



Dialogue In Growth (D.I.G) Pty. Ltd  
ABN :83 151 471 742

Men's Action in Open Thinking  
Counselling and Coaching for Men



## ***SpeakEASY* Counselling and Psychotherapy**

### **Common Mistakes Made by Target Parents**

A way to think about family law in Australia is that it focuses entirely upon what it thinks is in the children's best interests and not on the actions of the parents except where those actions are detrimental or abusive to the children. This is a little bit different from family law in the US and to some extent in the UK where, particularly in the US, there is a more adversarial focus on what the parents are doing wrong. In Australia, this means that even as a target parent, as someone who has had their children alienated from them by the other parent, your suffering and your pain is irrelevant to the court.

Just claiming that your children have been alienated from you and that your ex-partner is complicit in parental alienation is not enough for the court to do anything about it. Indeed, if anything, the Family Court in Australia has tended to maintain and validate the status quo established by alienating parents because the Family Court has yet to recognise that parental alienation is by itself a form of child abuse that is extremely harmful.

You can still in the eyes of the court be seen to be complicit and assisting the process yourself. Family law in Australia does not care about you. It only cares about the children and when they hear you talk about your rights or your needs if fits their preconceived notions of parents who appeal to family law as focused on each other and not on the children.

These are all easy traps to fall in and this is something with which I can help you. I can help you avoid the following mistakes:



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#### **1. Placing your own needs above those of your alienated children.**

The moment you talk about the other parent, the moment you talk about your needs and your rights, the moment you talk about how you need to see the children are telling the court the children not as important to you as your ex-partner.

#### **2. Not appreciating the impact of high conflict or alienation on the children.**

Time and time again, I have been told of family reports identifying how the children are struggling with high levels of conflict between parents. You have to show the court that you identify with and empathise with the children's plight in this conflict and that you are doing everything you can to eliminate this conflict, even to the extent of pulling your punches when you feel like striking a blow.

#### **3. Being like the alienating parent by engaging in the same tactics and focusing on the other parent.**

If you criticise the other parent, your ex-partner, you are not seen to be different to them either by the court or especially by your children

#### **4. Ignoring or failing to implement recommendations in family reports while using them as legal weapons in an adversarial context**

People fall into the trap of thinking that family reports, ordered by the court are simply another legal tool to use in their battle. All too often they fail to implement the recommendations in the report that if put in place, would effect of the change in status quo that are asking the court to validate.

#### **5. Allowing a status quo that supports alienation to become entrenched.**

You have to know when to do something and when to do nothing. Lengthy delays are part of the family law system in Australia. False accusations of abuse and violence are a means of buying time in which an alienating parent can implement their alienation processes and isolate the children. Delays give you a chance to implement the necessary changes and countermeasures. However, you must also know that any process you initiate or that your ex-partner initiates will take time before the court decides upon it.

Sometimes, you have to stand and fight that means fighting smart.



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#### **6. Taking matters to the family court without a change in status quo or a compelling case for a change in status quo supported by family reports and the independent children's lawyers (ICL).**

You have to have a family report and evidence to back your case and conclusively prove that the situation as it currently stands is not in the children's best interests and is harmful to them. Better still, you go back to court when you make certain changes in the children want to be with you. They are your best advocates and court orders tend to follow their feet.

#### **7. Not exploiting family court ordered interventions, such as confidential counselling, for maximum benefit.**

Some of the interventions ordered by the family court would be very useful indeed, if they were not implemented in the shadow of the law. You have to know how to use these interventions to your advantage and how to engage practitioners such that they become your advocates.

#### **8. Not seeking the discharge of family court ordered interventions that are ineffectual or downright harmful.**

Not everything the family court does is this helpful or useful. Sometimes what they do can be downright harmful. You need to identify such issues and seek to discharge those orders or otherwise render them irrelevant. If you do not, they could have the effect of entrenching the very status quo and the very alienation that you are seeking to overturn.

#### **9. Not dealing with your own complicity. This can range from focusing on your ex-partner rather than your children to your parenting style**

Family law is particularly good at holding both parents accountable, effectively blaming both. You have to differentiate yourself from your ex-partner by dealing with your part in creating an environment (insofar as the family court sees it) in which the children can be alienated against you. By dealing with these issues, you show the court and especially the court of your children that you are focused on the children and not upon your own needs or your ex-partner. What you want is that family reports recommend that the children spend equal time with you or even live with you and you want your children to agree to that.

Eventually you have to face up to the reality that you chose your partner.



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#### **10. Forgetting that every shot you fire must go through the children first.**

You cannot fight a war without a casualty. Family law is an oxymoron and paradoxical in that it requires us to engage in a very adversarial process that they then judge to be so harmful to the children. Family law then blames you for being part of that process that they also require you to engage in. You have to be smarter than them. The question is how? The devil is always in the detail.

