

Sutherland Trust Lecture, Monday 14<sup>th</sup> May 2018

## Alienation in families: On reflection and action

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Hello everyone. Are you ready for this grim topic at the end of such a beautiful day?! Most people don't want to know about it. I would prefer not to be doing this either! Like cancer surgery or sewage work, it's normal to just hope that 'someone else' knows how to do the job. If I say: "Have you had your tea?" it's because I think you need fortitude for this topic. On the other hand, I am honoured to be invited to do a Sutherland Lecture. The rare discipline of preparing a full lecture means that I have dug out my clearest thinking, some tools to enlighten this dark unknown corner of life, so that maybe the 'someone else' can be us.

As Graham said, these lectures keep a link going with Jock and the human-relations approach that he stood for. My own connection goes back to the early 1970s, training as a psychiatrist, taught by Jock as he arrived in Edinburgh, inspiring an interest in psychotherapy, but finally not finishing my analytical training. Instead that was a therapeutic liberation as I set off to work in child and family mental health services in Lanarkshire – the peripheries of excellence, as we called it. My activism turned to family systems approaches and to Family Therapy. I retired in 2003 to a small, now flourishing, team here in Edinburgh at Bright Light.

You'll see I'm loyal to things for years and then I move on. Now I've moved on again. One of Jock's mavericks, I suppose! This topic has become my main thing since I fell into it eight years ago: Alienation in families. Yes, like a pothole people don't know it's there until they fall into it. This evening, I will put the pothole on a wider map, a map which doesn't yet show the potholes. At the end, I'll go into one or two things in more detail.

The wider map helps us know where potholes appear. When they appear, you take action. With the wider map we can reflect better on the wheres and why-fores. Reflection and action. Writing this lecture I've slow-cooked some tough food. I've got some melting short cuts. But it may be hard to digest it all in one go. Anyway, bon appetit!

So I've been a constructive maverick. I've always wanted to get out of the box, to be active in wider thinking and systems. That kind of drive is useful; it can be creative and helpful to others. But if you're not careful an over-helpful personality can become unhelpful. I'm the sort of person who will help old ladies across the road even if they don't want to go!

Do you know the Karpman Drama Triangle? Basically, don't get trapped in any of the corners – Rescuer, Victim, Perpetrator – if you want to function in healthy adult ways. Rescuing is much harder now that everyone wants to be a victim. A determined victim frames everyone else as either a perpetrator to blame, or as a rescuer forever responsible for doing what they demand. Or both! But mostly it's not so simple: The helper, the old lady, and the dangerous road fit the Drama Triangle: The helper is the Rescuer; the old lady is the Victim; and the dangerous road, the Perpetrator or Persecutor. But if the road isn't dangerous and the lady doesn't want to cross it, then the help becomes coercion.

So there are rewards and stresses for helpers, not just their clients. Joining a helping profession can be part of our own attachment solution – we displace our hurt onto others to avoid our own upset. We take responsibility for helping others as we were not helped when we needed it. Sometimes it's not clear who is helping whom. The complications grow as we see that coercion can be done deliberately or unwittingly, with good or bad intentions, and have constructive or destructive outcomes.

We're about to look at some relentlessly "helpful" and "caring" people, parents who are so full of their need to be the carer that they exclude rivals. It ends up being their needs that are looked after by their children. It's not healthy, but it's how the parent secures an attachment for themselves. The drama triangle becomes a triangle of emotionally abusive relationships. The three key elements are: *I am the only one who loves you and you need me to feel good about yourself; Others are dangerous and unavailable; Pursuing a relationship with those others jeopardises your relationship with me.* Good intentions don't mean it isn't coercive control. This helpful / harmful "strangulation" – relationships that take you in and cut you off – will appear a few more times tonight.

Last year I was in this very same hall doing a TEDx talk “A Maverick’s Mission and Mistakes” ([youtu.be/CUPUMZrjOwk](https://youtu.be/CUPUMZrjOwk)). Watch the full 15 mins and you’ll hear me talk about what being maverick means, why we should always keep thinking for ourselves not just follow the crowd, and about how I did NOT learn those lessons early enough. I dismissed Alienation in families like everyone around me was doing. It was a client who taught me better.

