



The Family Tree

Grandparents Apart Self Help Groups

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GRANDPARENTS APART SELF HELP GROUPS

TODAY'S SOLUTIONS FOR TODAY'S PROBLEMS

SUPPORTING FAMILY UNITY

In consultation with the SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Honorary Patrons- Sir Bob Geldof, Phil Gallie, M.S.P., Kenneth J Gibson . Dr. Winnie Ewing. Donald Gorrie M. S. P. Bill Butler M. S. P.

Des Browne M.P. Margaret Jamieson M.S.P. Dorothy Paul.. Nicola Sturgeon M.S.P. Dorothy Grace-Elder.

A non political non profit making organisation **Grandparents Apart Self Help Groups** is staffed by volunteers.

CONTENTS

Section 1	Definitions of Contact
Section 2	Results of Questionnaire – Statistics
Section 3	Analysis of Results
Section 4	Family Mediation, Education & Contact Centres.

Our definition of legal rights of contact for grandparents/grandchildren.

Contact with, not control of, our grandchildren. On going communication by phone, letter etc.
If visits can be arranged even better.

We are proposing presumption of contact NOT rights and responsibilities over the children.

The Scottish Executive's reason for not allowing legal rights seems to be that in the event of separation or divorce a child will have too many people to "visit" leaving them no spare time to be with friends etc. and that Grandparents should not have rights (the Executive makes it look like PRRs) over children. They say it would cause more problems than it would solve.

PRRs is not what is required or asked for. The right of contact is what we asked for and that we don't understand who that is going to cause a problem for. Being able to send your Grandchild a birthday card or present would not generally be considered a problem.

Our main concern is being able to keep in contact with the children and the children know we are there if they need us. Also that we know where they are living and that they are safe. Unless there are genuine safety issues, this is not unreasonable. Laws are already in place to protect the vulnerable.

Ideally grandparents would love to be involved, help out, babysit, comfort and support, but this isn't always possible because of geography. But if geography is the only problem at least they will have some contact and know where the children are.

Grandparents have a lot to offer-love, security, a safety net, stability, time to listen, teach and play games, and of course family history, medical and incidental.

It is a proven fact that when parents separate, the ones who suffer most are the innocent children involved. As it stands the law is allowing the resident parent to wipe out a whole family? If Grandparents feel bereaved and we do, just think how the children must feel.

If there is a drugs issue would it not generally be better for children to remain with family rather than have them taken into care? Social Services need to be answerable to someone and need to communicate with the wider family.

We have the support of much of the general public shown in petitions (3000 for grandparents rights and 3000 on Nov 9th 2004 to comply with Article 8 of the Human Rights Act) **and the cross party support of many MPs and MSPs**, (Honorary Patrons) Can the justice department make such an important decision without taking heed of a wider opinion?.

At our meeting with the Scottish Executive in June, they were unaware of the problems that Grandparents face, obvious by their reaction to what they were being told, despite substantial information being given to the department.

The law should only be used in family disputes in extreme cases (Article 8 of the human rights act) this act also supports Grandparents as part of the family.

However, when the law is used, the current system is far too slow and court orders not enforced. Resident parents are encouraged by the structure of our law, to 'Alienate' family members and mentally abuse children in their 'fight' to win at all costs. This in turn encourages disrespect and selfishness..

Lies breed lies and if it's O.K. for Mum and Dad to tell lies then children will assume it is O.K. for them to do it too and this will follow into adulthood and so the cycle goes on.

The resident parent must be aware from the outset that they will not be allowed to manipulate and flout the law. Their version of events should be backed up by further investigation and discussion with the wider family.

Our suggestions for a commonsense solution.

Change the law to give PRESUMPTION of CONTACT then the resident parent will know ahead of any challenges that they cannot simply wipe out a family from the child's life.

This will encourage those involved to attend mediation/crisis counselling, which will assist in finding middle ground and compromise. This has to be MANDATORY to avoid the manipulative parent being uncooperative. At present, often very little effort is put into this by the controlling parent, meaning little chance of compromise.

