

NAVIGATING POST-DIVORCE CONFLICT WITH CHILDREN ON BOARD: SYSTEMIC WORK WITH PARENTAL ALIENATION

AFT London Workshop

with SSoPA Group

Saturday, 25th October, 2014

Overview – Nick Child

~ MY BACKGROUND: CAMHS SHRINK, NOW VOLUNTARY SECTOR FAMILY THERAPIST, ASPENS, ROY, ALLERGY WORKSHOP. DESPITE LIMITED CLINICAL EXPERIENCE WITH HIGH CONFLICT SEPARATIONS OR ALIENATION – I THINK MY BEST FOCUS IS ON READING, THINKING, WRITING AND ORGANISING ABOUT THEM.

PROGRAMME

- 10.00 London AFT
- 10.10 Myrna Gower: Introductions
- 10.25-11.00 Nick Child:
- 11.00-11.40 Chip Chimera / Kevin Amey
- 11.40-12.00 COFFEE
- 12.00-12.25 Myrna Gower
- 12.25-12.50 Roy Mackay
- 12.50-1.00 PM Planning
- 1.00-2.00 LUNCH
- 2.00-3.15 Discussion groups with presenters.
- 3.15-3.30 TEA
- 3.30-4.30 Plenary and Panel: with Hamish Cameron

Anna Gupta was ill and unable to present. Hopefully she will make her contribution available post hoc.

SSOPA: WHAT AND WHO WE ARE

- (A Google Group for the) Systemic Study of Parental Alienation
- 2012 Roy Mackay, Nick Child, Myrna Gower
- 2013 Chip Chimera, Anna Gupta, Gareth Morgan, Alison O'Mahony
- 2014 Gillian Solomon, David Secrett; Kevin Amey

Pre-October 3014, this is the story of who joined SSoPA.

TODAY'S AIMS

- PA – an important international field
 - Ignored in UK until now
- A short packed intro for all involved
 - Loads more to learn after
- Attend to any resistance & “allergy”~
- We’re all learning ... a work in progress
 - Multidisciplinary audience

~ “Allergy” refers to Nick’s term of ignorance, prejudice and active resistance to “PAS” he discovered in 2010 when Roy Mackay referred himself to the FT service in Edinburgh. But first Roy sent Nick a textbook (Amy Baker’s), correctly suspecting Nick needed help to become Roy’s helper! The concern that Nick’s allergy was a wider professional culture led to the workshop at Derby AFT (given by Nick, Roy, and Myrna) in May 2013 and its focus on “Why do we dismiss PA?”. In September 2013 at the main AFT UK conference, Chip Chimera was far more bold and effective in her plenary presentation and her well-attended workshop. It looked like the allergy was cured! At the AFT London conference (as elsewhere) the evidence of some resistance continuing perhaps showed most in a general wish that there was a less off-putting term than “alienation”. The search continues! ... I’LL START WITH>>



Cartoon by permission of Berger and Wyse:
<http://www.bergerandwyse.com>

START WITH A JOKE. THE LAWYER SAYS: "MY CLIENT WOULD LIKE TO PROPOSE A LONG DRAWN-OUT CUSTARDY BATTLE" ... BUT TODAY'S TOPIC IS NO JOKE ... NO ROOM FOR HUMOUR IN TRIBAL WARFARE. AND WHEN YOU'RE ...>>

RIDING THE WILD WATERS OF FAMILY SEPARATION



Life jackets are essential ~

.... SO MY OPENING OVERVIEW IS A LIFE JACKET FOR YOU. BTW THESE GUYS ARE DOING THIS FOR FUN ... HIGH CONFLICT SEPARATION IS NOT FUN ... NOBODY – NO CHILD, NO PARENT, NO PROFESSIONAL – WILLINGLY CHOOSES HIGH CONFLICT SEPARATION OR ALIENATION. SO: NO HUMOUR, NO CHOICE, NO FUN ... TODAY LOOKS GRIM ALREADY! ...>>

A LIFE JACKET ... BASIC SURVIVAL TIPS



1. A Definition
2. Brief Cases
3. Key Bullet Points
4. Why Study PA?
5. What We Can Do
6. Further Learning ~

~ THIS DOWNLOAD LATER WILL ALLOW YOU, THE READER, TO GO THROUGH THE SLIDES AND NOTES AT YOUR OWN PACE – WITH FULLER CLEAR NOTES (THAN NICK'S RUSHED CONFERENCE AD LIB) ...

.... THIS IS A PACKED SUMMARY OF THE FIELD AS I KNOW IT – CREDIT TO ROY MACKAY: WE'VE TAUGHT EACH OTHER ALL WE KNOW! I MAY FIRE THE BULLET POINTS, BUT WE SHARED THE PRODUCTION LINE.

Are you ready?!



PARENTAL ALIENATION: NICK'S DEFINITION

- Parental Alienation is a family pattern
- most strikingly (but not only) found in the context of high conflict separations,
 - where a child is shaped into totally rejecting the other parent and their tribe,
- even though the child previously had, and could still have, a safe and valued relationship with them ~

~ "SHAPED" ... BECAUSE IT'S A NEUTRAL TERM THAT INCLUDES A RANGE OF THINGS.

