

JUSTICE COMMITTEE

CHILDREN (SCOTLAND) BILL

SUBMISSION FROM KATY LONSDALE

The following content has emphasis on parental alienation. Evidence has proven, that when PA is present, the child's perception of the alienated parent has been manipulated and distorted to such a degree, that their views when presented to an untrained welfare reporter or psychologist, are actually a projection of a distorted reality, engineered by the alienator, rather than the child's own true wishes and values.

This is an extremely sensitive issue which has been substantially overlooked by the family courts in Scotland. Everyone I have spoken to relating to this issue, knows of an individual whom is suffering in silence because the repercussions of parental alienation continue to go unnoticed and families are walking away from court cases with their relationships in tatters and astronomical lawyers fees to clamber back from.

After attending a fantastic talk delivered by Jan James of the Good Egg Safety CIC, at the recent Shared Parenting AGM, it is without question that parental alienation is a child welfare issue and with the relevant training it is easy to detect and should be made illegal in the UK.

1. **Voice of the child:** I do agree with the approach taken in the Bill to remove the presumption that a child aged 12 or over is of sufficient age and maturity to form a view. The prefrontal cortex is not fully developed until the age of 25, this means individuals below this age may struggle with the following skills: Attention, complex planning, decision making, impulse control, logical thinking, organised thinking, personality development, risk management, short term memory. This not only leaves them vulnerable to manipulative behaviour but also not in a secure state to make healthy decisions for themselves. Only an individual whom has been trained in this area, should be in the position to decide what is best for the child.

Seeking the views of a child, whom is a victim of PA would put undue pressure on that child. As soon as the child refuses contact with a parent, this is a red flag that alienation in some form is present and should be addressed immediately. It isn't normal behaviour for any child to discard a parent.

2. **Child's best interests:** A child's best interests is to ensure that enough time is spent with the non-resident parent in order to continue the attachment bond to flourish in a natural and timely manner, free of time restricted contact and micro management from the resident parent, on what activities are suitable. "At the top of our agenda we must place the task of collecting our children - of drawing them under our wing, making them want to belong to us and with us". Even in families which have not divided, have tough competition to compensate for the cultural chaos of today's environment. Only once a child is collected in this nature, can a parent carry out their task of parenting in a healthy way and as stress free as possible. It is categorically not in the child's best interests to subject them to a relentless schedule of entertaining activities, in order to compete for their loyalty and favouritism in a bid to win them over. This sabotages

time for self reflection, creativity, nurturing a child's fundamental needs of feeling connected, understood and loved.

3. Child welfare reporters and curators ad litem:

Any child welfare reporter or curator dealing with cases where the future of a child's welfare is at stake, should absolutely be fully trained and regulated. An untrained welfare reporter could potentially sever what fragile relationship remains between the alienated parent and their child. This form of psychological abuse can have a lasting and detrimental impact on the child, well into adulthood, 78% have health concerns due to PA, mainly mental health and suicide. The Scottish courts should always use a psychologist, welfare reporter or curator that have had the relevant training on PA and have the skills required to identify any abusive, coercive, manipulative signs and raise the issue with the courts, as child abuse, this could save lives and many estranged relationships .

4. Factors to be considered by the court when making contact and residence orders:

The involvement of both parents, as regularly and routinely as possible, is essential in developing the bond between both parents and to create a secure environment in which a child can nurture their own sense of self to fully develop, free of fear and insecurities. Regularity is pivotal in this development, so the child has no underlying fears of abandonment. If a regular arrangement is broken, for whatever reason, a child will internalise the absence as rejection and unreliability, sabotaging not only the developing bond between the absent parent and the child but also the child's own relationship with the world around them.

Additional to regular contact with both parents, there should also be an emphasis on developing relationships with a wider community of protective adults, re-creating what is known as the attachment village. Grandparents, Aunts, Uncles, teachers, group leaders, family friends and neighbours, weaving the fabric of human existence that nourishes a sense of rootedness, belonging and connection that serves as the invisible matrix in which children mature and gain their sense of the world.

Other requirements on the court:

Children need to be included in all decisions made throughout the court case. This ideally needs to be carried out by an impartial, caring individual such as a trained psychologist or family mediator, especially if the communicative void between both parents has become irreversible, so that information is delivered in such a way that the child feels that their safety and wellbeing is paramount to all decisions, that they are not required to make any decisions themselves and that the love from both parents will not be sacrificed when contact is divided fairly between the parents. Keeping children in the dark about decisions made in court alienates them from reality, disempowering their values and opportunity to ask questions. Children sworn to secrecy from pathogenic parenting will internalise the distorted information, manifesting anxiety behavioural issues and silence any questions they may have about the situation.

Contact centres:

Contact centres would be very beneficial for situations where the non-resident parent is struggling to arrange access with the child, due to the resident parent attempting to

withhold access. Having an impartial mediator present, could witness contact during these times and highlight any concerns.

Katy Lonsdale
17 November 2019