Where the adults cannot resolve their differences, Contact Centres should be available so that the children can meet with the other parent or Grandparent without the adults having to come in to contact, saving stress for both adult and child. Suggest 2-3 hours per month minimum. Or, by agreement.

Lawyers should be trained to encourage compromise in family issues, not one-up-man-ship.

The judiciary should be trained to look at the whole picture and what really is "IN THE BEST INTEREST OF THE CHILD" not the best interest of the resident parent and what at first seems the easy way out.

When Legal Right of Contact becomes the norm and everyone is aware of it, fewer disputes will go as far as court. This has to be better for everyone concerned, especially the children.

These solutions will require some funding, but the costs and time saved in Legal Aid and Court costs would soon be recouped. The cost saved in human heartache is not quantifiable and if children grow up to see the adults around them compromising and cooperating, then they in turn will grow up to do the same.

Now that would be "IN THE BEST INTEREST OF THE CHILD".

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Returned forms 107		%Yes	%No	% N/A
Q1	Have you experienced falsified reports from the social services	33.6	42.0	24.4
Q2	Have you been bypassed by social services regards your grandchildren's welfare.	43.5	32.1	24.4
Q3	Have you experienced injustice from the courts.	47.3	27.5	25.2
Q4	Are you having /had problems getting a contact order enforced.	42.0	29.8	28.2
Q5	Have you had a court order against you for no real reason.	26.7	49.6	23.7
Q6	Do/did you find the court system too slow.	60.3	10.7	29.0
Q7	Do/did you find legal advice given you was correct/good	31.3	44.3	24.4
Q8	Do/did you find your grandchildren are/have been brainwashed against you.	78.6	10.7	10.7
Q9	Was/are your grandchildren used as weapons against you in arguments.	79.4	10.7	9.9
Q10	Should mediation be made compulsory in family disputes to encourage compromise.	93.1	5.3	1.5
Q11	Have you experienced one person having ultimate control over a family.	91.6	5.3	3.1
Q12	Do you think family education/contact/mediation centers would help if mandatory.	92.4	5.3	2.3
Q13	Do you think it would be better if disputes could be dealt with outside of courts where possible.	97.7	2.3	0.0
Q14	Do you think that laws are necessary to ensure attempts at family unity have the best chance of success.	95.4	3.8	0.8

Analysis of Questionnaire results – sent to 500 members and contacts.

- Q1 and Q2 Relate to problems with Social Services and show that **76%** of replies had dealt with Social Services and almost half of those had experience of falsified reports, over half felt they had been by-passed in relation to their grandchildren' welfare. This gives rise to great concern for all involved.
- Q3 Of the replies **47%** have experienced what they see as an injustice from the courts.
- Q4 From our replies a **72%** have had court orders granted, yet **over half** have had problems with enforcement. *Refer to Contact Section of our Family Mediation, Education & Contact Centres.*
- Q5 **27%** of replies feel they have had a court order granted against them for no real reason. *Refer to Education section of our Family Mediation, Education & Contact Centres.*
- Q6 **61%** of the replies find our current court system too slow. *Refer to Mediation section of our Family Mediation, Education & Contact Centres.*
- Q7 Asked if problems had been experienced with legal advice. Of the replies **76%** that had sought advice over half of those felt the advice given was wrong or bad.
- Q 8 and Q9 Almost **80%** in each question show suffering to the children because of Alienation / brainwashing and blackmail (mental cruelty). *Refer to our Education section of our Family Mediation, Education & Contact Centres.*
- Q10 Based on their own experience **93%** of replies see Mandatory Mediation as a solution to the problems today. *Refer to our Family Mediation, Education & Contact Centres.*
- Q11 Based on their own experience **92%** of replies have experience of one person having ultimate control over a whole family. *Refer to Education section of our Family Mediation, Education & Contact Centres.*
- Q12 Based on their own experience **93%** of replies think that the Centres would work best if Mandatory. *Refer to our Family Mediation, Education & Contact Centres.*
- Q13 **98%** of replies think it would be better if disputes could be dealt with outside of courts. *Refer to Mediation section of our Family Mediation, Education & Contact Centres.*
- Q14 **96%** of replies want a change in the law to ensure attempts at family unity have the best chance of success. *Refer to our Definitions of Contact and suggestions for Family Mediation, Education & Contact Centres.*

Family Arbitration, Education & Contact Centres

Each centre would be run on a day to day basis by a co-ordinator whose duties would also cover financial organization.

