

How to Make Recommendations for the Child's Relationship with the Non-residential Parent---Even When the Alienator Denies the Expert/Evaluator Access to the Child

I am sometimes asked how I am able to make recommendations regarding visitation arrangements or parenting time (a description which is so much more appropriate) having interviewed only the noncustodial parent. This situation is frequently the case as the alienating residential parent very often refuses to cooperate with an evaluation by not making the child available to the evaluator---even to the point of defying a court order to cooperate. So I commonly have access only to the targeted/alienated parent. My response to the question is quite simple: you don't need to reinvent the wheel every time you want to travel from point A to point B. And specifically related to the question at hand, that of visitation/parenting between a child and the nonresidential parent, my response is that we as a culture have reached a consensus that the cognitive and emotional state of a minor child are too undeveloped to make momentous decisions. Is not this the rationale for not permitting anyone under the age of 18 to sit on a jury? To vote? To serve in the military? To buy a pack of cigarettes? Do we ask a child how often they plan to attend school? Or obtain medical care? Would we allow children to determine their dietary habits? How is it, then, that we freely abrogate our professional and parental responsibility when we empower a child to decide such critical matters as family relationships, specifically the relationship with the non-residential parent? I do not understand any rationale for permitting a minor to have a controlling say-so or the authority to over-rule the adults in this area.

The reason children should not be empowered to make a decision about the relationship with a parent is as obvious as why no one would feel comfortable having only 18 year olds sitting in judgment of us. A child's judgment, insight, perception, reality testing, and emotions only barely reach maturity by the END of adolescence. One only has to read the epistemological research and studies undertaken by Jean Piaget, philosopher and developmental psychologist, who wrote the "Bible" upon which educators rely to understand the cognitive development of children. Children do not have the emotional and mental maturity to evaluate for themselves what is in their best interests; to theorize what it would be like to have a parent eradicated from their lives; to be able to discriminate what is rational, truthful, and moral amidst all the information their parents and other adults impart to them---especially about the malicious, fabricated, and fanciful data from the alienating parent. Children, for example, think very concretely until the age of 8; that is why they actually do believe, "Step on a crack, break my mother's back." Not until much older, can they discriminate reality from fantasy, which is why they should not see horror shows until much older. The ability to think abstractly commences at the beginning of adolescence and is still insufficiently mature by 18. Children lack wisdom! And children further do not have the emotional wherewithal to contradict the alienating parent---if that parent is the residential parent---as they are so dependent upon that parent.

The PAS-aware professional must educate the judicial system that PAS children's expressed hatred for and refusal to have a relationship with the targeted/alienated parent are not their true feelings---no more than these were the feelings of the thousands of

foster children with whom I had worked with during a period of 24 years: not a single foster child ever expressed a hatred for her/his parents or a refusal to visit. Indeed, the two most frequently asked questions were, "When can I go home?" and "When is my next visit with my mommy and daddy?" You have to be carefully taught to hate and fear---especially a parent.

PAS children are caught and trapped by their feelings and position: on the one hand, these children love and crave their relationship with their targeted/alienated parent; on the other hand, they are terrified of betraying their alienating parent by expressing their true feelings. The professionals who impact child custody----especially the judge----must release these children from their trap by relieving them of the decision about whether to have a relationship with their non-residential parent. The professionals who impact child custody and visitation must assume the responsibilities for which we were charged when we were licensed by our respective professions; that is, we must assume our responsibility of guaranteeing the PAS child's right to a meaningful relationship with both parents----that starts with the enforcement of the visitation rights of the non-residential parent.

And if the residential parent refuses to cooperate, what does this say about her/him? Their sabotage reveals all that is necessary for the judicial system to assess who is the better parent.

The determination about the quality and quantity of the relationship between a child and a parent is too critical to be cavalierly and thoughtlessly adjudicated----as when input from the child is determinative. The determination, to the contrary should be based exclusively upon the competency, commitment, availability, intentions, and desires of the nonresidential parent. Such an assessment requires emotional and cognitive maturity. It can therefore not be delegated to the child, who lacks the competency to make a decision in her/his best interests.