In eight years I’ve gone from knowing nothing to doing lectures. How much do you think you know about Alienation? Just to yourself, could you give yourself a quick rating between zero, knowing nothing – to ten, knowing everything. OK? Thanks. At the end I’ll get you to rate yourselves again! Now to make a bit of a connection say hello to the person next to you, (maybe) share your self-rating, and briefly share one thing about why you gave yourself that rating.

Alienation in families is commonly called Parental Alienation. I talked about the bigger map. This is what I mean: my biggest intervention yet is a recent online report: The unqualified gap through which children fall in Scotland’s family law system ([theunqualifiedgap.wordpress.com](http://theunqualifiedgap.wordpress.com)) Tackling the competence of family law is far wider than a family case, wider than therapy and wider than one disturbed family pattern. My aim is to help change the whole system through awareness-raising for a forthcoming government review.

So this is an example of big systems activism. The report points out how those of us workers who are better qualified in child and family work need to get back into the challenging field of separated families and get back up to speed to provide specialist assessment and help. In other words, alongside the legal system, we in the helping professions have also failed to do our job.

So, what do you think? Commonly, gentle professionals think (as I did) that Alienation can’t be that bad, that it’s in the range of normal family separation, that at most it requires a bit of good sense or therapy. In fact, let’s not use such a negative word. And surely we don’t need to annoy lawyers and governments?! ... Well obviously I cannot agree. I say we cannot be bystanders. Getting it right for every child is our job. We should be doing that job not walking away from it. Walking away means WE contribute to the ignorance and the suffering of children and families. We all need to reflect hard and then take action.

At the same time as Jock arrived in Edinburgh, I found the Scottish philosopher, John Macmurray. He says a person is primarily someone who does stuff, action, and interaction, in relationships. And one thing we do is reflect. In other words, by our fruit we shall be known, but good fruit comes from good reflection.

Now ... I’ve begun to put to you that the key to severe Alienation in families is that we’re dealing with Emotional Abuse. Disturbed situations, disturbed parents with unresolved attachment traumas of their own, who intend the best for their children while doing them harm. This is not to demonise, but to use the best framework to guide understanding, intervention and help. Now: Harm means we should switch over from the reflection of therapeutic work into action and intervention. When we spot risk and abuse, we know we need to talk it through with someone else. We don’t do that for Alienation because we don’t know about it yet. So it’s a vicious circle. Like when baby battering, domestic violence, and child sexual abuse were first discovered, people didn’t believe it. We need to learn more so that we are ready to take action not just pass by.

To get the idea across that Alienation belongs in the category of emotional abuse, I use a bigger label that gets the right bit of your mind switched on. Parental Child Abduction and Alienation. Everyone knows that Child Abduction is serious, harmful, wrong, an emergency. You don’t make an appointment in a few weeks’ time for therapy. Parental Abduction and severe Parental Alienation do exactly the same – one does it quickly and the other does it slowly. With that label, you also know what Parental Alienation is: it is slow Child Abduction. And here’s a short excerpt from “Victims of Another War” with a couple of adults looking back on their own Abduction and Alienation, about how it happens; and about the long term harm. In it, Cecilie says: “The sheer mental torture that I went through as a kid, the fear, and now looking back seeing that I was manipulated by my Dad in the way that I was for his own interests, I mean, this is pure child abuse.” She continues:

Cecilie (Norway > USA)... We travelled around for ten years – the most we stayed in one place was maybe

six months if that long. I couldn't talk about my mother at all with my father during any of that time. Basically he'd freeze up or get very angry or do something kind of scary like throw something on the floor or just get really really really angry, and really tense. So I couldn't say the M word, that was Mom, mother, I couldn't bring it up, and it was frightening. It reinforced her scariness to me, it felt that she was the cause of that fear, it was her fault that my father would get angry and withdrawn. So it wasn't his fault it became her fault in my mind. ... I think back to that little kid and I feel so much pain. Even the fact that I had had one perception of my father and his role in my life and how selfless he'd been and for years how he'd put his child first and he did all this for my sake to protect me against this terrible mother. And then when all that started changing it really screwed with my whole outlook on life and my own trust in my own perceptions on life. ... It led to a lot of depression, a lot of anxiety, trouble sleeping, I have nightmares sometimes ... It's caused a tremendous amount of upheaval and pain.