PURE ALIENATION IS RARE ... IT ALSO GETS CALLED ...>>

... OR CHILD ALIENATION ~

- “It’s when one parent turns their child against the other”
- Typically: The child strongly rejects one parent on a flimsy basis ~, driven by the aligned parent and their overwhelmingly strong and needy personality ~
- Terms like Child Alienation or Children Resisting Contact work better. But Parental Alienation has stuck
- Alienation is one end of the closeness spectrum that everyone knows – egs “I was close to my father”; your teen’s peer choice ~
- So Attachment-based explanation and approaches work well
 - Gardner listed 8 features of rarer pure PAS ~
- Most people have dropped the simplistic “Syndrome” tag ~

~ USING THE WORD “CHILD” EMPHASISES THE PRIORITY ALIENATION IS AN OFF-PUTTING WORD WHEN PEOPLE REMAIN PUZZLED, AND YOU SAY: IT’S WHEN etc ... THEY OFTEN SAY “OH, I KNOW SOMEONE WITH THAT!”

~ OFTEN NORMAL FRUSTRATIONS OF FAMILY LIFE – EG SHE GETS ANGRY, HE SLAMS DOORS

~ THE OVERWHELMINGLY STRONG PERSONALITY GETS GIVEN AWFULLY NEGATIVE LABELS LIKE “NARCISSISTIC PD” ... OR ELSE THEY GET HUGE SYMPATHY ... WHICH IS WHAT THEIR CHILD GIVES

~ TO MAKE ALIENATION SEEM LESS ALIEN, IMAGINE YOU DON’T LIKE YOUR TEENAGER’S CHOICE OF PEER GROUP OR BOY/GIRLFRIEND - YOU MAY SHOW YOUR FEELINGS AND TAKE STEPS TO INFLUENCE THEIR RELATIONSHIPS AND LOYALTY TO YOU. YOU’LL SAY “IT’S FOR THEIR OWN GOOD” ... WHICH IS ALSO WHAT ANY ALIENATING PARENT WOULD SAY. THE POINT IS THE PATTERN IS ONLY DIFFERENT IN DEGREE FROM GOOD PARENTING.

~ GARDNER’S LIST IS STILL USEFUL THOUGH MOST CASES ARE MULTIFACTORIAL OR HYBRID

WHEN LAYERS OF ADULT CONFLICT CRUSH THE CHILD ~



MY WAY OF TELLING IT (AS A SHORTHAND FOR A SHORT OVERVIEW) SEES PA AS A NATURAL OUTCOME OF A HIGH CONFLICT SYSTEM WITH LAYER ON LAYER OF ADULTS – MAYBE PA-UNAWARE THERAPISTS TOO – ALL ESCALATING THIS POLARISING TRIBAL CONFLICT WITH A CHILD IN THE MIDDLE AND EVERYONE LOOKING TO THE CHILD'S VOICE TO DECLARE THE WINNER. THEY SAY 1 IN 10 SEPARATIONS ARE HIGH CONFLICT LIKE THIS (MEANING THAT THE CONFLICT ENDURES AND FAMILY COURTS ARE INVOLVED). DO REMEMBER THAT HIGH CONFLICT SEPARATION GOES WITH A HIGH RISK OF ACTUAL PHYSICAL AND SEXUAL ABUSE FOR ALL PARTIES.

.... NB THE TUG OF WAR IMAGE IS NOT SATISFACTORY: IT IMPLIES BOTH PARENTS ARE EQUALLY UNCOLLABORATIVE – ALLOWING PEOPLE TO DISMISS THEM: "WELL WHAT CAN ANYONE DO WITH THEM?!". IT ONLY TAKES ONE PARENT TO BE NONCOLLABORATIVE TO CREATE HIGH CONFLICT.

..... IN A SITUATION LIKE THIS ONE... >> <<...

... IT IS NO SURPRISE WHEN THIS HAPPENS ...



..... THE CHILD OPTS TO CLING TO ONE SIDE AND DROP THE OTHER PARENT. WHERE THIS HAPPENS WITHOUT GOOD PAST OR PRESENT REASON TO DROP ONE SIDE, THIS IS ALIENATION. IT IS SAID TO BE RARE – 1/10 OF THE HIGH CONFLICT COURT CASES, ie 1/100 SEPARATIONS SO AN INTERESTING ... >>

... SO AN INTERESTING QUESTION IS ...



... Why does this happen so rarely?!!



>> QUESTION IS: ...

... YOU'D THINK IT WOULD HAPPEN QUITE A LOT



Are you with me so far?!

TASTE OF PUBLISHED CASE EXAMPLES 1

•THE CHILD'S EXPERIENCE

- A VIDEO SNIPPET (2.30 mins). Adults look back on abduction and alienation
- Do watch all of it: www.forallthat.com > Children Resisting Contact

..... ~ THE CLIPS ARE SELECTED TO GIVE A SNIPPET OF FIRST HAND DESCRIPTION OF ALIENATION IN ACTION, AND ALSO THE LONG TERM HARM ...

FIRST A GIRL ABDUCTED FROM NORWAY BY HER FATHER, THEN A BOY ABDUCTED FROM USA BY HIS MOTHER. ABDUCTION IS A QUICK WAY TO ALIENATE YOUR CHILDREN – BUT YOU STILL HAVE TO KEEP WORKING ON ALIENATING THEM.

