



Llywodraeth Cymru
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Listening to the Child: Assessing Lived Experiences of Domestic Abuse in Family Time Arrangements

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Parental Alienation Syndrome (PAS) is not a recognised health condition nor is it a term supported by Cafcass Cymru, nor by the Family Justice Council.¹

The term is not recognised by the Istanbul Convention, which has been ratified by the UK, nor is the term accepted by the World Health Organisation.

- Parental alienation is largely considered a pseudoscience by experts and researchers; however, it has become a key litigation tactic used by perpetrators of abuse in family court proceedings, particularly when used in response to domestic abuse disclosures.²
- Whilst there are cases where alienating behaviours can be exhibited by one or both parents it is important to explore the full motivations and context to this behaviour, in relation to the safety and wellbeing of the child(ren) before making recommendations.
- In cases of abuse, we must explore whether alienating behaviours are raised to invalidate the protective efforts of the victim-survivor or to comply with a perpetrator's perception of reality. We must be mindful that perpetrators of abuse can and do manipulate professionals in their attempts to maintain control.
- The Family Justice Council (2024) have also advised that in terms of their relative harm and prevalence, domestic abuse and alienating behaviours cannot be considered equal and genuine cases of alienating behaviours are rare, despite the prevalence of alienating behaviours or 'parental alienation' being raised in family courts.³

- Children and young people may also be making independent decisions based on their lived experience of a parent which are valid and should be considered within the full context of the family dynamics.
- Children and young people's views are important; listening and assessing their responses towards abuse is key to allowing their autonomy and right to participation in the court process.

Alienating Behaviours or Appropriate/Justified Rejection?

- Perpetrators of domestic abuse will attempt to deflect blame, or reverse culpability, by stating that the victim-survivor is alienating the child against them.
- In these circumstances it is important that we are guided by the evidence and/or findings and do not lose sight of the distinction between the child's justified, or appropriate rejection of a parent (as will often be the case where the child has suffered domestic abuse) and rejection caused by deliberately alienating, or unjustified, behaviours.
- We must also remember that where domestic abuse has been disclosed, but not upheld at fact finding, it does not automatically follow that the parent making the disclosure was deliberately attempting to alienate the child, and further enquiries should be undertaken, as directed by the court.

1 [Family Justice Council Guidance on responding to allegations of alienating behaviour 2024](#)

2 [A collective international response to the claim that so-called 'parental alienation' is a well-studied 'gender neutral' empirical phenomenon which can easily be measured \(researchgate.net\)](#)

3 [Family Justice Council Guidance on responding to allegations of alienating behaviour 2024](#)

Practice Point

Apply a domestic violence informed lens to your interviews and assessments from the outset to determine the context, potential motivations, and impact of a child who is reluctant, resisting or refusing contact with a parent.

- Apply a domestic abuse assessment approach from the outset to determine whether there are patterns of behaviour that amount to domestic abuse.
- If there is evidence or indication that a parent is a victim-survivor, aim to interview them first to risk assess and limit a perpetrator's opportunity to influence an assessment.
- Where incidents of violence have been reported, explore what the motivating factors were i.e. to maintain control or domination, punish or humiliate, or were they to gain control of oneself, in self-defence, protection, or dignity?
- Consider the risk of continuing or escalating violence and its impact on children, the victim-survivor, wider networks, and the perpetrator.
- Avoid mutualising language; 'they're as bad as each other' and similar.

If children or young people do not want to spend family time with their parent, consider their thoughts, feelings and lived experiences and whether the behaviours or actions of parents (including potential abuse against another parent) have impacted their desire to continue spending family time with them.