Thomas (USA > Scotland): ... My mother dished out a 20 year sentence to my father, one that had consequences for all of us. And I think now she's maybe realising that the consequences of her actions are inescapable. Although I'm in contact with my father, basically he still is a stranger. And I've cut off all contact with my mother.

So Abduction and Alienation happen. Watch the full 30 minute video to learn more ([youtu.be/ulodb32\\_xRI](https://youtu.be/ulodb32_xRI)) An innovative and complete way to learn more is this new novel "YOU" by Phil Whitaker. I say: "Truth is stronger in fiction".

You need to know about Alienation because you may not see through the drama otherwise. Why? Because the child may present at the time as flourishing and happy ... like mind-controlled cult members do, like jihadi terrorists do as they blow themselves up, like Victoria Climbié did until she died of her abuse. That video excerpt shows it is harmful at the time and in the long run. It is emotional abuse.

Down the pothole it can be dark. Let's see if my torch helps. The video also shows that Parental Alienation happens with any gender pattern. It is not just rejected fathers. Alienation can happen with any gender and same sex separations too. Strangely, mothers who are Alienated find nothing that helps them at Womens Aid .. but they do at Families Need Fathers. Puzzling, isn't it?! We need other theories than gender.

Modern attachment theory explains things best. Remember that – when attachments go wrong and stop being a safe base – humans and other animals have the deepest reactions: fear, flight, fight or freeze. It is no surprise that family separation can be a 'matter of life and death'. New and effective Attachment-based assessment and help are emerging now.

For early and less severe cases of Parental Alienation good voluntary collaborative help may work and prevent things escalating, as they do through adversarial courts. Otherwise for severe cases, a more active and legally mandated or 'prescribed cooperation' is needed with highly skilled child-focused family work. This rarely happens in the UK because we're ignorant.

The strange thing is that, if you talk to ordinary folk, they do know it! It's common knowledge that one parent can turn their child against the other parent. Often they even know someone it happened to. Somehow professionals don't know: Our trainings teach us an ignorance we didn't have before!

Next you need to know that uninformed help can make it worse. We are required to believe and please our customers, the person in front of us. Strangely, we disbelieve the desperate rejected parent. Where do we get these opposite rules about who to believe and disbelieve?! Of course, we must listen carefully. But it is always important to remember that the truth may lie elsewhere. . .

Now: there are different ways to take Parental Alienation seriously. One way is to completely believe what is presented. Another has been to make it into a syndrome, a psychiatric disorder, something scientific. And we look at it as Emotional Abuse as well. ... I find the best way to get what's going on is to be a theatre critic. So here's the classic Parental Alienation picture. Usually it is a sombre list of the features of the 'syndrome'. But if you think like a

theatre critic, you can see it's histrionic acting, an operatic plot and a very poor script. Like an hysterical or conversion disorder – that's physical symptoms without a physical cause – classic Parental Alienation is a drama based on an imaginary version of life, not what would actually happen. Here's the features of this melodrama:

- There is a compelling story delivered in a powerful way – “Everything is wonderful but for one thing ...”
- The dramatic rejection of a once loved, caring, safe parent is way over the top – “... If only he or she would disappear, everything would be perfect”.
- The melodrama doesn't match the plot – weak or frivolous reasons are given: “She forgot my teddy! He made me eat my toast!” Or maybe no reasons at all: “I just don't want to go. Aren't my feelings important?!”
- Assessment shows no serious risk or criminal abuse, not at all the kind of parent that social work or probation would have as a client.
- An untrained actor, the child takes on a melodramatic two-dimensional identity, with reflex totally split loyalty to one parent and ruthless rejection of the other parent.
- As amateurs, they lack the normal ambivalence that, in reality, children show who have actually been abused by a parent, No child can so simply dispose of an Attachment figure.
- For a script, the child is taught or borrows adult words – “You're just a nobody, Dave” In case of any doubt, the child may add: “And no one made me say that! It's what I think.”
- The lack of a decent plot and script means that the child extends the unfounded rejection to the whole tribe, the extended family. Even innocent pets are rejected. This is the biggest botch in the amateur script. But accidentally it works. The power of tribal loyalty and conflict is familiar on stage and in real life. The logical dumb question about this off-stage genocide is seldom asked: “What terrible thing could they have all done simultaneously?!” Instead, melodrama meets reality. We see behind the scenes into over-riding disturbed family attachment going tribal.
- And if the melodrama isn't powerful enough the parent adds in some false allegations, fabricated or passionately believed. (If allegations are true by the way, then by definition, it's not Parental Alienation but Justified Estrangement.)

