



*Why can't they just  
get on?*

Understanding and Addressing  
Alienating Behaviours



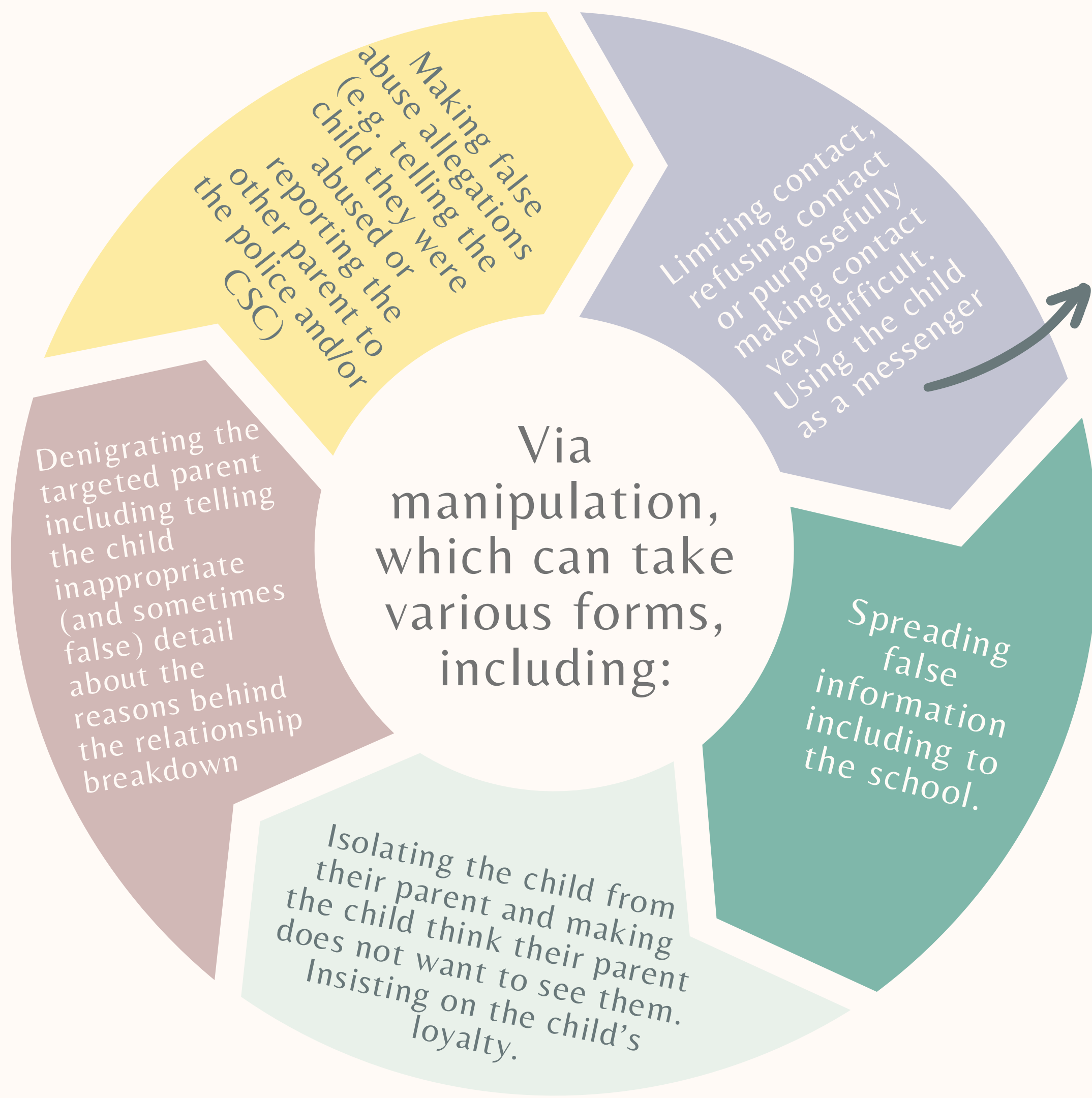


# *What is it?*

Alienating behaviours are part of a complex and emotionally charged issue that occurs when one parent - often during or after a divorce or separation (but even for a long time following the end of a relationship) - manipulates a child's perception of the other parent to turn them against that parent.

The ultimate goal of parental alienation is to sever the child's bond with the targeted parent.





This can also involve purposeful 'misunderstanding' and weaponised incompetence.



# Facts about Alienating Behaviours

In the USA, research found that there are 3 times as many children who are alienated from a parent than there are children with autism.



# Facts about Alienating Behaviours

Every child's experience is different and it is not possible to compare the impact of every child's experience.

However, abusive parents often use their children as weapons to harm the other parent and manipulate them. Domestic violence researchers call this behaviour a form of coercive control.

Scientists who study PA call this very same behaviour parental alienating behaviour. They are two terms describing the same phenomenon.



# Facts about Alienating Behaviours

In over half of the cases where PA was found to have occurred, there were no allegations of other forms of abuse.

