
Parental Alienation Europe

Newsletter of the European Association of Parental Alienation Practitioners

Issue 1 - Winter 2018

Second European conference held in London

The second EAPAP conference, co-hosted with the Family Separation Clinic, was held in London on 30 and 31 August 2018. The landmark conference brought together world leading experts in the field of parental alienation to consider the legal and mental health interlock necessary to promote successful resolution in these complex cases.

Described by Sir Paul Coleridge, former High Court Judge in the UK and Chair of Marriage Foundation, as a conference with gold standard presentations, the two-day event featured many of the world leading authorities on parental alienation. The event was attended by more than 200 delegates over the two days and, whilst the conference was focussed on the situation in Europe, delegates also travelled from as far afield as Hong Kong, New Zealand and the USA to attend. Attendees included magistrates, judges, lawyers, psychotherapists, psychologists, mediators and family support workers. The conference was also attended by a group of parent representatives who formed a parent panel to give their views throughout the interactive event.

The purpose of the conference was to draw together the practitioners who work in the internationally recognised models which are shown to be successful in treatment of parental alienation. The Conference heard from eighteen experts in the field with the first day focussing on the legal and the second day focussing on the mental health aspects of the issue. Karen Woodall from the Family Separation

Clinic in London introduced the standards of practice which will govern the work of the new European Association of Parental Alienation Practitioners. These were endorsed by the Conference and by Sir Paul Coleridge in his closing speech.

These included a commitment to families to provide services that are clear and explicit in how the needs of children and rejected parents are recognised and met, that are demonstrated to deliver the key standards of the organisation, that deliver specialised treatment routes that are provided as a plan of work prior to intervention, that implement an intervention to prevent child abuse where necessary, and that prioritise of the restoration of the relationship between child and parent. One key theme that emerged from the conference was that standard therapeutic approaches to cases of parental alienation are not only ineffective but are known to be contraindicated. As Dr. Steven Miller, a expert in clinical reasoning pointed out, 'techniques that might be effective in other settings are not effective for PA, and often make things worse,' adding that, the word contraindicated does not mean "not indicated," it means forbidden.'

Speaking about the launch of internationally recognised standards of practice, Karen Woodall acknowledged the work of Wilfred von Boch-Galhau, Ursula Kodjoe, Walter Andritzky & Peter Koeppel, pioneers in parental alienation awareness raising who organised the first international conference on PA in Germany in 2002.

Recognising that the standards of practice advocated by EAPAP have been in existence for almost two decades, Karen spoke of the need to build upon



the work which has already been done to establish the reality of parental alienation as child abuse.

In addition to key European practitioners such as Gordana Buljan Flander, Judge Lana Peto Kujundžić and Vlatka Boričević Maršanić, from Croatia, Simona Maria Vlădică from Romania, Sietske Dijkstra from the Netherlands, and Francesca Wiley, Andrea Watts, Victoria Green, Hamish Cameron and Nick Woodall from the United Kingdom, the conference heard from North American speakers including Amy J. L. Baker, Brian Ludmer, Bill Bernet, Steven G Miller, Jennifer Jill Harman, Eric J. Green, Linda Gottlieb and Leilani Sinclair.

European Association of
**Parental
Alienation
Practitioners**

Practitioners receive training in Bosnia and Herzegovina

In November 2017, the Director of the Child and Youth Protection Centre of Zagreb, prof. dr. sc. Gordana Buljan Flander, delivered a lecture as part of the module on “High-conflict divorces, manipulation and child alienation” for students from the child and adolescent integrative psychotherapy and counselling programme in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

This programme is Europe's first licensed educational program of child and adolescent integrative psychotherapy and counselling which has been implemented by the Bosnian-Herzegovinian Association for Integrative Child and Adolescent Psychotherapy (BHIDAPA), an association that advocates for the preservation and promotion of mental health and quality of daily life of children, adolescents and adults respecting European standards in accordance with the goals of the World Health Organization. BHIDAPA qualifies candidates to acquire professional and academic knowledge and experience in the field of child and adolescent psychotherapy, with special emphasis on clinical skills, professional competence and personal development.