So, that's quite a performance. By being a theatre critic, you're not likely to miss how stagey it is. The melodrama demands that we see through it, to be very concerned indeed: Why are the family doing this? What are they trying to communicate through this performance? As for conversion disorders, we find past unresolved attachment traumas transferred onto newcomers who don't know what's hit them. The key sign of Alienation is the unambiguous rejection of a parent. But realistic ambiguous rejection is just as important to take seriously, to report, assess and help the child and parents work out safely. Whatever's going on, 'parent-refusal' needs active help and intervention.

A word more about false allegations: If you've not been on the receiving end of false allegations you may not know how extremely damaging they are. Reported false allegations to Police or Social Work can be a 'nuclear' option to get the court to prevent contact for months of investigation while the Alienation is entrenched. Informal false allegations through hints and gossip are devastating too: “I heard he's a bit strict with the kids”; “She's a career woman, not very motherly ... on anti-depressants too.” Rumour spreads like fake news does on social media ... all the way to the unqualified kangaroo courts. Even saying nothing leaves imagination to fill the gaps. ... By the way, did you spot your own gullibility there? Hardly any children would live with their own family if their parents were disqualified by having a career or depression or by setting limits! ... Making false allegations would lose much of its power to damage, if allegations of all kinds were quickly and properly assessed, and if appropriate work and supported contact sustained.

So a standard definition of Parental Alienation is: A family pattern most strikingly (but not only) found in the context of implacably disputed separations, where a child is shaped into totally rejecting the other parent and their tribe, in a lasting way and for no good reason, even though the child previously had, and could still have, a safe and valued relationship with them. ... So the kind of Alienation we're talking about takes three parties to do it: One person turns a second person against a third person in a lasting way for no good reason.

As I said: let's not be too simplistic. It is rarely as obvious as the classic melodramatic picture. Commonly it is more mixed up, two-sided and multi-factorial. But that same complexity is true of children who refuse school: it shouldn't stop us doing the same job with those who refuse a parent. Being bamboozled means people often get frustrated and over-react in simplistic ways with Alienation. The following sorts of thing are too simplistic:

- It's just a syndrome, a diagnosis, you have it or you don't;
- It doesn't exist, it's not scientific;
- It's weird and nothing like normal separation or relationships;
- It's just bad fathers – or bad mothers – with evil personality disorders. They should be evaporated;
- Intervention is simple – just transfer residence to the other parent.

But some conclusions are clear:

- Yes, it's serious and not good for the children and their development
- No, it's not just an equally-matched tit-for-tat; it's not just a contact dispute.
- Yes, the reasons for resisting contact may not be clear. And:
- Yes, one or two parents may use Parental Alienation as a cover up.
- So yes, we need to understand, assess, and intervene at least as thoroughly as we do with school refusal, each case in its own right.
- No, don't "give it time" – remember Abduction is urgent; these patterns quickly get entrenched
- Yes, whatever happens, keep any kind of contact and communication going with the other parent.
- Teachers, GPs, Social Workers, and CAMHS staff: For all separated families, always contact both parents. If one parent says you shouldn't, check it out.
- And yes, lawyers and courts are sometimes needed.
- And yes, sometimes transferring residence completely transforms a child's life.

