

## THE RESOLUTION TO HELPING A CHILD WHO EXPRESSES HATRED, FEAR, AND REJECTION OF A PARENT IS AMELIORATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP—NOT EMOTIONAL CUTOFFS

In what situations other than an adversarial custody matter do parents, therapists, attorneys, child protection staff, and judges accede to a child's expression of anger, permit the child's tenacity in remaining wedded to hatred, overlook the child's disrespectful and abusive behaviors, and sanction the child's rejection of a significant individual to the child? Why has society reached a consensus that we do not want our citizens walking around like a volcano waiting to erupt with anger, but yet the professionals in the systems which impact the family turn a blind's eye to a child's explosive expressions of hatred, anger, and rejection of a parent? Why do we send children to "anger management" therapy in every other situation of out-of-control anger, but we do not recognize the importance of healing the unsurpassed, meaningful parent-child relationship in cases of adversarial custody battles? Why do we sanction the severing of the parent-child relationship when, in all other situations of interpersonal conflict between intimate parties we encourage atonement, resolution, and healing.

We know that parents regularly bring their children to therapy to help them overcome "their anger issues;" that teachers require angry students get fixed in therapy or face expulsion; that judges admonish the delinquent children who come before them to learn how to sublimate their anger or suffer penalties.

Even in cases when the child has been placed in foster care due to adjudicated abuse and neglect, the parental rights of the parents are *scrupulously* guarded and enforced; that is, the parents are entitled to weekly visits—supervised if necessary to protect the child; the parents must be *consulted not merely informed about* all medical developments and procedures; they must be involved in educational planning; and they must be requested to approve all social and extracurricular activities. Why do we do this? It is not because this is in the parents' best interests. We do it because *we know* that it is in the child's best interests. We have documented with a high degree of clinical certainty that even abused and neglected children crave to be reunited with their parents. We also know with a high degree of clinical certainty that the foster children who have the most favorable prognosis upon "graduating" from the foster care system are the one's whose parents remained involved with them and collaborated with the agency for their return and for permanency planning.

We have not transferred the knowledge about foster children to children whose parents are in an adversarial custody battle. Even in the absence of abuse and neglect by a parent, the rights of that parent can be trampled upon by the other parent. In the best interests of children, we must end this bifurcated system in which a relationship between and fit parent and child can be severed in a custody battle while we simultaneously recognize the necessity to facilitate the parent-child relationship in the child welfare system.

Society requires amelioration for interpersonal conflicts because we recognize that carrying around anger is unhealthy and often leads to anti-social behaviors if unchecked.

When it comes to adversarial custody battles, however, all too many mental health professionals determine to rescue their child patients from the allegedly abusive parent instead of doing a proper investigation as to the veracity of the allegations and then helping the child to resolve her/his perceived or *misperceived* perceptions of the rejected parent. When it comes to the parent-child relationship, there must be healing, problem resolution, and reunification with a fit parent. The child protective worker empowers these children by allowing them to terminate the visit early if they express fear of their rejected parent, merely because the parent imposes discipline and limits; the attorney for the child merely mimics the wishes of the child client, who is the puppet of the ventriloquist favored parent; and the judge fails to enforce visitation due to the child's spurious expressions of fear for the rejected parent and threats of self-harm.

What we, as the professionals who intervene in child custody, fail to do is to recognize that the issue is not *that* a child has rejected a parent but *why* the child has rejected a parent.

We must implement what we have learned about healthy child development: 1) that children cannot grow up healthy carrying around a 50-pound bowling ball of anger and hatred for a parent—especially in situations absent abuse and neglect on the part of the rejected parent; 2) that the child's expressed feelings of fear and hatred are spurious and not genuine; 3) that resolution of the child's feelings must be ameliorated in therapy with the rejected parent. 4) that the healthiest prognosis for children of parental separation requires the meaningful involvement by both parents; 5) that a civil and respectful co-parenting relationship is what the child commands and that mature parents who are serving their child's best interests will subvert their feelings for their former partner to their love for their child.

The severing of the relationship between a fit parent and child can never serve the child's best interests.