Research indicates that mothers and fathers are just as likely to be alienated parents: PA is a form of abuse that does not discriminate based on gender.

Harman & Lorandos, 2020; Harman, Leder-Elder, Biringen, 2019





*What could be some of the effects  
of parental alienation on children?*





Physical



Emotional/Psychological



Social (including long term)







Each child was given two places for the Orchestra recital. When I phoned to book my ticket, I was told her Mum had already booked both tickets. I had to explain to my daughter that I couldn't be there.

She made up lies about me. Said I'd threatened her. I'd never do that! The police investigated and found it to be lies. Plus, my kids told the school I would never do anything like that. But that's it - the teachers view me with suspicion.

When my eldest was poorly recently, they even rang her Nan before they rang me. I'm her Mum for goodness sake! I need to know when she's ill and I'd have dropped everything to collect her. It's like because she doesn't live with me all the time, I must not exist.

I TURNED UP AT PARENT'S EVENING AND HARDLY ANY OF HIS TEACHERS KNEW WHO I WAS. I'M HIS DAD! HE LIVES WITH ME EVERY WEEKEND! THEY SEEMED IMPATIENT TO HAVE TO EXPLAIN EVERYTHING ALL OVER AGAIN, WHEN THEY'D ALREADY MET WITH HIS MUM. BELIEVE ME, I KNOW THIS ISN'T IDEAL BUT I WANT TO KNOW HOW MY SON IS GETTING ON.

# What are our experiences?

① How would you feel if you were that parent?

② How might this affect how the parent communicates and engages with school?







What might be the barriers for staff?



What makes this issue so complex for schools to deal with?

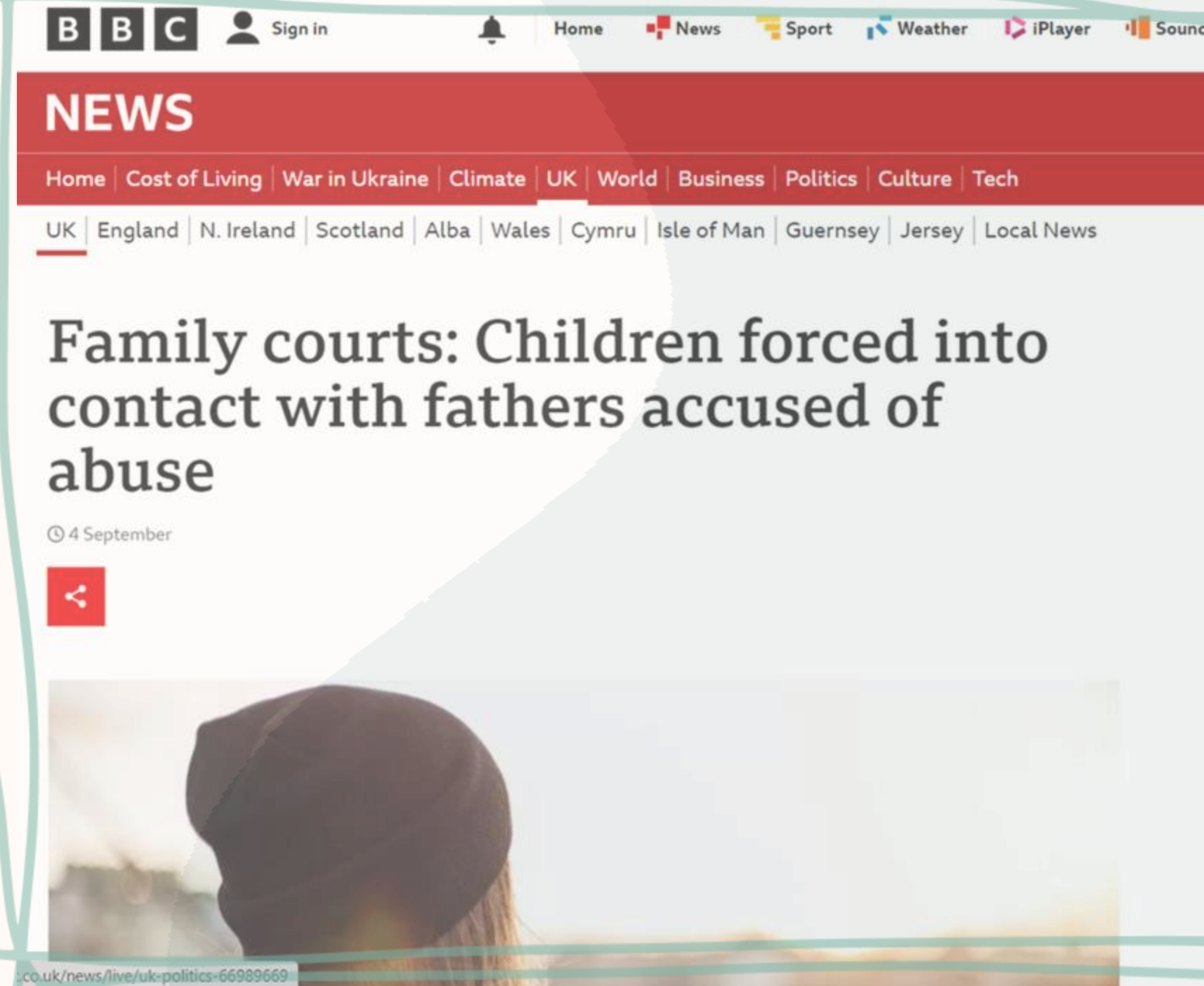
Well, this issue is NOT to be confused with this

...and it can be very difficult to know who to believe (especially as abusers can be highly charming and manipulative).