WATCH THE SNIPPET IN THE SAME SSOPA FOLDER IF YOU'RE IN THE GOOGLE DRIVE, OR PASTE THIS:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B_EeGJQLNTYoWTJ4V0VTRnhpRkE/view?usp=sharing

BUT, AS THE SLIDE SUGGESTS, BEST SEE THE FULL VERSION VIA FORALLTHAT.COM

TASTE OF PUBLISHED CASE EXAMPLES 2

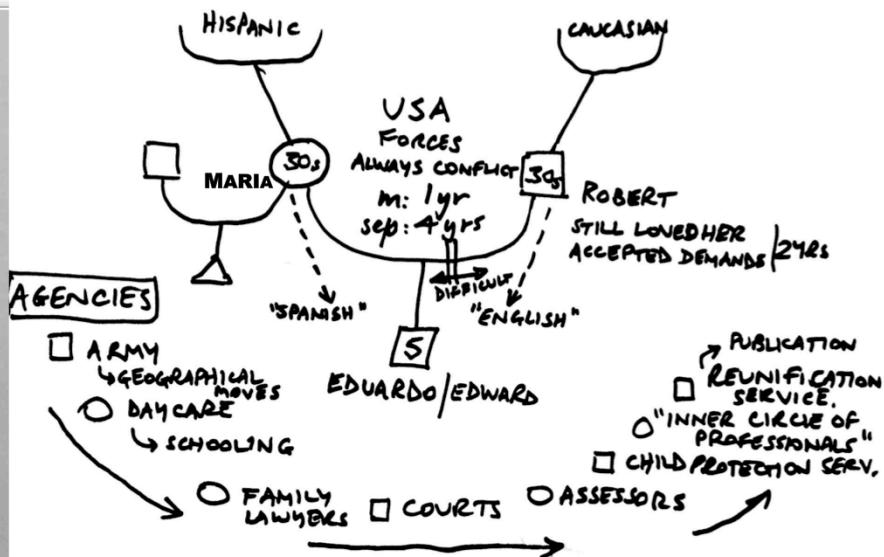
• WORKING WITH A FAMILY (USA)

A BRIEF CASE STORY ~

Adapted from: **Jack Weitzman** (2013) Reunification and the One Way Mirror. Chapter 10 in **Amy Baker & Richard Sauber** *Working with Alienated Children and Families*. Routledge.

.... ~ A CASE STORY TO ILLUSTRATE THE USE OF A ONE WAY MIRROR (SO FAMILY THERAPISTS MIGHT LIKE IT AND BE RESOURCED TO USE ONE) – BUT THE STORY ALSO NEATLY SHOWS MOST OF THE OTHER KEY POINTS OF PA. ... FROM THIS BOOK

A USA CASE : EDUARDO / EDWARD



... I'M GOING TO READ THE STORY – THAT WILL EXPLAIN THIS GENOGRAM AS WE GO.

... NOTE THE AGENCIES. COMPARE UK WITH USA IT DOESN'T SAY WHO PAID FOR ALL THIS. NOTE THAT AT LEAST THE AGENCIES WERE PA AWARE AND DID SOMETHING RIGHT; IN THE UK AGENCIES ARE USUALLY UNAWARE AND MOSTLY DO PRECISELY THE WRONG THING
READ THE CASE STORY IN THE SAME SSOPA FOLDER IF YOU'RE IN THE GOOGLE DRIVE, OR PASTE THIS:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B_EeGJQLNTYoYj1ZDM5ZU5mN3M/view?usp=sharing

.... AN EXERCISE: I'LL PAUSE AT ONE POINT TO REPEAT THE WORDS "5 MONTHS". JUST TAKE A GENTLE SNAPSHOT, A NOTE OF WHERE YOU FIND YOUR MAIN SYMPATHIES LIE AT THAT POINT? LATER WE'LL COME BACK TO THINK ABOUT THAT MORE.

How soaking wet are we?!



Remember to save your thoughts for discussion later

.... NOW MY LIFE JACKET BULLET POINTS - A LIST OF SOLUTIONS WITHOUT DESCRIBING THE PROBLEMS THEY SOLVE (WHICH IS A FRUSTRATING EXERCISE) ... AND WITH MORE APOLOGIES (TO CONFERENCE AUDIENCE WHO HAD TO GO AT NICK'S PACE!) SINCE LOTS OF BULLET POINTS CAN ONLY FEEL LIKE BEING MACHINE GUNNED! SO THANKS FOR DOWNLOADING IT LATER TO ALLOW MORE TIME FOR YOUR THINKING THAN WAS POSSIBLE ON THE TODAY.

YOUR LIFE JACKET – KEY POINTS TO KEEP AFLOAT

- While adults take sides, keep a CHILD-FOCUS ~
- Children want a relationship with BOTH parents~
 - Most DO prioritise their children's needs for that
 - Hard for workers to NOT SIDE with one client ~
- Parents may be dead-set AGAINST collaborating~
 - So high conflict & PA = EMOTIONAL ABUSE~
 - Abuse means we have OTHER OBLIGATIONS
 - LEGAL etc SYSTEMS are necessary & can help

~ THE CHILD'S WELFARE IS SUPPOSED TO BE PARAMOUNT ANYWAY; A CHILD-FOCUS KEEPS WORKERS BALANCED AND PRINCIPLED – AND A PARENT CANNOT REALLY DEMAND THAT THEIR CHILD'S WELFARE IS SECOND PRIORITY TO THEIRS, WHILE THEY CAN CERTAINLY OBJECT TO PRIORITY GIVEN TO ONE OR OTHER PARENT.

~ (AS KEVIN DESCRIBED SO CLEARLY) EVEN WHEN A PARENT HAS BEHAVED BADLY, CHILDREN WILL WANT TO REPAIR SOME CONNECTION WITH THEM – THAT'S WHY PA IS SUCH A REMARKABLY EXCEPTIONAL PATTERN: THE REJECTED PARENT HAS NOT BEHAVED BADLY YET THEY ARE VOCIFEROUSLY AND 100% REJECTED.

~ WE ALL – SYSTEMIC THERAPISTS TOO – KNOW HOW HARD IT IS TO BALANCE A CLIENT'S NEED FOR YOU TO HEAR THEIR STORY AND BE ON THEIR SIDE, BUT ALSO LEAVE ROOM FOR THEIR PARTNER'S VIEWS AND THE CHILDREN'S POSITION TOO.

~ ESPECIALLY COMING FOR THERAPY – “THERAPY” CAN IMPLY THE LAST THING THEY WANT – GETTING BACK TOGETHER. **NOW**, NOT COLLABORATING MEANS THEY ARE NOT PRIORITISING CHILD'S WELFARE SO >

~ I'LL REPEAT THAT – IT'S SELDOM SAID ... WE CROSS OUR FINGERS AND HOPE THAT ANY HIGH CONFLCT IS JUST BETWEEN THE PARENTS – WE THINK: WHAT MORE CAN WE DO WHEN THE FAMILY COURTS ARE THE HIGHEST AUTHORITY AND MUST KNOW WHAT THEY'RE DOING?! OH YEAH?!!

MORE KEY POINTS AS IT GETS ROUGHER

- If parents on their own don't or can't put children first, then **EARLY PREVENTION** is key ~
- More parents **CAN** do better given a firm push to get it~
- **YOU** may not be the best agency for the family – especially if you are PA-unaware and can't manage the side-taking
 - Adversarial legal systems are **AWFUL** but **COLLABORATIVE** family lawyers may be **THE BEST** ~
- A properly assessed **CHILD'S VOICE** around family courts is important, but not if it's PA-unaware ~
- And this **INVITES PRESSURE** on child, a key factor in PA

~ OFTEN THE IGNORANT ADVICE IS TO "GIVE IT TIME" – WHICH IS EXACTLY THE WRONG ADVICE. MORE ON PREVENTION SHORTLY

~ ALTHOUGH WE'VE GOT A LOT TO LEARN FROM NORTH AMERICA AND AUSTRALIA ABOUT RESOURCES – EG PARENTING COORDINATION (A BLEND OF ROLES INCLUDING A DEGREE OF LEGAL AUTHORITY AND REPORTING BACK).

~ TWO LAWYERS CAN ADVOCATE AND SUPPORT FOR THEIR CLIENT AND ALSO NEGOTIATE SENSIBLY WITH EACH OTHER TO GUIDE AND ADVISE THEIR CLIENT TOWARDS A GOOD COMPROMISE. ... PAYING MORE CAN MOTIVATE! COLLABORATIVE DIVORCE TEAM MEMBERS REMINDED US (ON THE DAY) OF THEIR MORE DEVELOPED WAY TO ACHIEVE THIS.

~ AUSTRALIA INVESTED IN A FAR MORE SOPHISTICATED OUT OF COURT APPROACH TO WORKING WITH THE CHILD'S VOICE.

~ STRANGELY A KEY ROLE IN THE RISE OF PA – SURELY DUE TO THE PROMOTION OF CHILD'S VOICE IN COURT DECISIONS – IS NOT MENTIONED IN FIDLER ET AL TEXTBOOK

... KEY POINTS FOR WILDER WATER

- UK courts <> other agencies don't HOLD HANDS yet~
 - There are NO RELIABLE ANSWERS yet for PA
 - High conflict & PA patterns are MULTI-FACTORIAL
- CHILDREN play a part eg initiate or resist taking sides – hand-over TRANSITIONS are their biggest challenge~
 - When things go TRIBAL a whole family side is blocked
 - FIND LESS NEGATIVE terms than Narcissistic etc ~
- ABSENCE MAKES the hate grow stronger > allegations and other assessments need prompt action ~

~ THIS MEANS EFFECTIVE TO-ING AND FRO-ING TO USE LEGAL AUTHORITY WITH THE NON-LEGAL WORK TO ENSURE SOMETHING IS MADE TO HAPPEN. IN CONTRAST, (IN THE UK) MEDIATION AND THERAPY TYPICALLY SPECIFY FULL CLIENT CONFIDENTIALITY AND DECISION-MAKING WITH NO REPORTING BACK TO ANYONE ELSE.

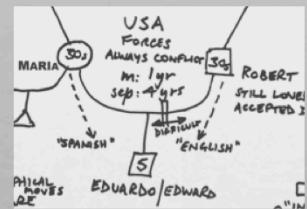
~ TRANSITIONS ARE A SPECIAL STUDY ON THEIR OWN, CHILD'S BIGGEST CHALLENGE – THINK OF EDWARD IN THE AIRPORT – DIFFICULT HANOVERS ARE A REASON TO SORT THINGS OUT, WHICH CAN BE DONE JUST BY CAREFUL PLANNING OF DETAILS OF HOW TRANSITIONS ARE DONE. DIFFICULT TRANSITIONS ARE NOT ON THEIR OWN EVIDENCE OF BAD RELATIONSHIPS WITH A PARENT ON EITHER SIDE. ... THEY ARE DIFFICULT POINTS IN HIGH CONFLICT SEPARATIONS – THEY ARE THE HIGH POINT OF FAILED COLLABORATION AND PLANNING FOR CHILDREN, THEY ARE SEEN BY ALL PARTIES – LOOKING AS THEY ARE FOR REASON TO CUT ALL CONTACT – AND THEY RAISE TENSIONS AND BLAME ACROSS THE NO-MAN'S LAND THE CHILD HAS TO CROSS. IMAGINE WHAT CHILDREN HAVE TO NEGOTIATE – YOU CAN SEE HOW THEY GEAR UP FOR THE CHANGE-OVER, HOW PARENTS AND OTHERS CAN HELP MAKE IT BETTER FOR THEM.

~ BUT IF THE LEGAL SYSTEM STOPS ITS PRESENT BLIND SANCTION AND SUPPORT FOR THE PA PATTERN, NASTY NAMES WON'T BE NEEDED ANYWAY!

~ DURING MONTHS OF DELAYS, THE ALIENATION CAN BE MUCH MORE IRREVERSIBLY ENTRENCHED TIME FOR OUR LITTLE THINKING EXERCISE ...>>

“5 MONTHS NO CONTACT”

- WHO HAD YOUR SYMPATHIES?
- Poor Dad? ~
- Poor Mum? ~ Poor Edward? ~
- Relief for all of them? No stormy transitions? ~
- Edward's with his Mum where a young child should be? ~
- All of the above? ~
- NOW RECALL THE VIDEO CLIPS – WHAT THE ADULT CHILDREN TOLD OF THEIR EXPERIENCE ~



- ~ ROBERT? – MISSING HIS MUCH LOVED SON? FALSELY ACCUSED OF ABUSE? LOST THE BATTLE? MAYBE THIS IS IT FOREVER? (FAIR REASONS TO SYMPATHISE, BUT SELF-CENTRED NOT CHILD-FOCUSED).
- ~ MARIA? – WORRIED? LOSE EDWARD? PLEASED WITH PROGRESS.
- ~ EDWARD/O – MISSING HIS DAD? HE WOULD SAY NOT! HE'S A BAD MAN (BEING INVESTIGATED FOR ABUSING ME), MIA MAMA IS KEEPING ME SAFE.
- ~ LIKE AT THE AIRPORT!
- ~ BETTER BE SCHOoled NEAR HIS MUM SO HE CAN STAY WITH HER
- ~ “ALL POINTS OF VIEW (AND MORE)” IS THE FAMILY THERAPISTS SYSTEMIC APPROACH ... SO YOU’LL HEAR MORE OF THAT TODAY
- ~ HOW THEY WERE CONNED, THE LIFE LONG EMOTIONAL DAMAGE THEY SUFFER

... THE BAD & GOOD OF A LONG-TERM CHILD-FOCUS

- The BAD news: At least sometimes it is this bad. ~
- It's the long-term SOUL-DESTRUCTION of a child
 - who claims to be happy just now as a HOSTAGE
- in a well-meant but exclusive COERCIVE ATTACHMENT aka ALIENATION required by & to support
- the OVERWHELMINGLY STRONG and needy “love” of the one parent who should be THEIR carer~
- The GOOD news: It's not hidden like other abuses. ~

~ FIRST THE BAD NEWS: I WILL UNDERLINE THE WORST PICTURE BECAUSE IT MIGHT BE RIGHT, NOT BECAUSE WE CAN BE SURE IT IS – THE EVIDENCE IS LIMITED BUT SUGGESTS IT IS AS BAD AS THIS.

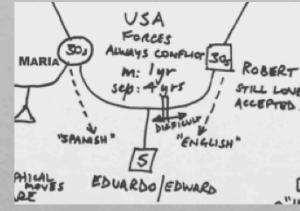
~ NOW NO CHILD CHOOSES THEIR UPBRINGING, AND IN A WAY THEY ARE COERCED INTO WHAT THEIR FAMILY AND CULTURE IMPOSES. BUT – BUT THAT'S OK BECAUSE IT IS DONE IN LOVE AND GOOD FAITH, LOVE FOR INDIVIDUALITY AND EVEN REBELLION. IN CONTRAST ALIENATION IS OF COERCED LOVE AND BAD FAITH. THIS IS EMOTIONAL ABUSE WITH LONGTERM HARM.

~ PUT THIS WAY IT'S NOT JUST A CASE FOR SYSTEMIC REFLECTION BUT FOR SYSTEM INTERVENTION AND CHILD PROTECTION RESPONSES AS WE DO WITH OTHER ABUSE.

~ ONCE HIDDEN ABUSES LIKE BABY BATTERING AND CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE GOT DISBELIEF, “HOW COULD ANY PARENT DO SUCH A THING?!”. SO THE TRUTH HAD TO BE UNDERLINED TO GET IT BELIEVED AND ACTED ON. MAYBE THIS IS THE SAME WITH PA ... THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT HIGH CONFLICT AND ALIENATION IS NOT HIDDEN; IT USUALLY HAPPENS IN FULL PUBLIC IN FAMILY COURTS; AND THE ABUSE GETS PUBLIC LEGAL SANCTION ... SO ALL WE NEED TO DO IS SPOT IT AND STOP SUPPORTING IT AS WE DO JUST NOW. ROY WILL SAY MORE ABOUT THIS – IT WAS HIS IDEA.

... SO EDWARD IS TOP CONCERN HERE BUT ALSO ...

- Alienated Robert: If his concern is for Ed's welfare now and in future
- And if court misses this point and denigrates him, the one who gets it
- Don't pillory A'gP – Maria is troubled and means well too. She can't help it ... But the courts can.
- We note older Edward would say: "I had to say it for Mama and Dad should've known I didn't mean it"
- Harder still for parent of longer disappeared children



~ SO, BACK TO EDWARD'S CASE, TOP CONCERN IS FOR EDWARD OF COURSE. BUT WE MIGHT RATE NEXT MOST SYMPATHY FOR ROBERT, THE REJECTED PARENT (NOT FOR THOSE PREVIOUSLY MENTIONED SELF-CENTRED REASONS BUT) IF HE HAS SOME RESPONSIBLE SENSE OF THIS NOT BEING RIGHT FOR EDWARD'S WELFARE (WITH OR WITHOUT HAVING READ THE LITERATURE), AWARE OF THE DEEPER UNHAPPY TRUTH INSIDE THE HAPPY-LOOKING UNIT OF EDUARDO AND MARIA. ~ ROBERT (AT THIS POINT IN THE STORY) IS WORRYING IF THE FORTHCOMING COURT (LIKE THEY DO SO OFTEN EVERYWHERE) COMPLETELY MISSES THE POINT AT EVERY TURN, DENIGRATING THE ONE PARENT WHO MAY BE ACTUALLY ON THE BALL.

~ (IF THE ANSWER ANYWAY LIES IN THE LEGAL / STATE SYSTEM THAT OPENLY CONDONES ALIENATING PATTERNS) THEN THERE IS NO NEED TO PILLORY THE ALIENATING PARENT WHO IS SURELY PITIABLY TROUBLED AND DESPERATE AND IN NEED OF UNDERSTANDING. THE ALIENATING PARENT TOO WILL INSIST THAT THEY'RE THE CHILD-FOCUSED ONE, LISTENING TO WHAT THE CHILD IS SO LOUDLY SAYING.

~ WE HAVE TO REMEMBER THAT LATER EDWARD MIGHT SAY: "BUT I HAD TO SAY THAT NOT TO LOSE MIA MAMA (OR THE FAVOURED PARENT); AND MY DAD (OR THE REJECTED PARENT) SHOULD HAVE KNOWN I DIDN'T MEAN IT". ...

~ THIS IS EVEN HARDER, AS ROY CAN TELL YOU, FOR CHILD-FOCUSED PARENTS WHOSE CHILDREN HAVE BEEN DISAPPEARED FOR YEARS AND YEARS NOT MONTHS.

... LAST POINTS FOR THE WILDEST WATERS

- Alienation can happen with ANY GENDERS of parent or child – but the experience is different for mums vs dads
- Each PA case is driven by different amounts of unconscious EMOTIONALITY ↔ conscious STRATEGY ~
- Allegations in pure PA will by definition be trite or FALSE~
- BEST to PROMPTLY deal with allegations ... not in the UK
- Present UK laws and courts could work IF they got more PA-AWARE and if the PROCESS improved
 - REVERSING custody seems drastic but it does work

~ ... SO IT'S A REAL BUT KEY PUZZLE TO KNOW HOW TO ENGAGE ALIENATING PARENTS, AND KNOW WHAT TO MAKE OF AND DO WITH THEM. A MAIN THEME IN DISCUSSION (ON THE DAY) FOR SYSTEMIC THERAPISTS – WHO ARE NOT USUALLY INVOLVED IN COURT PROCEEDINGS WHERE HARD ASSESSMENT AND DECISIONS HAVE TO BE MADE – WAS TO FIND MORE SYMPATHETIC TERMS AND UNDERSTANDINGS THAT WOULD HELP ENGAGE AND HELP THEM.

~ BUT THE ALLEGATIONS MAY OFTEN SOUND UTTERLY BELIEVED AND BELIEVABLE. ... OF COURSE ALLEGATIONS HAVE ALWAYS TO BE ASSESSED PROPERLY TO DETERMINE IF THEY ARE TRUE OR FALSE. ... See Steven Miller's Chap 2 in Baker and Sauber's book "Working with ..." for a very high analysis of how to keep your bias and influences under control in legal and therapeutic tasks with child alignment.

~ THERE IS A CASE TO DETER ALLEGATIONS THAT TURN OUT TO BE FALSE WITH MORE SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES (EG STERN TELLING-OFF, CONTEMPT OF COURT, DIVERTING COURSE OF JUSTICE / CHILD WELFARE).



Last rapids ahead ...

NOW THE LAST SECTIONS (IF THERE'S TIME) ...>>

WHY STUDY PARENTAL ALIENATION?

- Pure PA may be rare, but enduringly SERIOUS for a child ~
 - If you're involved with SEPARATED FAMILIES AT ALL you need to learn PA
- And family therapists especially ~
 - Plus it's fascinating!

~ AND HUGELY EXPENSIVE IN COURTS
~ IT'S FAMILIES AND SYSTEMS – THAT'S OUR JOB! AND THESE PATTERNS CAN BE FOUND IN A WIDER RANGE OF FAMILIES

... MORE REASONS TO LEARN ABOUT PA

- Huge relief for CLIENTS to find the PA idea fits
- Learn about rare pure PA to SPOT & STOP it early (before anyone starts talking about PA at all)
- Learn WHEN TO USE “PA” language and when to avoid using it
- Learn PA to learn ABOUT full range of separation
 - Learn collaborative integrative approaches with multi-agencies and multi-factors

“LEARN” DOESN’T MEAN WE’VE FOUND ALL THE ANSWERS YET!

THREE KINDS OF WORK WITH PART FAMILIES

1. Ordinary therapeutic support and validation ~
2. Systemic therapy – Subtler ways to change alienated patterns.
3. Specific PA low profile work – what an alienated parent does while they wait ~
 - NB For all of these, we need to make ourselves and our services more PA aware and welcoming ~

~ BE OPEN TO LEARNING MORE WITH OR FROM YOUR CLIENT. AT LEAST DON'T DISMISS THE REFERRAL THROUGH PREJUDICED THINKING ABOUT PAS AND GENDER LIKE I NEARLY DID WITH ROY

~ TO PROMOTE DISTANT ALIENATED CHILDREN INTO EARLIER THINKING FOR THEMSELVES; TO PREPARE FOR EVENTUAL REUNIFICATION.

~ WELCOMING TO ALL AGES AND STAGES OF ALIENATED CHILDREN, FATHERS AND MOTHERS, AND THEIR OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS

THREE KINDS OF WORK WITH FULLER SYSTEMS

4. More robust and effective re/unification work for families, pre and post court ~
5. Big systems work eg more proactive family courts (> Hamish; > Roy; > Nick's ~)
6. Better work and services for separated families in general ~

~ SSOPA'S CORE AIM IS TO DEVELOP OUR SYSTEMIC FAMILY THERAPY SKILLS HERE. RATHER DOMINATING IN UK IS KAREN WOODALL'S PRINCIPLED AND PERSUASIVE CHARISMATIC INTEGRATIVE WHOLE FAMILY SYSTEM APPROACH TO ENSURE CHILDREN HAVE A RELATIONSHIP WITH BOTH PARENTS. FAMILY THERAPISTS AND KAREN AND OUR VARIOUS APPROACHES HAVE YET TO STRIKE A HARMONIOUS WORKING RELATIONSHIP. PROBABLY EACH HAS OUR STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES. KAREN HAS LONG EXPERIENCE AND CONFIDENCE AND WOULD BE A NATURAL SERVICE TO REFER TO. // WE NEED MORE PA EXPERIENCED EXPERT WITNESS AND COURT-LINKED WORK

~ FAMILY THERAPY HAS GONE RATHER REFLECTIVE AND CONTAINED WITHIN THE THERAPY ROOM, BUT IT USED TO AND COULD NOW SPREAD ITS WINGS INTO "BIG SYSTEMS", NOT JUST CLIENT FAMILIES. SO, WE CAN DO COLLABORATIVE WORK WITH, OR TEACHING – EG WITH MEDIATORS, CAFCASS, LAWYERS, JUDGES, SOCIAL WORKERS etc Hamish (and Nick) have been teaching Scottish Family Court Sherriffs. Hamish has developed a way to get Family Courts to be more directive. ROY WILL SAY MORE ON HIS BIG SYSTEM PROPOSED SOLUTION. For Nick's Big Systems Proposal, see next slide notes.

~ DEVELOP NEW WAYS IN ALL OUR PROFESSIONS, AND IN SHARED LEARNING WTH FAMILIES AND OTHER PROFESSIONS INVOLVED

FURTHER LEARNING ~

- Key Texts
- **www.forallthat.com**
> Children Resisting Contact > links ++
- Join SSoPA Email:
nick.child@virgin.net

~ REMEMBER: LEARN MORE OR DON'T WORK WITH SEPARATED FAMILIES

~ TO JOIN SSOPA, EMAIL: NICK.CHILD@VIRGIN.NET Other developments to support a learning network are being worked out.

PS ~ NICK'S "BIG SYSTEM" PLAN: IF ANY COURT CASE LASTS LONGER THAN SO MANY (SPECIFIED) DAYS IT BE AUTOMATICALLY DECLARED A CASE OF LIKELY EMOTIONAL ABUSE. SO A REFERRAL IS MADE TO CHILD PROTECTION SERVICES TO ASSESS – THEY WILL OF COURSE NEED TO BE MORE TRAINED AND RESOURCED FOR THIS WORK. NICK PREDICTS THAT FAMILIES WHO ARE QUITE HAPPY TO SPEND LOTS OF TIME AND MONEY IN COURTS (FIGHTING EACH OTHER, NOT FOR THE CHILDREN) WILL BE CONSTRUCTIVELY PUT OFF BEING CATEGORISED AS "EMOTIONALLY ABUSIVE" AND "SOCIAL WORK CASES". OR THEY WILL BE HELPED! THIS WOULD HELP INTEGRATE APPROACHES TO PRIVATE AND PUBLIC CASES, SO DIVIDED IN HOW THEY GET TREATED JUST NOW.



THESE SLIDES WERE NOT SHOWN AT THE MEETING. THEY SIMPLY DEMONSTRATE HOW TO GET TO NICK'S WEBPAGE, AND GIVE A SNIPPET OF WHAT'S THERE.

- [Home \(/\)](#)
- [Demystification \(/demystification.html\)](#)
- [Psychiatry \(/psychiatry.html\)](#)
- [Psychotherapy \(/psychotherapy.html\)](#)
- [Systemic Practice \(/systemic-practices.html\)](#)
- [Family Therapy \(/family-therapy.html\)](#)
- [Philosophy \(/philosophy.html\)](#)
- [CAMHS \(/camhs.html\)](#)
- [America Again \(/america-again.html\)](#)
- [Children Resisting Contact \(/children-resisting-contact.html\)](#)
- [Scotland's Couple Therapy \(/scotlands-couple-therapy.html\)](#)
- [Poems \(/poems.html\)](#)
- [Extras \(/extras.html\)](#)



Children Resisting Post-Separation Contact



(http://www.bergerandwyse.com/blog/2012/10/11/messy-divorce.html)
With permission. © Berger and Wyse. Click on the cartoon to visit their blog. Sadly this is too serious for humour.

*To help families, legal and professional systems to do better for the children in the middle of difficult separations.
For much more go to the full version (/scotlands-children-resisting-contact.html).*

Please note that Nick Child is a keen learner not an expert. All help to improve this page is appreciated.

WHEN LAYERS OF ADULT CONFLICT CRUSH THE CHILD

The humor of Berger and Wyse's "custody" cartoon is to highlight that high conflict family separations are never a laughing matter. Even when families face bereavement, there is usually room for warmth and humour alongside the grief. The lack of a place for humour shows that we are dealing here with some of the hardest "tribal" human predicaments outside of actual war-zones.

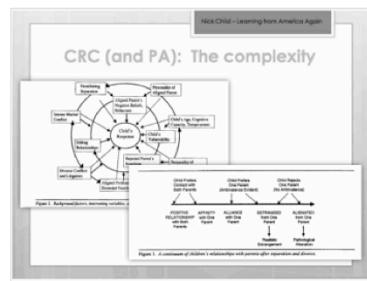
This page is an easier general summary of the very full thinking through and resources - written for a Scottish context but still covering the international field - on Scotland's Children Resisting Contact or SCRC. (/scotlands-children-resisting-contact.html) Please read that if you want more than this summary page has in it.

PUTTING CHILDREN'S NEEDS FIRST
Most separating parents manage to set aside their own conflicts and put their children first in supporting the

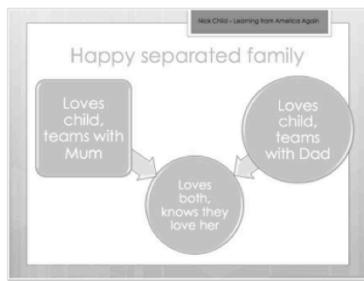
PA Diagrams 1.

14. One way for Scotland to be ahead of the game is for those who emphasise any particular position here to always **acknowledge the complexity**, that many patterns happen, that each troubled family must be carefully assessed rather than presumptions made.
15. We in Scotland could aim to neither make nor accept any mythical statements. **We should keep thinking**. Mythical statements are recognisable because in one powerful assertion they tend to induce an emotional paralysis of our proper thinking and talking about a complex range of difficult things.

So saying, Nick has over-simplified this complex subject of CRC/PA into four slides showing: 1. CRC as a complex field, 2. Happily separated families, 3. Unhappily separated families, and 4. Parental alienation. So the visuals may help as a framework before reading on.

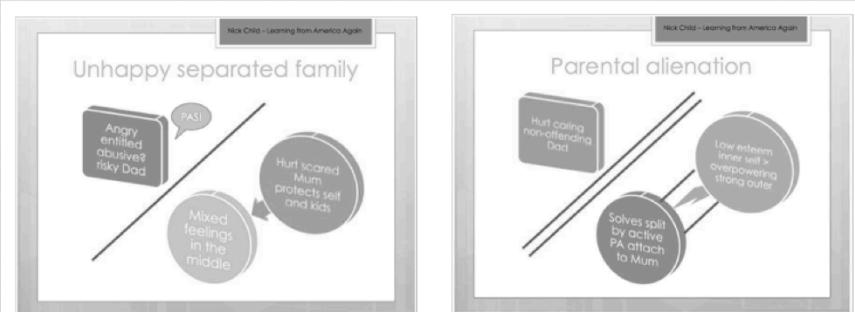


1. A quick glimpse of the complexity (diagrams from Child Alienation paper, click here). Multiple systemic factors. A continuum of children's relationships with separated parents with PA at one end.



2. Parents both love their child and each collaborates with the other for her sake. Their child has a relationship with both and knows they love her. Contact works fine. See Relationships Scotland's leaflet

PA Diagrams 2.



3. Genders may be reversed or different (eg LGBT couples). Relationships are fraught. Hurt upset or scared Mum wants to distance and protect herself and the kids from contact with an angry upset maybe abusive or risky Dad while the child has mixed feelings in the middle, resists contact maybe, and often just wants her parents to stop arguing. Although the Dad may throw in "PAS" this is not PA. It gives PA its bad name. PA is typically more like this >>

4. Again genders may be reversed or different. Relationships are polarised into aligned and rejected. Mum is a woman with a very negative inner self esteem hidden inside an overpoweringly controlling strong outer difficult personality. This may be the only solution she knows to hold onto attachments. In the literature, she gets called Narcissistic or worse. Actively or intentionally she programmes her child to side with her to resist contact with a caring safe and previously loved Dad. The child can only resolve the split by devoting herself to her Mum's needs and develop the denigration of her Dad. The child's voice gets amplified by the unintended help of the family court process into a powerful choice.