OK, you ask: What do you do next? That's quite easy to answer but not to do:

- You already know what to do: Resisting seeing a parent is much more serious than a child resisting going to school. But both of these require the same approach. You pull together the picture with the child and everyone else and put together a plan. However many factors there are to sort out, the aim is the same: get the relationship with rejected school or rejected parent back on track. We know how to do that with school-refusal, but no one yet does the same with parent-refusal.
- If you get that idea, you're well on the right tracks. But so many tricky things bamboozle everyone that you need to learn more to get through the fog.
- Alienation may need ordinary or extraordinary help. But for any clients who don't engage, start thinking of reporting – as questions of child welfare – the following concerns:
  - Any child's rejection of a parent – whether it is unambivalent or reasonable.
  - Any parent who seriously threatens that their ex- is never going to see the children again. ... (Some of us need to begin this reporting or no one will ever learn why.)
- Another thing you can do is to talk about this everywhere, so that it stops being such a hidden pothole.

So that's a quick tour of the pothole. Now back to the broader territory. The vast majority of activists and professionals in this field are dedicated to pulling bodies out of the potholes. But prevention is better than cure. This image [the soldier picking a dead child up on a Mediterranean beach] makes the point: Mostly we find ourselves pulling bodies out downstream. But stopping them being pushed in upstream is obviously better.

How do we prevent Parental Alienation happening? Changing the tortuous family law system that brings out the worst in everyone would help. But here's a simpler prevention idea: What if, when a family first came into the family law system, a high priority was to place a child (all else being ok) mainly with the parent assessed as best able to support their child's relationship with the other parent? The whole game would be turned on its head before it began.

Otherwise prevention means that everyone needs to learn more, to spot these patterns early on, so that early ordinary and specialist intervention will prevent things getting so stuck.

An instant way to get rid of Parental Alienation is to declare it doesn't exist!!! Seriously, campaigners often try to close down events like this! More moderately, helpful folks prefer positive, non-blaming, words and ideas. But that assumes nothing risky is going on, and that clients are engaged in collaborative work. Here abuse may be happening .. and we have a very disengaged client and their very loyal child. We don't balk at using negative words like 'abuse' or 'murder' for things that simply are that negative. If Alienation is abusive, there is no reason to be so coy. And you don't have to use these words with clients.

But actually Alienation is a very good old word for it. Great thinkers have studied it for centuries. Mostly that's about a more passive form of: 'social alienation' when an individual is alienated from their society. But for all forms of Alienation, the core meanings are the same. People with more power are insensitive to others with less power, and the powerful do things that distance the powerless. The Alienated person is left at a loss a loss of power, of connection, meaning, and norms. For separated families, possession (of the children) is great power ... 9/10ths of the law, as they say.

For Parental Alienation, in Europe at least, the Rights of the Child say that a child has the right to family life (unless it's clearly not possible or safe). Courts that fumble this job deny a child their human right to family life with both parents. Family life means a fair share of residential care, not just occasional outings. And we now have solid research and evidence to show that children benefit in every measurable way the more shared care they get from both their separated parents.

Moving onto the last part of the meal, I want to look more closely at: 1. All the kinds of "relationships that take you in and cut you off"; 2. How they do that; 3. What Emotional Abuse is; and 4. to look at Influence and the voice of the child.

So here's the thing: Active three-party 'Alienation' is basically another name for 'coercive control' and for emotional abuse. They're all relationships that take you in and cut you off. 'Coercive control' is best known in couples and domestic abuse. Scotland's recent Domestic Abuse law creates a specific offence of psychological abuse. Here's a summary of 'Abusive behaviour (to a partner) which is:

- Violent, threatening or intimidating
- Behaviour whose purpose is to:
  - Make a partner dependent or subordinate
  - Isolate them from friends, relatives or other sources of support
  - Control, regulate or monitor their day-to-day activities
  - Deprive or restrict their freedom of action
  - Frighten, humiliate, degrade or punish them. .

Again, every bit of this is found in Alienation and in all kinds of "relationships that take you in and cut you off". Whatever you call it, this is at the core of all of them: Coercive Control, Alienation, Emotional Abuse. And what we collectively call by the legal term: Undue influence.

The new UK laws are restricted to 'intimate partners and ex-partners'. But it's the same pattern in other family abuse, and in other groups than families. In fact there we find it's more deeply hidden domestic abuse, child sexual abuse, and Parental Alienation. We know these may be hidden in upstanding institutions. But we forget the large number of mind-control cultic ones, small, or big like Scientology or the Jehovah's Witnesses. And if you brave the implanted phobia and leave cults like that, your ex and your kids have to completely shun you. Or an extremist group or a mind control cult may take in your loved one and totally cut them off from you.