#### **11. Not managing the alienating parent's personality type and method of alienation.**

You have to fight smart. There is no point in engaging in a fight to out-punch your ex-partner. You must understand the type of personality your ex-partner has and in what sort of alienation process they engage. How do you deal with an anxious ex-partner? How do you deal with a controlling ex-partner? How do you deal with an ex-partner who has drug and alcohol issues or diagnosed mental illnesses (which by the way is not enough to render them incapable of being a parent, unless it is extremely severe)? Remember, you may leave the family court with the orders that you want-then you have to enforce them!

#### **12. Attempting to engage and negotiate with an emotional terrorist, an obsessive alienating parent who simply does not stop.**

Extreme and obsessive alienating parents present as very plausible (especially with their legal counsel fronting them) and can sometimes make false accusations that are treated very seriously in our legal system. Trying to negotiate with such emotional terrorists actually gives them power. You have to be smarter than that and lead them into a trap where their terrorism becomes apparent to the court. This allows the court the chance to determine whether this is truly in the best interest of the children.

#### **13. Rejecting your alienated children.**

Being a target parent hurts and hurts badly. It is very easy for you to inadvertently reject your children when they reject you, especially if they are hostile, oppositional and rebellious teenagers. In particular, the literature on parental alienation suggests that alienated children can persecute the target parent, without understanding why, even if later on they may be ashamed of their behaviour. This can be difficult to take, especially when family law places such weight upon their wishes without much regard for how they are formed. However, when you reject them, it simply reinforces the children's view of you, validates the tactics of the alienating parent, invalidates any beneficial recommendations made in family reports and supports the ones made against you.



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On the other hand, you have to appropriately challenge alienating behaviour perpetuated by the children such as when they use adult concepts against you, are blatantly contemptuous and disrespectful towards you because the alienating parent is coaching them. You have to be very tactical and strategic as to when and how you do this.

Staying centred and keeping a space available in you for your children takes enormous resilience, flexibility, and adaptability. You have to become a different person and a different parent.

#### **14. Confusing Letting Go with Giving Up.**

Some target parents are too frightened to stop fighting, too frightened to change the way they fight for their children for fear that they are giving up. Yet giving up differs from letting go in that the former means that despair enters your life as you give up all hope, abandon the space that you hold in yourself for your children. The children have an uncanny way of finding out you have given up, if only because the alienating parent tells them!

Letting go means that you are still there for your children but you open to other possibilities that would not otherwise occur to you while you are engaged in a fight defined by the alienating parent and the family law system.

Giving up means the children no longer have a place in your life and you no longer have a place in theirs. It means that you have become indifferent to them, lost in your own despair. It is now about you and how you feel and no longer about your children. In this space, you no longer have the capacity to bear the pain for your children's sake. Parents who do this sometime say to me that it is just too hard; there is no hope and no point in believing it.

Letting go means that you get on with your life and therefore send their children that powerful message that one day they too can have their own lives and that maybe one day there is a possibility they could meet their parents again, under very different terms with new possibilities.



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**Stan Korosi is an independent counsellor and psychotherapist with post-graduate qualifications in counselling and human services, Emotion Focused Therapy and Existential Therapy. He works in community and private practice, and has a special interest in:**

### **Parental Alienation**

Stan works with stepfamilies, parents and children whose relationships are affected and in some cases severed by high conflict separation and divorce. He has a deep appreciation of these issues from his personal experience, and from research driven by his insider perspective and counselling experience. In particular, Stan is interested in working with parents and step-parents to defuse high conflict relationships with ex-partners, to foster the needs of their children for a relationship with both parents and to reunite parents and children where that bond has been ruptured.

### **Stepfamilies, 'Blended' and 'Patchwork' Families**

Stan is a facilitator with the Step Families Association of Australia (now Drummond Street Family Services). He works with groups and individuals to help them appreciate the unique family and relationship dynamics of the 21<sup>st</sup> century family system-the stepfamily.

### **Sex, Intimacy and the Fragility of Life**

Stan and his associate have developed a differentiated model for relationships based on a dynamic balance between sex and intimacy as proxies for differentiation and fusion. In this model, the client is the client-not the relationship. Approaches to relationship therapy are oriented towards defusing negative interactional patterns and facilitating Bowenian notions of being oneself in a relationship. Stan explores how practitioners' anxiety can limit relationship therapy rather than anxiety between partners enabling new relationship possibilities.

### **Working with Men**

Stan's private practice has a distinct theme for engaging men. Many men can be notoriously reluctant to engage with contemporary counselling services, especially those that tend to rake over old emotional coals and ignore the profound sense of failure and shame that can infuse men. However, not all men are alike and Stan has developed approaches that respond to the unique way in which men engage in their emotional, experiential and spiritual domains. He attracts and engages men in their hyper-individuality and mythic themes of the heroes journey.