



## 2017 POSITION STATEMENT

### Abusive Influence on Children

We, being signatories to this document, state that:

- 1) Children experiencing family division or separation are particularly vulnerable, and frequently exposed, to extreme levels of psychological manipulation - especially when their parents are involved in legal action or family court proceedings;
- 2) Children can be psychologically manipulated into showing unwarranted fear, disrespect or animosity towards a parent and/or other family members, and into unjustifiably refusing contact with parents, family members or friends;
- 3) This is a distinctive form of psychological child abuse and family violence, as defined by legislation in many countries<sup>1</sup> and by internationally recognised mental health publications<sup>2</sup>;
- 4) This variety of child abuse is extremely harmful to children; its impact is often life-long and as serious as other, more familiar forms of child abuse. It may cause a serious, mental and long-term disorder in the child and is likely to increase lifetime risks of mental and physical illness<sup>3</sup>;
- 5) The behaviour of children experiencing this form of Psychological Child Abuse is distinct and consistent; properly trained specialists can distinguish it reliably and diagnostically from the behaviour of children who justifiably reject, or have been physically abused or mistreated by, a parent;
- 6) Many professionals, including psychologists, lawyers & judges, are unfamiliar with this phenomenon and with its signs, symptoms and treatment; specialised knowledge and experience is required to assess its possible occurrence, especially since both the child and the perpetrator may present as genuine and convincing, and the perpetrator may even be unaware that he/she is abusing his/her own child;
- 7) Where this abuse is suspected or identified, this becomes a child welfare & protection issue of the utmost urgency. Early intervention is best to minimise the risk of long-term psychological damage to the child; the most effective response, in many cases, is to remove a child temporarily from the abusive parent;
- 8) Considerable scientific research shows that, in a large majority of separated families, it is best for children to spend substantial amounts of time with both of their parents, and to have both parents playing central roles in their lives. Thus, this now-widespread form of psychological abuse frequently undermines what is best for a child.

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<sup>1</sup> e.g. Australia's Family Law Act 1975: definitions of "Child Abuse" (Section 4(1) (c): "causing the child to suffer serious psychological harm"); and "Family Violence" (Section 4AB: "violent, threatening or other behaviour by a person that coerces or controls a member of the person's family (the family member), or causes the family member to be fearful", including "preventing the family member from making or keeping connections with his or her family, friends or culture";

<sup>2</sup> e.g. DSM-5 of the American Psychiatric Association, 995.51 Child Psychological Abuse. See also: V61.20 Parent-Child Relational Problem & V61.29 Child Affected by Parental Relationship Distress;

<sup>3</sup> Adverse Childhood Experiences Study: <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/about.html>.