At the core of all of these is the same harmful behaviour pattern. So it's a shame to have excluded all these other victims from the protection of the new laws which were admirably campaigned for by the women's movement for victims of their own kind. But harmful Undue Influence is not so exclusive. Sadly, I think, the new laws marginalise victim groups who don't have such a powerful voice or an equal opportunity.

And I would add that those other groups face worse harm. In the well-known kinds of domestic or child abuse, the victim usually knows they're a victim. Sure, they're frightened, trapped, forced to keep quiet. That is hellish .. but at least they know they're a victim.

In other extreme coercive groups, like mind-control cults, terrorist groups, and the more extreme forms of abuse and Alienation in families, the victim cannot bear to know it. These victims of more extreme coercion deal with the terror by switching to that devoutly loyal false identity, proclaiming they've never been happier, the last thing they want is to leave. They identify with and devotedly seek to please their controller or group. The false identity is the only way they can protect themselves, absent their authentic self and erase their true thoughts and feelings. .. Do you recognise the melodrama of Parental Alienation there?

How is this done? Attachment theory explains it best. This is Alexandra Stein and her book *Terror, Love and Brainwashing: Attachment in cults and other totalitarian systems*. So how is harmful coercion done? She describes how inducing disorganised attachment does the job. Given our understanding of neuroscience now, that is literally “brain-washing”!

But for children with their primary attachment to a parent, they’re sitting ducks already – they don’t need any Disorganised attachment. They will willingly do, for love, what the parent they’re attached to needs them to do. They can’t know it isn’t good for them. They have no alternative. They’ve been made to get rid of one parent .. and, as Stein describes, they cling to the nearby parent thinking they’re safe. But actually that parent feeds their anxiety instead of sorting it. Children can’t think clearly. So they just obey the script. Remember the Drama triangle becoming the Emotional Abuse triangle?

So Alienation is found in all kinds of emotionally abusive or coercively controlling groups and relationships as well as in families. Parental Alienation is the only one that actually uses the word in its label. There’s lots to learn about all kinds of Undue Influence through the Open Minds Foundation ([openmindsfoundation.org](http://openmindsfoundation.org)) There are more faces of manipulation than just family / one-to-one, and Alienation or coercion.

In passing, many people think the answer is to do away with power in society and relationships. But we can’t get rid of power. We have to live with it. What we need to do is to keep working to make power and influence work for good. We need to know how to tell whether influence is constructive or destructive? Here’s Steve Hassan’s Continuum chart that lists the distinguishing features like Authentic versus False self; Free will and critical thinking versus Dependency and obedience; Trustworthy versus Secretive and deceptive; Checks and balances versus Authoritarian structure. See: [freedomofmind.com](http://freedomofmind.com)

OK, so we have all these harmful relationship patterns that are all “relationships that take you in and cut you off”. These relationship patterns all cause mental stress and disorder in individuals. And the patterns are caused by disturbed individuals who do have mental health or personality disorders. But the patterns are not in themselves mental health disorders. They are relationship patterns that get nasty when we don’t sort them out sooner, like we do with school refusal. But you can see that mental health skills are needed for the job. And Defining the core of all these patterns is about defining what Emotional Abuse is, what it does.

Often Emotional Abuse is defined in terms of the harmful outcome, or what the abuser’s aims are. But those definitions are tautological. They tell us what results, not what the abuse is. My own definition is that: Emotional Abuse happens when, in a lasting way, someone blocks your natural reactions, actions, and interactions, as well as your turning for help and your capacity for reflection. Notice: action and reflection within relationships again. Note the now familiar ‘taken in and cut off’ bits in there. And note that this definition is not just academic. People tend to include all kinds of things that are not Emotional Abuse. It is not just disagreements, or bad feelings, or bad experiences. “The way you eat and watch soaps, annoys me .. that’s Emotional Abuse, you know!” To be Emotional Abuse it has to be more systematic, sustained and entrapping. Those are the intended or unintended features that make it harmful. Note that Emotional Abuse is what makes the other concrete Abuses so abusive. It’s the basis of all Abuse. So it’s what we most need to learn about.