As well as exploring the effects of parental conflict on children, Prof Flander's lecture offered students insights into the research around transgenerational transmission of the conflict and the psychological underpinnings of harmful parental conflict for children, based on empirical data. Prof Flander also explored issues around Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and, specifically, a recognition that the child's stated wishes and feelings are not always in accordance with his or her best interests. The lecture looked at the manipulation of children by a parent and the issue of parental alienation, including how to examine and argue opinions, the distinction between the forms and the reasons for the child's refusal of parents, observation and interpretation of manipulative behaviours in accordance with contemporary literature and a demystification of manipulation as a rare behaviour.

Students were provided with information to help them recognise alienating behaviours in parents and how to begin to understand cases using an analysis of power dynamics, the toxic triangle of alienation in connection with the theory of attachment and the recognition of manipulation as an emotional abuse according to contemporary scientific knowledge. The lecture also looked at legal responses in cases of child manipulation and an analysis of relevant factors in assessing charges for child abuse during and after the parents' divorce.

Through a comprehensive theoretical lecture, and experiential examples and practical exercises, those attending the lecture will have improved knowledge and skills in their future daily work and practice.

The legal situation in Romania regarding custody measures when parents split up - civil cases

The rule imposed by the current Romanian Civil Code is to rely on the assumption of joint parental authority. Only if the child's best interests claim it, the judge can choose parental authority exercised by one of the parents (meaning sole custody) – art. 397 C. Civ. 1, *‘after divorce, the parental authority is shared by both parents, unless the court decides otherwise.’*

Thus, the new legislation enshrines the principle of coparenting supporting the harmonious development of the child, which in this way can benefit from the education and guidance of both parents.

The Law no. 272 on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of the Child, Art. 30 lined up 1, referred to 33 article from the same law guarantees the right of the child to the family life, having the right to grow up with his parents as well as the fact that he can not be separated from his parents or one of them, against their will, except the cases provided by the law, subject to judicial review and only if this is required by the best interests of the child.

According to the art. 14 of Law no. 272/2004, *‘the child has the right to maintain personal relationships and*

direct contacts with parents, relatives, and other people to whom the child has developed attachment ties. The child has the right to know his relatives and to have personal relations with them, as well as other persons with whom the child enjoyed family life, as far as this does not conflict with his / her best interest.’

In addition, according to art. 16 of the same normative act *‘a child who has been separated from both parents or one of them by a measure ordered under the law has the right to maintain personal relationships and direct contacts with both parents, except the situation where this is contrary to the best interests of the child.’*

Similar provisions are founded in art. 262, paragraph 2 of the Civil Code, according to which *‘a child who does not live with his parents or, as the case may be, to one of them, has the right to have personal ties with them. The exercise of this right can not be limited except under the conditions provided by law, for sound reasons, taking into account the best interests of the child.’*

Therefore, in Romania, the courts state that any measure concerning the child must be taken in the best interests of the child. The expression *‘superior interest of the child’* refers to the well-being of a child.

The Romanian courts also have begun to invoke the Agreement No. 2/2016 published in the Official Gazette of 25.02.2016, according to which the Romanian Psychologists' College recognised the phenomenon of parental alienation as a form of severe psychological abuse on the child. The severe psychological abuse of the child by one of the parents falls within the cases provided for by Law 272/2004.

Article 94 of Law 272/2004 refers to the emotional abuse of the minor and recognise it as a form of abuse: Child abuse means any voluntary action by a person who is in a relationship of responsibility, trust, or authority towards him, by which they are endangered life, physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development, physical integrity, physical or mental health of the child, and is classified as physical, emotional, psychological, social and economic abuse.

Child neglect means *‘the omission, whether voluntary or involuntary, of a person who has the responsibility of raising, caring for or educating the child to take any measure required to do so, life-threatening, physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development, physical integrity, physical or mental health of the child, and which can take*

several forms: food, clothing, neglect of hygiene, medical neglect, educational neglect, emotional neglect or child abandonment / family abandonment, which is the worst form of neglect.'

What does the child's best interest in the Romanian legislation mean: Article 21 of Law no. 272/2004 order this as follows:

'If the parents do not have the same opinion regarding to the child's home, the guardianship court will settle his or her home to one of them, according to the art. 496 alin. (3) of the Civil Code. When the child's interest is established, the court may consider, in addition to the elements provided in art. 2 alin. (6), some other issues such as:

the availability of each parent to involve the other parent in child-related decisions and to respect the latter's parental rights;

the availability of each of the parents to allow the other to maintain their personal relationships;

the home situation of each parent in the last 3 years;

the history of parental violence against the child or other people;

the distance between each parent's home and the institution providing education to the child.'