Each area would have a “committee” that would oversee a group of local Centres e.g. Glasgow, Ayrshire, Lanarkshire, West Lothian, Tayside etc. The committee would be a mix of funded employees and volunteers preferably with experience of family problems. Committee members would spend time at each Centre on a regular basis to ensure standards are being met and to pick up on any ideas or improvements that could be passed on to other Centres.

Funded staff required for each Centre (all must have a focus on family unity)

- 1) Co-ordinator – responsible for day to day running and admin duties.
- 2) Educator/counsellor – trained specifically in family issues
- 3) Arbitrator – trained specifically in family issues.
- 4) Creche leader – with appropriate training.

Suggested name – Family Unity Centre/ Family Resource Centre/ Family Care Centre.

Accommodation requirements

Area 1 - Office/Reception/Toilets

Information would be available relating to the Centre. Leaflets on how to help keep families in contact and the benefits of family unity.

Area 2 – Education Room

Where parenting classes would be held on a one-to-one basis or in small groups. We suggest a Grandparent Apart Group Member could be present to assist.
See below our suggested line for education.

Area 3 - Arbitration Room

Where mediation interviews and meetings would take place.
See below our suggested process.

Area 4 – Contact Room/Creche.

Where children could play while adults take part in education or mediation sessions. Where the children would spend time with the non-resident parent or grandparent in a communal play area with a Centre member present. There would be less pressure on adult and child if there were others in the room and the children could play together while slowly gaining confidence with their family member. There should also be a corner where child and adult can have a quiet time with each other if this is appropriate.

This room could also be used in circumstances where a non-resident parent/grandparent has been granted a contact order, but the resident parent has flouted that order. If the resident parent was sentenced to some form of community service as punishment, the children involved could spend time at the Centre, with or without the non-resident parent/grandparent.

Area 5 – Waiting Room.

Where a resident parent can wait if required, while children spend time with the non-resident parent or grandparent. They would perhaps feel easier and more likely to co-operate if they were on hand, should any problem arise.

Additional points –

- 1) It may also be possible to find some way for violent partners to spend time with their children, if the child's safety is not at risk, without the adults coming into contact
- 2) All services need to be available in the evenings or weekends to suit working family members.
- 3) Timescale limits must be set down and adhered to so that the problems don't drag on for months or even years because of one party's lack of co-operation.
Time is of the essence to prevent "Alienation Syndrome".
- 4) Some form of enforcement is required where parties have reached agreement, so that the agreement is not breached,
- 5) Mediation must be mandatory to give family unity the best possible chance for the benefit of the children.
- 6) Before legal aid is granted or a court date arranged both parties involved would have to show evidence that attempts at mediation and conciliation had failed, perhaps in the form of a report from the Centre.

This would have three main advantages as it would save immense amounts of funds and speed up court processes because there would be less cases going to court and far fewer claims for legal aid. Last but not least it would be much less stressful for all involved, most importantly the children.
- 7) The Centre must be in a pleasant, safe environment. It must be welcoming to encourage people to come forward for help. It should be well maintained and presentable.
- 8) There would be no Social Services control or involvement. A social worker may be assigned to bring a child to have contact with a relative.
- 9) A huge publicity campaign must be a priority to ensure everyone knows about these Centres, not just families with problems. People must know about them so that they will come at the earliest opportunity before too much damage is done to the family

Education

At Family classes parents would learn the benefits of family unity and how the child is affected by an adult's behaviour.

