

## A Family's Heartbreak: A parent's introduction to Parental Alienation

Michael Jeffries and Dr Joel Davies

A unique insight into the less known effects of divorce before the legal process sets in, this book focuses on the controversial phenomenon that is Parental Alienation; a phenomenon that has not yet been recognised by the medical profession but one which nevertheless is gaining ground in both the United States and Great Britain and acquiring an infamous reputation as conflict's biggest ally.

Michael Jeffries together with Dr Joel Davies, a practicing psychotherapist co-author this work, which at its heart is about Michael's family and what happened to it when divorce became inevitable. Michael outlines some of the symptoms of PA into his own story as an illustration of the way the conflict surfaces and how it works to undermine the family unit and alter the emotional development of our children forever. A journalist by profession, Michael tells his story with factual clarity coupled with a certain bias: the story is told by and large from his own perspective.

Despite the angle at which we enter the story, there is a concerted effort to keep the recollection of events as fair and as impartial as possible although you are left wondering whether the most vulnerable member of the family, Michael's wife, a victim of her own childhood, was at any point treated with the compassion she needed to address her own conduct and regain the opportunity to have a healthy relationship with her children. The book is in its own way a pessimistic view of a mother in turmoil and though the anger and frustration present in this book are understandable and create an enormous amount of empathy, the one chasm present relates to the very limited focus on how to resolve the alienating parent's pain, no mean feat when considering the barriers involved which number among them a lack of awareness of the impact of their conduct and a distinct refusal to take responsibility for their part in the conflict. Yet, the sequence of events that unfold are told with great sensitivity and there is clearly a desire to come to terms with an emotional minefield, aggravated by a failing legal system, dispassionate professionals and the constant tug of war between adversarial and collaborative methods both vying for supremacy inside a system that rewards shortcuts, not chivalry.

The tragedy told in this book is underscored with wry humour and well placed heartfelt home truths that resonate throughout the book from the description of unconditional love and its significance when caring for our children to the fleeting but powerful mention of the importance of even a small child's autonomy, which is so often overlooked in a world where law and conventional psychiatry dominate this field of family care. Whether you find yourself laughing at the Banana Schedule or intrigued by the solutions Michael offers, A Family's Heartbreak is a must read: with startling similarities between the UK and US family law courts, you will find yourself asking whether our current understanding of the human condition needs to be revised and more poignant still, whether our courts hold a viable place in the determination of a family's future.