Negative aspects of Romanian legislation:

Article 912 of the Code of Civil Procedure- Minor's refusal
If the bailiff finds that the minor himself refuses to leave the debtor or manifests aversion to the creditor, will draw up a record of its findings and will communicate it to the parties and to the representative of the General Directorate for Social Assistance and Child Protection.

The representative of the General Directorate for Social Assistance and Child Protection will notify and ask the competent court at the place where the child is living, to dispose a psychological counselling program, for a period not exceeding 3 months.

The request is urgently solved in the council chamber, by the end of an appeal, pronounced by quoting the parents and, as the case may be, the person with the child. Legal provisions on hearing the child remain applicable.

At the end of the counselling program, the psychologist appointed by the court will draw up a report that will be communicated to the court, to the bailiff, and to the General Directorate for Social Assistance and Child Protection. In fact, the report could not

be used by the same court to do something for the child, just noticed that it was done.

After receiving the report from psychologist, the bailiff will resume the forced execution procedure, according to art. 910 (Code of Civil Procedure), the creditor may refer the case to the competent court of the place where the juvenile is located for the purpose of applying a penalty, the provisions of art. 905 alin. (2) and (4) to (6) are applicable accordingly.

Simona Maria Vlădica, PhD

International conference on parental alienation held in Sweden

Stockholm recently hosted the second Parental Alienation Studies Group conference in Stockholm. The conference, titled 'Parental Alienation – What Is it? What To Do About It?' was held on the island of Skeppsholmen on 24-25 August 2018.

Lena Hellblom Sjögren, Ph.D., who is the Chair and Secretary of PASG Nordic, the organisation hosting the conference, said, 'the number of long custody cases has risen and means heavy burdens for the courts. The number of children that without justification lose a loved mum or dad is going higher and higher. More and more children, and also adults, suffer.' Nevertheless, the issue of parental alienation isn't widely recognised in Sweden and the other Nordic countries.

The Stockholm conference on parental alienation addressed professionals and researchers within the health and law sector, the school system, the police, media, and all who are interested in learning about the growing psychological domestic violence of our time from the knowledgeable lecturers who are invited.

The conference was arranged by the not-for-profit organisation PASG Nordic and, in particular, Lena Hellblom Sjögren, who is a member of the EAPAP Board, in cooperation with the Parental Alienation Study Group, an international not-for-profit organisation registered in the US with 450 members from 46 countries from all continents.

Members are researchers and practitioners from different disciplines, law, psychology, sociology, medicine, psychiatry, criminology, and some family members who have experienced parental alienation. PASG members are also interested in developing and promoting research on the causes, evaluation, prevention, and treatment of parental alienation.

Homecoming: The paths and pitfalls of reunification with lost loved ones

A wave of reunifications between now adult children and their lost loved ones has been happening recently in the UK and in the midst of this I have been helping families to understand the paths and pitfalls which occur in this momentous occasion in their lives.

Whilst so many long to be reunited with the children they have lost through parental alienation and the failure of the family courts to resolve the difficulties the family has in making the transition from together to apart, the reality of that process is often shocking as well as or instead of it being wonderful. For when the longing of the years gives way to the encounter with reality, the buried feelings of the past, which have often been held in emotional aspic, come rushing up like ghosts demanding to be attended to. Again and again I am asked by parents and children and wider family members '*why, when I have reconnected to the person that I love, do I feel so bad?*'

The answer of course lies in the way in which estrangement or alienation from loved ones causes the stultification of normal feelings of attachment and the way in which loss of a loved one who is still alive cannot be mourned fully. This causes a traumatic wounding pattern in which feelings of anger, fear, dread and terror plus sadness, grief and despair become fused into one overwhelming feeling of helplessness. Reunited children experience different feelings which are very much based upon their need for the neglected parts of themselves to be attended to. Of course as those parts which are unattended to are now demanding attention right at the time when the newly reunited adults are coping with emerging unprocessed

feelings, there is the very real possibility of a perfect storm of misunderstandings to arise. For onlookers, the confusion about why the reunification which was so longed for is less a happy ending and more an emotional and psychological jumble sale, can become both frustrating and bewildering. Understanding what is going on under the surface helps to steer a steady course through the ruins of the past and into the building of a new future.