Suggestions and discussions about how compromise can be achieved in less than perfect circumstances. Adults need not agree with each other, but can still find middle ground for the benefit of the children, because the children are the main concern of both parties.

It would be explained that in general circumstances it is not a benefit for the child to be denied contact with non-resident parent or extended family

New partners need to be helped to understand that children involved already have a relationship with family members and the damage it causes them to suddenly be denied contact.

Education to prevent "Alienation Syndrome" is paramount.

Steps to family unity –

- 1) Remember first and foremost this process is for the benefit of the children and family unity
- 2) Building bridges is easier than bulldozing.
- 3) Remember the child/ren is the responsibility of the person with PRRs and they must be allowed that privilege.
- 4) The mother may be new to motherhood and can be very sensitive. She must be encouraged to gain confidence.
- 5) Grandparents should not present "got the T-Shirt, saw the movie" attitude.
- 6) Grandparents may have to learn to take a back seat and present an attitude of friendship rather than criticism. Be prepared to muck in when required, but step back when not.
- 7) New partners need to be guided how to deal with and accept existing family members.
- 8) Learn the principle of co-operation, not manipulation. Earn what is expected of each of you in these roles, how not to step over the line.
- 9) If you are interested in being in your children/grandchildren's lives and improving their lives, be prepared to attend arbitration and education groups.
- 10) Be prepared to talk about the problems you are experiencing and listen to how other people cope. Be willing to learn from others
- 11) Be patient, results may not happen overnight, but with effort they will.
- 12) Above all, you want to be proud of your family, so you must work to achieve that as a family.

Arbitration

The first meeting should take place within a minimum timescale e.g. two weeks from first request. Time is of the essence,

First meeting – non resident parent/grandparent

Discuss how the dispute has arisen and what common ground exists. Also what compromise the adult is prepared to make to enable improvements in the relationship, even if it is just “to agree to disagree” and move forward. The Arbitrator would explain the harm disputes do emotionally to the innocent children involved and emphasize that the child’s needs are paramount.

Second meeting – resident parent (same week)

Same content as above.

Third meeting – non-resident parent/grandparent (following week)

Discuss any common ground found from the initial meeting and put forward any suggestions for compromise to hopefully avoid confrontations when the two parties meet. Explain that this is the time to move forward and that the past should perhaps stay in the past.

Fourth meeting – resident parent (same week as third meeting)

Same as above.

Fifth meeting - all parties (within one month of initial request)

To work out a suitable contact relationship which will enable communication and cooperation in the best interest of the child.

Subsequent meetings may be required at each stage, but must not be used as a delaying tactic.

A follow up visit/report may be a good idea to check no additional help is required.

Where agreements cannot be reached, arrangements should be made for contact via the contact area of the Centre to avoid any further separation.

GRANDPARENTS APART SELF HELP GROUPS

Bringing Families Together

Supporting Family Unity



The Family Tree

PARENTS

IS SOMETHING MISSING IN YOUR CHILD'S LIFE ?

Have you –

Fallen out with your partner / parents / parents or in-laws?

Have you –

Refused your children the right to see or visit their parent or grandparents?

Have you –

Dug your heels in, exercising all the 'power' over everyone and feeling good?

Do you –

'Alienate' (brainwash) your children to dislike their parent or grandparent, then say that it's the children who don't want to see them?

Do you –

Use your children as weapons to win an argument with their parent or grandparent?

Do you –

Wonder why as your children get older, how disrespectful they've become?

Do you –

Know that Nursery and Primary school children talk about their family as part of their schooling? Is yours the odd one out when they have nothing to say?

Do you –

Hate the parent or grandparent so much that that you are willing to put the child and yourself through this emotional hell?

Do you –

Know this is child abuse, that the children suffer most in the long run?

Are you –

Horrified by this? Are you guilty without realising it?

ADVICE IS AVAILABLE HERE – JUST ASK