



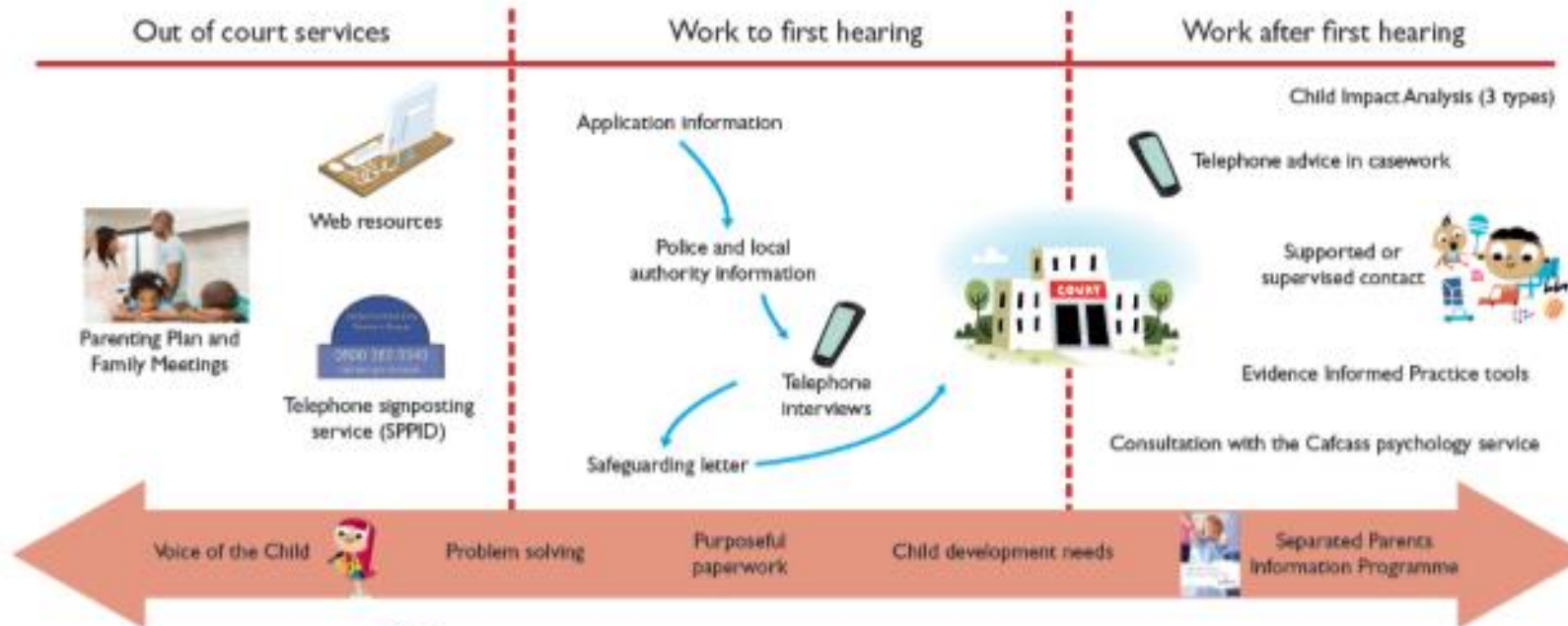
How Cafcass assesses parental alienation

14 October 2017
Parental Alienation Workshop
London

Anthony Douglas CBE, Chief Executive, Cafcass

Working to build safe and positive relationships between the parents and the child/children after separation

While each child has individual needs where parents are in dispute after separation, there are common lines, or journeys, in our private law cases. The destination is the same: safe and healthy outcomes for children. It is the role of the Cafcass practitioner to help guide parents to this destination, using their social work skill set at specific junctions, to be the voice of the child in the family court and pointing parents to the resources they can access to focus on the needs of their child/children after separation.



reducing the impact on the child of abuse, neglect and high conflict

Our practitioners will be ...

improving child mental health and development

NB Children's emotional and psychological wellbeing can improve quickly in the right environment.

Private law case management pathway
'for children, with parents'

CHILDREN

Parents are encouraged to seek their child's views and asked neither to exert pressure nor to manipulate the situation for their own ends.

Parents are encouraged to involve their child in the dispute resolution sensitively without asking them to take sides. This is so the child's views can be taken into account

Improving the child's well-being

Reducing harmful impact on the child

Agreed actions supported by the child

PARENTS

Parents are asked about their child's needs, wishes and feelings through the EIT phone call, and reinforced throughout the life of the case

Parents are asked for their side of the story but encouraged to see this through the eyes of their child.

Resolution at, or before, the FHDRA

Reducing risk

Reducing the level of conflict

Agreed outcomes with parents

CLARIFYING EXPECTATIONS

TRIAGE

Safeguarding concerns continue

INTERVENTIONS

Report to court

Direct work

RECOMMENDATIONS AND OUTCOMES

Our assessment framework for Parental Alienation

- ▶ The debate about parental alienation being a syndrome or a disorder is a sterile one. The main point is that alienating behaviours are common in many of our cases. Alienating behaviours include irrational contact denial - trying to make the ex-partner an ex-parent as well, and spreading fake news about the other parent.
- ▶ What matters most to us is the child impact of parental behaviour, including the development of distorted attachments and a distorted way of relating. The impact can be usefully classified as severe, moderate or mild.
- ▶ It is important to intervene early, before alienation becomes a way of life and the relationship between a parent and child breaks down irretrievably. We see this in terms of de-alienation.
- ▶ We use social work assessment tools to understand alienating behaviours, like 'the impact of parental conflict tool', a list of behaviours that indicate the child may be subject to alienating behaviours such as complaints being rehearsed and describing one parent or both unrealistically in either wholly positive or negative language.



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- ▶ The impact on children of parental alienation can be stress, attachment difficulties – being stuck in childhood. Whilst this is more widely true of an unresolved separation or divorce, alienating behaviour can intensify the emotional harm to children.
 - ▶ Parental alienation is part of the arsenal of separation or divorce weaponry in high conflict cases. Usually all family members, including the child, feel that each other is a weapon against them – and they will usually see and experience the family court in the same way – as an extension of the battlefield. We see this as poly-victimisation.
 - ▶ It is an insult to children’s intelligence to simply say they have been put up to thinking in a certain way. They clearly can be unduly influenced and in a small number of cases, they take on the alienating completely and it becomes a false identity. But usually, family life is more nuanced and complex and children will have strong legitimate views and feelings of their own which must be respected even if not always agreed with.



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- ▶ There are wholly wronged parents who become ‘othered’, a shadow of their former selves and lacking in confidence. We should recommend ways they can become part of the child’s world again.
 - ▶ Criminalising parents can backfire on them and drive their children further away, alienating them more and causing stress. Children often feel – wrongly – responsible. Responsibility lies fairly and squarely with parents.
 - ▶ In enforcement proceedings, it may become necessary to consider a change of residence as the ultimate sanction, in order for a child to maintain a relationship with both parents. However, this has to be subject to careful assessment and analysis of whether the child is able to make that transition, with support.



Parental alienation is a public health issue. Early help is crucial.

(refer to paper)





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