



I'm Not Going to Force Them

'I fully support our child/ren having a relationship with their [other parent], but they get anxious at the idea of it and I'm not going to force them, they will reconnect with their [other parent] when they are ready and at their own pace.'

If I had a pound for every time I have heard or read this line or words to the same effect, I'd be sunning myself on a beach in Barbados rather than writing this article. This statement is usually made by a parent that does not want to support contact, but needs professionals involved in a case to believe that it's the children making the decision. Very often, professionals will accept this as the 'Voice of the Child', without even challenging it. Should they?

If a child rejects a parent it's a VERY big deal. Half their parental emotional support is gone, often overnight and often without explanation (or rather without true explanation). But not only that, in most cases that I come into contact with the entire side of the rejected parent's family are also rejected, that alone should raise suspicions but rarely seems to in Family Court situations.

The rejected parent will of course be distraught, and will very likely claim their child/ren are being alienated by the [other parent]. Are they right? How can we tell? Well let's look at what the choice of possibilities are.

If the child/ren are rejecting a parent and it is to be believed that they are suffering an anxiety response causing them to not want to have contact with that parent, then what is causing that anxiety response? It can only be one of the following:

- 1. Harm by the Rejected Parent:** The rejected parent has harmed the child/ren and that harm is sufficient to override the child/ren having formed a primary bond attachment in the years prior.
- 2. Induced Delusion by the Custodial Parent:** The child/ren are suffering a delusion about the parent they are rejecting, influenced by the parent stating they do not wish to 'force' the child/ren to have contact with the other parent.



- 3. Delusion from Other Causes:** The child/ren are suffering a delusion about the parent they are rejecting, but that delusion has come about for reasons other than the parent not wishing to 'force' them to have contact with the other parent.
- 4. Alienation by the Custodial Parent:** The child/ren feel that they must reject the other parent because the parent in who's care they are in either overtly or covertly makes it known that they need to reject their other parent (i.e. they are alienating the child/ren).
- 5. Prevention of Contact:** The parent who wishes not to 'force' the child/ren to have contact is lying, the child/ren do want to spend time with their other parent but are being prevented from doing so.

If **1.** were the reason, it is very likely there will be some form of evidence to corroborate that response from a child. Indeed, even when children are caused harm by a parent, through neglect or intent to cause harm, it is rarely sufficient to override their attachment bond with such a parent, hence Stockholm Syndrome for example, and hence why children removed from abusive parents and into the care system so frequently pine after the parent/s they have been removed from and why those children running away in search of the parent/s they have been removed from is a very common problem in the care system.

If **4.** or **5.** is the reason, the parent stating that they won't 'force' the child/ren to have contact will not admit either of those is the reason, at least never in my experience. But that leaves such a parent in a bind. Possibilities **2.** and **3.** are ultimately the same at a practical level (i.e. either way they need to be diagnosed and treated as a mental/emotional health injury). If the parent not wishing to 'force' the child/ren to have contact is relying on the children's anxiety to be where the responsibility lies, there must be a cause that has amounted to a mental/emotional health injury to the child/ren.

Putting aside whether there is a cause and what the cause may be for a moment, we should really then ask that parent (and any professionals that have become involved), what is the diagnosis and what is the treatment plan?



A parent who genuinely supports the rejected parent maintaining their relationship with the child/ren, would seek a resolution to the problem, they would not leave it to fix itself '*when the child/ren are ready*'. As an analogy, if a child breaks their leg, a parent would rightly be expected to seek medical treatment for the child, they may even need surgery to reset the bone, otherwise the child would suffer pain for longer, and there is a serious risk that if it were to be left to heal '*when its ready*' the child would be left with a life long deformity and all the disadvantages that come with that. So not to seek treatment would rightly be considered neglect, in fact to the extent that social services would highly likely take steps to remove and place into care any child neglected to that extent by their parent/s.

A child suffering an anxiety response is a serious matter, it is a mental/emotional health injury that, if left undiagnosed and untreated for over 6 months, can result in the child developing generalised anxiety disorder or phobia's¹. A parent that is alienating a child and relying on their purported "*anxiety*" will typically resist the child engaging with a professional who could assess the alleged mental/emotional health injury the child is purported to be suffering from. And there comes the bind. Either the parent is neglecting the child by preventing a diagnosis and effective treatment plan, or they are alienating the child.

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References:

1. "*any long-term anxieties (6 months and over) left untreated can develop into a debilitating life-long Generalised Anxiety Disorder or phobia (DSM-5)*" <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK519704/table/ch3.t15/> Generalised Anxiety Disorder