Also, a person can be a terrible partner but a great parent/carer.

It's difficult not to bring in our own value judgements and experiences.

The solution? Gain the child's voice (and try to ensure it's theirs, not their parent's!)



# *Try to be aware of:*

- Our own experiences of negative relationships
- Whether we may have 'picked sides' without realising
- Our own value judgements relating to relationship breakdown (e.g. divorce, betrayal, division of money etc.)
- Our own relationships with our parents/carers
- Our own relationships with our children
- Our own views on gender roles





- Unexplained hostility toward one parent
- Parroting negative statements about a parent
- Unwillingness to spend time with one parent
- Sudden changes in behaviour or school performance
- Fear of both parents being in the same place at the same time
- Anxiety around Mother's Day, Father's Day and 'not wanting to upset anybody'

What are some of the signs we might spot in schools?





## DO

Offer a safe and empathetic environment for children to express their emotions without judgment.

Encourage children to communicate with both parents, as long as it's safe and appropriate.

Remain neutral and avoid taking sides or expressing personal opinions about the parents' conflicts.

Document any observations or behaviours related to parental alienation and share this information with appropriate school staff or support agencies

Suggest or refer families to professional counsellors, therapists, or support groups who specialise in dealing with parental alienation.

Foster an inclusive and supportive school environment where all children feel valued and respected, regardless of their family situation.

Collaborate with teachers, counsellors, and other school staff to ensure a co-ordinated approach to supporting children affected by parental alienation.

## DON'T

Express favouritism or take sides in parental conflicts, and avoid showing bias toward one parent over the other.

Provide legal advice or get involved in legal disputes between parents.

Force children to have contact with a parent against their will or when it's not safe to do so.

Downplay or minimise the seriousness of parental alienation. Take concerns seriously and seek appropriate guidance.

Share confidential information about the child's situation with anyone who doesn't have a legitimate need to know.

Blame the child for their parents' conflicts or for any negative behaviour they may exhibit due to parental alienation.

Confront parents involved in parental alienation directly. Instead, encourage them to seek professional help.

Make assumptions about a child's feelings or experiences based solely on their family situation. Each child is unique.



- Maintain neutrality
- Focus on the child's best interests and encourage parents to ponder what those could be
- Encourage parents to seek professional advice and support
- Remain child focused at all times
- Don't get caught up in legalities and court arrangements
- Keep in mind who has PR
- Avoid getting caught up in hearing all about the relationship difficulties or breakdown - you are not a therapist and your role is to advocate for the child
- Avoid falling into the trap of 'all men are abusers and neglectful fathers and all women are lovely and maternal'




*Communicating with parents*





# *Our limitations :*

- Remember that the child NEEDS us to remain impartial for them to feel safe and to share with us their feelings
- The child also needs us to advocate for them...including ensuring they have an advocate in the family courts
- It can be wise to recommend expert professional help if parents are:

-  Trying to force school to make a decision about contact arrangements
-  Trying to draw school into enforcing contact arrangements
-  Trying to involve school in legalities





# Support and Resources:

- [www.parentalalienationuk.info](http://www.parentalalienationuk.info) (They have a PA Survival Guide which schools or individuals can purchase)
- Families Need Fathers <https://fnf.org.uk/> [Helpline: 0300 0300 363](https://fnf.org.uk/helpline)
- [Gingerbread](#) provides support for single parents in England, Wales and Northern Ireland with [factsheets offering practical advice](#) on issues such as money, separation, housing and work. [One Parent Families](#) provides this service in Scotland.
- [Family Lives](#) (England and Wales), [Children 1st Scotland](#) and [Parenting Northern Ireland](#) all provide professional, non-judgemental advice to all family members to help achieve the best for everyone.
- [Citizens Advice](#) can give advice to parents if their relationship breaks down and can give information on [child maintenance services](#).
- [Relate](#) provides family counselling and advice on understanding children's feelings and behaviours during separation.
- <https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/about-us/how-cafcass-can-help-you>
- <https://www.nyas.net/get-support/support-for-young-people/advocacy/> Advocacy Services for Children and Young People





*Any questions?*



Thank you and keep in touch.



07971 200 223



Ella Savell-Boss Ltd  
Lancaster House  
Amy Johnson Way  
FY4 2RP



[ella@savellboss.co.uk](mailto:ella@savellboss.co.uk)



ellasavell-  
boss