

“ Human beings owe to each-other help to distinguish the better from the Worse, and encouragement to choose the former and avoid the latter.

They should be forever stimulating each other to increased exercise of their higher faculties and increased direction of their feelings and aims toward the wise instead of foolishly elevating instead of degrading, objects and contemplation’s”. “Quote” John Stuart Mill on Liberty 1859.

GRANDPARENTS ACTION GROUP UK

Helping Grandparents maintain and protect contact with their Grandchildren

Head Office 7 Hilda Hooke Close Madeley Telford Shropshire TF7 4Hu

Tel-Fax 01952-582621 Email- GAGJASPER@AOL.COM

Many families today are fragmented in our society as a direct result of the separation of parents. This is a sad fact of life in present day living; the family has a vital foundation to raise children in a loving caring environment. A foundation that this country has always been proud of through the generations. However this has been decimated over the past 2-3 decades, as a result families are breaking up and the power struggles that ensue are damaging to all of us. The biggest casualties are our children, when parents separate the balance of power lies in the majority of cases with the mother, fathers are very often denied contact, this then impacts on the paternal grandparents. Whether paternal or maternal grandparents have NO automatic rights to contact with their grandchildren, they can ask for “leave to apply” for a contact order at court. This can be very expensive and time consuming. Because the resident parent is refusing to allow contact, the child/children are being denied contact with grandparents and the extended family, losing their right to a family life. How does this benefit children to be deprived of the love, care and support that is the purpose and function of the family. Most non resident parents mainly fathers lose all contact within 2 years.

Grandparents are a link to the past and a bridge to the future for family history and medical details. Children need all their family to form bonds with them which promotes stability, security, protection and love, this in turn helps children to grow and develop into confident and responsible adults, it has long been the role of grandparents to provide the values to achieve the latter. When children experience the trauma of separating parents they then become a weapon

(again mainly for mothers) who often take a new partner. Courts and relevant agencies accept and uphold this imbalance of power (an awesome power) in the “best interest of the child”? Upholding lies and false allegations no proof requested and non provided Perjury it seems is acceptable in these described circumstances. Why should children be allowed to be used in this way when throughout their formative years until the age of 7 years they are not allowed a voice unless the resident parent agrees ? Again the resident parent wields the power, if there are valid reasons of risk to a child proper investigation finds this out, however too often non relative partners (namely new boyfriends) are not vetted to prove their character, who poses the greatest risk which we have seen in the past ? Grandparents (classed as non relative) have to prove worthy to have contact with their grandchildren.

There has to be a redress of the system that allows families to be destroyed by lack of proper and much needed legislation. Our children are the future generations they live what they learn, consequently we have the highest level of teenage pregnancies in Europe, a growing culture of single parents fathers are not encouraged to be part of the family unit and many are losing contact with their children, is this the way forward for our children. Shared parental responsibility should be the criteria incorporating grandparents and the extended family. Giving equality and fairness to these issues would ensure children would be well adjusted, achieve in education, develop good social skills and benefit all aspects of their live to help them live in an ever changing society. Too many children have to undergo counselling, psychiatric and other emotional problems very often brought on by the parental alienation of children by the resident parent again (mainly mothers) and mum and dad separating. Children are paramount in family breakdown re-education for parenting is badly needed and should be implemented into the school curriculum, young people should be encouraged to ask help and advice from grandparents, aunts, uncles etc. Who from life experience could give valuable support to young lives, children are an integral part of families and family is the basis of our society.

More initiatives must be given to CAFFCASS, Social services and other relevant agencies to enable them to facilitate and promote harmony between relevant parties. This means better training and a closer understanding of family issues, treat the causes not the symptoms these agencies must be made a valuable resource. The judiciary must recognize the value of grandparents, they are parents too, the ultimate reward for a grandparent is their child's child. Court orders must be enforced otherwise they are not worth the paper they are written on. A lot of work has gone into the "Making Contact Work" report published 2002. 'The Advisory Board on Family Law, Children's Act Sub Committee'. A report to the Lord Chancellor now the (DCA) Department of Constitutional Affairs on the facilitation of contact arrangement between separated parents and the enforcement of orders. If the recommended changes are implemented would move things forward and should go further incorporating grandparents and the extended family, who are also a valuable resource and one that would be freely given and produce very satisfactory results. This is the consensus of opinion of thousands of grandparents throughout the UK we feel that current legislation is unjust and discriminates against us. We live in a democracy, where are our democratic rights to see our grandchildren. Do grandparents count for so little in the present day, statistics tell us there are more over 50s per capita than under 30s and all the over 50s have a vote. Grandparents who seem to have a lost voice, have a right to representation of our issues by the government we help to elect.

COURT ORDERS

When a contact order is made often the resident parent (mainly mothers) will find all sorts inane excuses to flout the courts directions thus breaking the court order.

(1) The child can't come for contact, something better to do or homework to finish.

(2) **Excuse over contact weekends:-** Accommodation unsuitable, too small no computer in the bedroom for homework , no desk, not enough space or no quiet area. The subtle methods of parental alienation (PA) are common practice, making a child believe that a parent or grandparent doesn't care about them, implanting negative thoughts and feelings into young minds. Making children afraid to trust the people who love them dearly namely parents, grandparents and the wider family.

(3):- False allegations of physical or sexual abuse or they will be kidnapped by a parent or grandparent. A serious abuse of power! Mind games to damage children. The resident parent ignores court orders with impunity knowing that the courts will rarely use their punitive powers which they have within the Children's Act, to make it clear that court orders cannot be ignored or abused.

Solicitors, barristers, CAFFCASS, social services and the judiciary are all in a most specific way encouraging and condoning this gross behaviour which can only be against the "child's best interest ". It seems that 40% of mothers actually admit to deliberately defying contact to fathers and paternal grandparents. The damage this awesome power can impact on a child is against their rights to a family life, children are people too. Good parenting puts the child's needs before jealousy and spite. There is a well known quotation "Power corrupts and absolute Power corrupts absolutely". There has been some talk from solicitors in the media that the law is wrong !

It seems that current legislation is rooted in laws from generations ago, nothing will move things on unless legislation moves forward to accommodate present modern day living. Gone are the days of "mother at home and dad the breadwinner". Many parents work and grandparents are unpaid child-minders who do it for love of the child not for money (while it suits) all forgotten when a relationship breaks down. Contact which has been ongoing and enjoyed by children is denied indeed prevented, whatever part grandparents have played in child-care or baby-sitting goes unappreciated and forgotten by the resident parent. There is nothing wrong with children forming family bonds, what is wrong is forcing them to break those loving bonds and children lose out all the time, again the power of selfishness and spite to satisfy the resident parent.

Pamela Wilson Chairwoman