Now: About influence – remember we’ve seen that even adults can be unduly influenced. You don’t have to be a child, and you don’t have to have mental health problems or personality disorders to get taken into a cult or an abusive relationship. Parental Alienation is sometimes called ‘undue influence of the child’. People are saying that the voice of the child is the solution for family conflict. So .. should we just do what children say?

Here’s a diagram reminding us of just how constantly influenced a child is for good or bad: (Diagram of) Influences on children on a typical day. (The details don’t matter). Mostly we hope that all this influence is healthy – including some coercion – and we’ve seen the signs of when it’s harmful, undue influence.

Because ‘the voice of the child’ sounds so right, we need to see how it can be so wrong: .. Let’s go back to the child who resists going to school. The usual factors we look at include the child’s temperament, development, attachments, family, separation anxieties, and on the school front, bullying, learning problems or teacher relationship. We listen carefully. But when a child says: “I don’t want to go to school ever again!” a responsible

adult does not say: "OK, your wish is my command"! Often with school refusal a key factor is separation anxiety, even raging panic attacks, with the closest parent. Separation anxiety, panic or phobic disorder is all that a devoted carer needs for complete coercive control. Note that ensuring school attendance is the parent's responsibility, ultimately a legal matter ... to the point of legal orders and sanctions. School refusal would be Emotional Abuse too if we didn't tackle it straight away and if we let it get out of hand.

Every bit of that school refusal picture is the same with Parental Alienation – except that the child welfare concern is far greater; and Alienation certainly gets way out of hand: There should be, but is not, the same thorough multi-agency child and family assessment and help. Instead just now lawyers and courts get away with doing their unqualified stuff while people seriously promote the idea that the wishes and feelings, the voice of the child is the same as the welfare of that child. Children are immature by definition, may be quite disturbed when their parents separate, and certainly they'll be pushed and pulled. To use the child and their voice to decide their future is a dreadful idea. It's bound to increase the pressure a desperate parent puts on their child. And that's a major cause of disturbance and Parental Alienation. A child's voice can be used and abused.

Before we wind up: Just to yourself, rate your knowledge of Alienation again, zero to ten. OK? ... Whether you learned more or not, please contact me later to feedback what you think. Now, for a couple of minutes to your colleague again: Share what's come to mind. Can you see it differently? Warm up a question to ask after I've finished. ..

To round up, here's the tea and coffee: a couple of my Attachment favourites to show how far we've come and how far we've yet to go. The most thorough, useful Attachment-based approach is Pat Crittenden's Dynamic Maturational Model (DMM). Following on from Bowlby and others, she sets out objectively assessed patterns of an individual child or adult's information-processing and self-protective strategies as they mature, on dimensions of Cognition and Affect which can be more True or more False. On one side you have More Reserved, Defended Disengaged patterns, and on the other More Protest, Coercive Enmeshed patterns. Giving you this wonderful circle of patterns, things like Comfortable natural functioning (at the top), Compulsively caregiving Compliant (that's me and some of you too), Punitive Seductive, and (at the bottom) Psychopathy. If you search "Crittenden DMM" you can have fun browsing her website. The Crittenden book to read is: Raising Parents. DMM goes way beyond any and all of the disorder labels. It can direct and guide what intervention is needed where.

And, finally, Attachment brings me back to psychiatry and to Jock: it's another wonderful Attachment based therapy and book by JONATHAN BAYLIN and DAN HUGHES about The Neurobiology of Attachment-focused Therapy: Enhancing connection and trust in the treatment of children and adolescents. So here we are now with identifiable brain systems that go with safe or disturbed attachment and that guide effective relationships, care and psychotherapy. Whereas back in 1972 if anyone found anything to do with the brain it was: zap with drugs and ban psychotherapy!! What tickles me most is that we have biology and brain linking with minds through action, interaction and relationships. Which is precisely what John Macmurray said so long ago.

We live in a rather scary culture. We find that careful reason and debate are trampled on. Alienation in families requires some really careful reflection and action. I hope this lecture has helped. I hope your chosen action will be to learn more. As well as reading Phil Whitaker's novel, you can take away my card. Thank you. And over to you. ... And to Graham ...

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION