

## 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 CONFLICT 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.

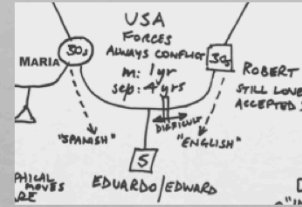
~ TRANSITIONS ARE A SPECIAL STUDY ON THEIR OWN, CHILD'S BIGGEST CHALLENGE – THINK OF EDWARD IN THE AIRPORT – DIFFICULT HANDOVERS ARE A REASON TO SORT THINGS OUT, WHICH CAN BE DONE JUST BY CAREFUL PLANNING OF DETAILS OF HOW TRANSITIONS ARE DONE. DIFFICULT TRANSITIONS ARE NOT ON THEIR OWN EVIDENCE OF BAD 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).