption of children. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of maltreatment of a child, though it may occur alone.”

FNF, JUMP and Match want to raise awareness of International Parental Alienation Awareness Day, which is now into its third year, and was originally initiated by the Parental Alienation Awareness Organisation in the US. (<http://www.paawareness.org>)

Many FNF, JUMP and MATCH members have been affected by Parental Alienation. However, judges, CAFCASS staff, social workers, and others involved in crucial decision-making relating to children’s welfare often fail to recognise Parental Alienation as a genuine occurrence, and children, as a consequence, may lose a loved and loving parent for a long time or, tragically, forever.

This can also have a long-term effect on the child’s relationship with the parent causing the alienation, if, during adulthood, the child discovers that they have been misled.

Below is a selection of responses:

**Question: What were the initial parenting arrangements made for your child(ren)?**

- 24% of respondents said that they had not made any initial parenting arrangements for their children.
- 11% of respondents said shared parenting was the initial parenting arrangement for their children.

**Question: What residency status did/do you have for your child(ren)?**

**a) When your relationship ended**

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<sup>2</sup> Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children  
(<http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/files/AE53C8F9D7AEB1B23E403514A6C1B17D.pdf>)

**b) Now**

- 24% of respondents had the residency status of Non-Resident Parent status when the relationship ended.
- 1 respondent had shared residency when the relationship ended.
- 71% of respondents have Non-Resident Parent status of at least one of their children now.

**Question: When after your relationship ended did you feel Parental Alienation started affecting the lives of your child(ren) and you?**

- 18% of respondents felt Parental Alienation affected the lives of their child(ren) and themselves 2 years or more after their relationship ended.
- 18% of respondents felt Parental Alienation affected the lives of their child(ren) and themselves up to one year after their relationship ended.
- 41% of respondents felt Parental Alienation affected the lives of the child(ren) and themselves immediately after their relationship ended.
- 18% of respondents felt Parental Alienation affected the lives of the child(ren) and themselves before the relationship ended.

**Question: How long after your relationship ended did you stop seeing your child(ren)?**

- 18% of respondents did not stop seeing their child(ren) at any time after their relationship ended.
- 18% of respondents stopped seeing their child(ren) immediately after their relationship ended.

**Question: What contact, if any, do you have with your child(ren) now?**

- 59% of respondents do not have any contact with at least one of their children.
- 18% of respondents have indirect contact only with at least one of their children.

**Question: If you were involved in Family Court proceedings for how many years and number of hearings did this last for, where did the hearings take place and how many judges heard your case?**

- 31% of respondents have had Family Court Proceedings which lasted longer than 5 years.
- 85% of respondents have had more than 5 court hearings.
- 31% of respondents have had more than 5 Judges hear their cases.

**Question: Are Court proceedings still ongoing?**

- 24% of respondents still have Court proceedings still ongoing.

**Question: Give an example of how Parental Alienation has affected your child(ren). (Sample of comments)**

- “Refused to come for contact as she said was afraid of me, and that I could take her away and may beat her because I hit my son which was not true”.
- “My older son went from love to hate with no apparent emotion in the middle. From telling me he loved me so much and hugging me to saying that he never wanted to see me again, in the space of 1 month”.
- “She was not allowed to mention my name when she went to stay (with her father)”.
- “In a contact centre, my son suddenly became distressed and then repeatedly said “You took mummy to court, you are trying to put her in jail Mummy told me. You must stop Daddy”. Thereafter he began refusing to see me in the contact centre”.
- “Husband would stand and say nothing as they verbally abused me. He never said they were wrong to talk to their mother like that”.

**Question: How do you think current Family Law failed to protect your relationship with your children and their relationship with you as the non-resident parent? (Sample of comments)**

- “I cannot begin to describe how let down I feel. I am a professional woman who had de facto residence of my girls from the ages of 2 and 4. When my elder daughter was 14 she was deemed by the Courts to be of an age to decide where she wished to live”.
- “The current law has failed my children...”
- “Everyone knows that the bottom line is Court Orders can be broken by Resident Parents”.

**Question: What do you think needs to change with Family Law to prevent children suffering from Parental Alienation? (Sample of comments)**

- “Instead of using undefined ‘best interests’ principle with child's wishes and feelings, using a simple approximation rule where amount of contact is establishment based on the amount of care each parent used to provide prior to separation”.
- “PA needs to be recognised by the law and then procedures must be put in place to deal with it...”
- “Counselling of both parents, information especially to alienating parent, to avoid the harm that can be done”.

These findings show that current arrangements for the parenting of children whose parents are separated polarise the children between the one with whom they ‘live’ and the one with whom they are allowed limited and strictly defined contact. Many of our Members, as Non-Resident Parents, have experienced their court-designated Contact Order being very easily disrupted or ignored when one parent is committed to honouring it and the other is committed to sabotaging it.

Sadly, many separations are highly acrimonious and the parent with greater power over their children (usually the Resident Parent) finds it relatively easy to exploit the conditions prevailing, at both pre- and post- separation times, when children's fragile and emotional vulnerability enables that parent to create an atmosphere in which children feel they cannot see the other parent without feeling they have somehow 'betrayed' their loyalty and primary commitment to the Resident Parent.

From this sample, one gets the impression that all statutory and legal authorities involved in children's post divorce residence arrangements, fail to recognise when children's wishes not to see a parent are genuine, and when they are induced. It seems to be the case that even when the system does recognise they are induced, it commonly fails to tackle the problem properly or thoroughly.

Although it has been shown that some cases of inter-parental hostility may be cured by time, Parental Alienation can get worse. If the courts, and all parties concerned in post-separation residence arrangements for children understood Parental Alienation's existence or, more importantly, were aware of its rapid, negative effects in destroying relationships between parents and children, all parties should not delay in acting rapidly in a concerned attempt to avert such dangers.

In the light of these findings, should we listen to children?

John Baker, FNF chair, concurs that “as a starting point, absolutely yes. It yields information about their needs, wishes and feelings that cannot be got from anyone else. In divorce and separation, it may be especially important. Their parents (because of the intensity of their own feelings) may not be fully aware of what the children are going through or may not be in a stable emotional state to put them first. Both may want to exclude the other from the lives of their children. Only very rarely do the children want this. This, however, is not to say that what the children say may not need interpretation”.

Figures used by *11 million*<sup>3</sup> states that half the children whose parents live apart want to spend more time than they are allowed with the parent whom they do not live with. In fact, it is commonly the case that children want to have a relationship with a parent or parents even when they (the parents) have behaved inadequately or shabbily. This is recognised in Public Law. When a child has been removed from his or her parental home, they have a statutory right to have contact with their parents, unless it has been formally set aside commonly in legal proceedings where the children have their own advocate.

It is important for a child who wants to see their 'other parent' or excluded family and who knows or feels that this will upset their 'principal parent' to feel safe and supported in getting what they want.

An important first step in this direction is to acknowledge that there *is* such a thing as Parental Alienation. Secondly, and perhaps more crucially, is to recognise the circumstances of how and when Parental Alienation might arise. Ultimately, it is imperative to be able to identify and tackle it.

Without acknowledging, as well-respected research has conclusively and decisively demonstrated, that this chronically negative condition called Parental Alienation exists, how can statutory and legal authorities fulfil their primary role to protect vulnerable children? How can they claim to act in our children's best and highest interests when they fail to protect them from this insidious and subtle form of emotional abuse which can so rapidly extinguish the love a child had for a previously loved parent?

#### Useful references:

Dr Richard Gardner (<http://www.rgardner.com/>)

- *The Parental Alienation Syndrome - as stated above ie:* Gardner, R. A. (1992), *The Parental Alienation Syndrome: A Guide for Mental Health and Legal Professionals*. Cresskill, NJ: Creative Therapeutics, Inc
- *Recommendations for Dealing with Parents who induce a Parental Alienation Syndrome in their Children, Journal of Divorce & Remarriage, Volume 28 (3/4), 1998, p. 1-21* (<http://www.fact.on.ca/Info/pas/gardnr98.htm>)
- *True and False Accusations of Child Sex Abuse - Gardner, R.A. (1992). True and False Accusations of Child Sex Abuse . Cresskill, NJ: Creative Therapeutics. (p. 592-3)*

Dr Ludwig Lowenstein (<http://www.parental-alienation.info/>)

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<sup>3</sup> 11 Million, previously recognised as Children's Commissioner for England, Professor Sir Albert Aynsley-Green, April 2007  
[https://www.childrenscommissioner.org/documents/11Million\\_5Year\\_plan.pdf](https://www.childrenscommissioner.org/documents/11Million_5Year_plan.pdf)

- *Parental Alienation Syndrome* - <http://www.parental-alienation.info/publications/02-paralisyn.htm> & <http://www.parental-alienation.info/publications/04-paralisyn.htm>
- *How to Understand and Address Parental Alienation Resulting from Acrimonious Divorce or Separation, 2007, Russell House Publishing Ltd (ISBN:978-1-905541-10-2)*

Dr Amy J. L. Baker (<http://www.amyjlaker.com/index.html>)

- *Adult Children of Parental Alienation Syndrome: Breaking the Ties that Bind, April 2007 W.W. Norton,*

Dr José Manuel Aguilar (<http://www.jmaguilar.com/>)

English translation via Google -

(<http://translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&sl=es&u=http://www.jmaguilar.com/&sa=X&oi=translate&resnum=6&ct=result&prev=/search%3Fq%3DJos%25C3%25A9%2BManuel%2BAguilar%2B%26hl%3Den%26rls%3DRNWE,RNWE:2006-11,RNWE:en>)

THE USE OF CHILDREN IN THE SEPARATION PROCESS: PARENTAL ALIENATION SYNDROME. ARTICLE FOR THE MAGAZINE LEX NOVA, OCT-DEC 2005

José Manuel Aguilar Cuenca. Psychologist. (<http://www.apase.org.br/71001-sindrome.htm>).

To view the survey and spreadsheet of data, or to discuss the issues further please contact Becky Sibert, FNF Policy & Information Officer: [becky.sibert@fnf.org.uk](mailto:becky.sibert@fnf.org.uk) or call the FNF office on 0207 613 5060.