

In my personal situation it appears that my 9 and 11 year old stepsons are losing their ability to identify with my husband and his family. The children were separated from their father at ages 2 and 4 at their mother's choice. This separation is a physical one of 1500km and the only contact my husband has is twice a year visits and twice a week phone calls if he is lucky. The children have very limited, in some instances nil, contact with their paternal Grandfather, Aunts, Uncles and Cousins. My husband pays in excess of \$1,000 per month in child support and has done since the day his ex-wife removed the children from their family home. My stepsons have on occasion made comments like "mum owns me" or "I belong to mum". Unfortunately, in these instances the only value that the children place on themselves is a possession of their mothers.

Submission No: 923

(a)(i) Fundamentally, where there is no proven history of abuse, children should spend equal amounts of time with both parents post separation. To ascertain whether claims of abuse are actual or perceived it should be mandatory for the child to be undergone independent counselling.

Post separation abuse of children can occur when one parent treats the ex-spouse badly either physically or mentally via the children. In such a way that a parent may make comments regarding the other parent and the children are too young to psychologically handle or recognise such abuse. If children receive post separation counselling they may then be more prepared for such abuse in such a way that they are more able to recognise it and be able to seek help from specialists/adults/Teachers.

When children spend the majority of time with one parent they mimic/learn the traits/behaviours of that parent. Unfortunately, in some cases this means that the children are unable to fully develop their potential because they are influenced by only one parent and one extended family. They do not get the chance to identify with the displaced parent and I believe that this also makes it hard for the child to form a strong relationship with the displaced parent.

If children receive post separation counselling they may then be more prepared for such abuse in such a way that they are more able to recognise it and be able to seek help from specialists/adults/Teachers.

(a) (ii) Considering my comments above I believe that the children have a right to know their extended family particularly Grandparents. I believe that if one parent chooses to have sole responsibility of the children then it is their responsibility to ensure that Grandparents, Aunts, Uncles and Cousins of the displaced parent are still a part of the child's life. I believe this gives the children a sense of belonging by being able to identify with people who may look like them etc. For the children it means a greater support network throughout their lives.

(b) The Child Support System is flawed in a similar fashion to Centrelink payments. In such that either parent, resident or displaced, can still work cash in hand or live in a new de-facto relationship and not be honest about income. I believe that displaced Child Support Paying parents are entitled to know how payments are being spent. This receiving parent needs to prove that the money is being spent on the children. I believe that this is the paying parent's right, particularly when the children are handed over for contact visits without suitable clothing, footwear or medical treatment. Additionally, it should not be up to the receiving parent to tell CSA that items purchased or medical treatment were not necessary for the paying parent to receive money back from CSA. Unfortunately, some receiving parents treat their children like income bearing assets but don't spend the necessary funds (Child Support payments) in maintaining that asset.

I also believe that if a parent does not pay Child Support through negligence or by choosing to go on the dole that this is not in the interests of the child, does not benefit the child and is actually abuse toward the child. In these instances the resident parent has the right to limit contact particularly where expenses are involved.

BERNARDINE SYMSS, 63 Templeton Cres, Douglas Qld 4814

Ph: [REDACTED] - [REDACTED]