

Behind the behaviours of an alienating parent are often unresolved psychological issues, trauma or abuse. They have a fear of, and are triggered by, abandonment and rejection. Children are usually unable to act against a parent who is so troubled. They are usually acutely attuned to that parent's emotional expression and needs. They feel responsible for their mother or father's emotional state. They fear their parent's sadness, distress, displeasure or anger, and behave in a way that minimises this. Ultimately, they fear the withdrawal of love from this parent.

Early intervention is essential. The focus of any intervention is to quickly reunite the child with their rejected parent and to help the alienating parent resolve their underlying psychological distress. However, this is rarely addressed within the current system in the UK.

The length of time since the child has last seen their 'rejected' parent is critical. Separation of parent and child is fostered by repeated frustration of child arrangements, including serial breaches of court orders.

False allegations of domestic abuse and child abuse also feature, disrupting parent-child time while safeguarding investigations are undertaken.

Many parents in the UK have lost faith in the socio-legal mechanisms intended to support them. The systems in place do not adequately reflect the complexities and dynamics that exist in PA. In England and Wales, there is a requirement to explore mediation prior to applying to the court. However, mediation is usually ineffective when there are unresolved psychological issues for one parent.

These tragic cases demand robust and timely judicial management.

Many parents invest tens or even hundreds of thousands of pounds in trying to exercise their parental responsibilities and protect their children.

Current processes, costs and timescales of the family court do not meet the needs of alienated children. Enforcement for non-compliance is virtually non-existent and breeds complacency on the part of those supposed to comply with court orders.

The risk of serious psychological harm to children does not appear to be well considered in decisions around order compliance and enforcement.

Parental alienation cannot be allowed to continue, not least because our courts are currently seriously failing in their statutory duty. To address the issue effectively we urgently need:

(i) Inclusion of Parental Alienation in the new Domestic Abuse Bill

(ii) Early diagnosis of alienation when referenced in a private law court application

(iii) Qualified and experienced sub-specialists in the field of parental alienation and other forms of abuse who can identify the difference between alienation (unjustified rejection) and estrangement (justified rejection)

(iv) Court orders enforced first time.

(v) Those who bring false allegations of any kind of abuse, held accountable.

We need to see a willingness by the courts to act upon alienation with the same resolve to protect the child as with any other form of child abuse.