The point of reunification is both the ending and beginning and within that moment is contained all of the hopes, fears, dreams and determinations of everyone involved. This is a rebirth of a child/adult relationship and unless it is recognised as being both a point of possibility and of despair, disappointment will surely follow. For the parent the end of a long wait is here, for the child a point at which a new start is signified, two paths which diverged have now come together again and falling into step requires time, patience and a willingness to understand and hear the voice of each other. Those who achieve this are those who will walk on together in life and who will be seen in years to come to be in healthy relationship with each other. Those who do not achieve it will find the estrangement more comfortable than the reunited relationship. And there are many more of these relationships which foundered on the rocks of reunification, than you would ordinarily imagine.

European Association of
**Parental
Alienation
Practitioners**

**Establishing best
practice across
Europe**

www.eapap.eu

The work of receiving a lost child into your emotional and psychological life is incredibly difficult and for some the fear of failing leads to a preference for the status quo than for change. When someone has not been in your life for many years, welcoming them back takes courage and sometimes the willingness to allow them to bring a little bit of chaos with them. I often liken reunifications to aircraft landings, some are smooth and we barely know that the wheels have touched the ground, others are turbulent, bumping their way onto the ground in fits and starts before coming to a screeching halt or careering to a halt in the long grass. Being able to remain open to that process requires psychological strength and the capacity to be able to maintain perspective. In each reunification process we counsel people to recognise that this is a process not an event, it will bring tears as well as laughter and being open to letting our world be enriched by the people who live within our relational systems is what life is all about.

Sometimes reunifications do not go well. These are the those in which the rigidity of mind in one or both people concerned prevents the resurrection of the warm attachment bonds. For children who encounter this in a parent they have sought out, this is tragedy in their lives twice over. Because not only do they have to deal with the split off and denied feelings of guilt and shame for having pushed a parent away in the first place, they now have to deal with a block to their seeking of health through the restoration of that relationship. It is cruel blow to children and one which in my experience is amongst the most damaging things that can happen in reunification. Why it happens is not difficult to understand. Parents become bitter, enraged by having been denied for so long and fixed in their belief that their views must now hold sway.

Fear populates this relational system too, the fear of the parent that they can no longer bring influence in their adult child's life and fear that there is no other role for them if that influence is no longer theirs to exercise. What these parents fail to realise is that their own fear is what maintains the barrier to their child's longer term health. Those who cannot shift beyond fear based reality will cast their children back out into the wilderness and whilst that may be difficult for many who are alienated from their children now to believe, trust me, it is a far more common outcome for families who

attempt to reunite, than the popular narrative would have us believe.

Because at the end of the time apart the beginning of the time apart is also present. The end is in the beginning and the beginning is always in the end. This is because ultimately, alienation, like estrangement, like all of the reasons why people disappear out of each other's lives, is a human relational issue. And in all that we do we are all, always still human. What we find in reunification work is that which caused the splitting in the first place and being able to hold that with the families we work with is our greatest responsibility of all. Bringing families to the place of dynamic change is what reunification is about, entering into that liminal space on the threshold of the past, present and future, is to be human in relationship to families.

It is both an art, a privilege and a time of great fear as well as rejoicing. Nothing can be predicted in a reunification, which is not based upon how life was to the point where the two paths diverged. And that is the simple truth of the matter. Don't let anyone else tell you otherwise. Reunification depends upon the openness of heart and spirit and the capacity to take risks. If it was not there in the beginning, it won't be there in the end which is also a new beginning. Drawing upon those strengths and helping families not to be tripped up by the inherent weaknesses is what reunification work is all about.

See this in perspective, it is not a fairy story and this is not a happy ending, reunification is a process not a one off event and you have to work at it.

Recognise that the dynamics which were present at the point where the paths diverged are going to come howling into the present at the point at which the paths converge again. If you are a parent get help to deal with the reactive shock that encountering long buried feelings brings. If you are an adult child recognise that your parent/ other adult relations need time to adjust. For wider family members, keep boundaries and know your limitations in terms of being able to make things different. Above all be patient, let time and proximity do the work of reigniting buried feelings of family, warmth and attachment. Do not expect too much too soon and always always keep in touch, however hard it is, this is what will ultimately oil the wheels and make the vehicle of your relational system work again.

Karen Woodall