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## **Introduction and Curriculum Links**

This resource pack is aimed at teachers and students of Drama, Theatre Studies, English (GCSE & A level) and Performing Arts National Diploma: Improvisation, Devising, especially issue based work, Scriptwriting, Contemporary Theatre and Performing Arts in Context. Due to the nature of the material in the play, we recommend it to students aged 15+.

Given the themes in the play it will also be of interest to students and teachers of Citizenship and PHSE.

The interviews with the artistic team give insights into the writing and directing processes as well as illuminating the themes in the play as they see them.

The exploration of some of the themes through essays, images and media articles both informs and encourages discussion & debate.

There are exercises at the end of each section guiding further discussion, improvisation and creative writing.

Further reading encourages work beyond the classroom.

YWP information explains how our department operates and how students aged 13-25 can submit scripts or join our writers' groups.

## Photograph from the Dress Rehearsal



*Ben Miles (Man) and Adam Arnold (Child)*

## **Interview with Mike Bartlett, playwright**

### **Describe your writing process**

I don't know if I have a process. I read a lot of newspapers, watch a lot of television news, examine my own feelings and experiences and try to think about the world as much as possible. I am looking for subjects where I am not immediately sure what I think about them, where there is a problem or a paradox or something missing in the argument that is being presented. With reference to *My Child*, one of the starting points was the assumption by nearly everyone that striving for success and money, and being given a choice over every single aspect of one's life is intrinsically and without reservation a good thing. And that being 'good' means being successful, rather than living according to a set of values or ethics. I was interested in what we lose when we live simply through self-interest and freedom of choice.

These thoughts and subjects hang around for a long time, as I try to work them out and then, alongside that, I'm thinking about form – what is interesting? What haven't I seen on stage? What will engage a sophisticated, quick, intelligent, fun-loving audience? Hopefully, at this point, the two come together – a form appears that immediately demands the content, or vice-versa. After that it is a case of writing freely and quite quickly, knowing that I'll come back and edit afterwards. I then read and cut, and re-read and re-write the whole play.

### **What are the main themes in the play?**

The play is about what it means to be a good man and what it means to be good father. As I mentioned above, it is also about the concept of choice and success, and the way that we choose to live our lives. It is also about how within families we can be at our most manipulative, cruel and violent to the people we love.

### **What interests you about these?**

I think, generally speaking, we have little sense of duty left. Less and less people are living their lives according to a set of principals coming from religion, society, politics, or ethics. Instead we decide what is best in a given situation, and often we look after ourselves first. I'm also interested in the games we play with people we love, and how traits and behaviours are passed down from one generation to the next; the things we choose to do differently to our parents, and the things it seems we cannot escape.

### **Did you do any research?**

No. Only in terms of things I had picked up before writing the play – but this was more general reading.

### **What do you want the audience to leave talking about?**

I would like them to be talking about the world, about their families, about the characters and what they would do. I don't really mind, as long as the world of the play has engaged them.

### **How do you hope it will affect the audience?**

I hope they have a good time and go on a journey, both with the characters in the story and in terms of their own emotions. I hope the play surprises them.

**How relevant is it to a young audience? Is there an age limit?**

I think the play is relevant to anyone that has a family. It is a fast-moving play with short scenes and strong conflict – much like a lot of good television. But the difference with this is that the audience are only a metre or two away from the action and in the same space. I am so often bored in the theatre and I hope there won't be a moment in the play where there's a chance for that to happen.

The play has strong language, so it's probably not suitable for under 12's.

**Why did you become a playwright? Describe your journey.**

I acted at school and did a bit of direction. I think I liked it then because it was really a social thing where you made friends (and met lots of girls!), but I found I actually loved being on stage telling a story. Then I directed a couple of plays and found that was even better because you didn't have to learn lines and you got to have a say in everything – casting, lighting, design, etc. I did English and Theatre Studies at university where I still wanted to be a director, but I couldn't find many plays that I wanted to do, so I wrote a few of my own. I then came out of university and tried to start a career as a director, but didn't get any work, and wrote a play instead, called *Not Talking*. This suddenly meant I was going to meetings, and I did the YWP course.

I realised through the course and the meetings that actually I loved writing for the stage. I didn't particularly want the attention of acting any more (and I wasn't very good at it), or the responsibility of a director, but I did want to find ways to engage a group of people together in a dialogue about the world. I wanted people to come out of their homes and come together and enjoy an evening of something interesting, unusual and unclear. We are bombarded with opinion these days and told we must know what we think, so we are rarely given an opportunity to feel and question and think freely. I think that's sort of what theatre is – thinking and feeling together in public.

**Who/what are your influences – in and beyond theatre?**

Shakespeare, Chekhov, Samuel Beckett, *Forced Entertainment*, Tony Kushner, Edward Albee, David Grieg and recently Debbie Tucker Green and Caryl Churchill. A brilliant book called *Play in a Godless World* by Catherine Bates. Keith Johnstone's books *Impro* and *Impro for Storytellers*.

## Education Ideas (I)

A method Mike uses both as a warm up and also to use as inspiration is to write lists.

You must be spontaneous, write fast & only for say 1 minute per list.

You can make up your own lists. Here are some ideas:

51 things that have happened to you in your life.

20 things that you saw on the way here today.

What makes you angry?

What makes you sad?

What makes you happy?

What makes you ashamed?

20 things you would not want to lose?

20 ways you might lose those things.

Ways to get them back.

Choose one of the things you don't want to lose and write a scene where A has lost it and B tries to help them to get it back

## Research images



***"Mum. Can we go to Starbucks? I want a muffin"***



***"He's got a PS3"***



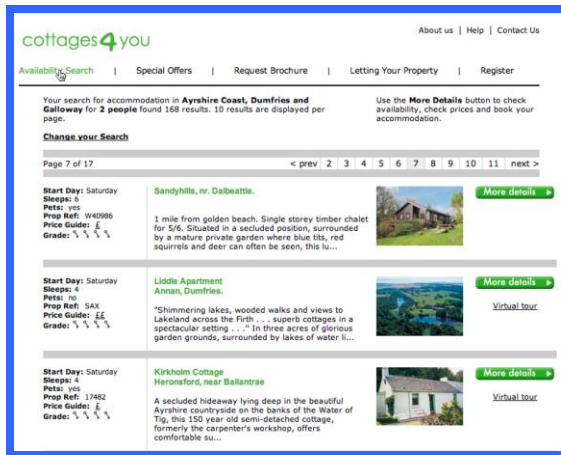
***"Can I buy you a drink?"***



***"Excuse me. Is this a Circle Line train?"***



***"I thought you liked wrestling"***



***"I checked your computer and found all the Scottish houses you were trying to book"***



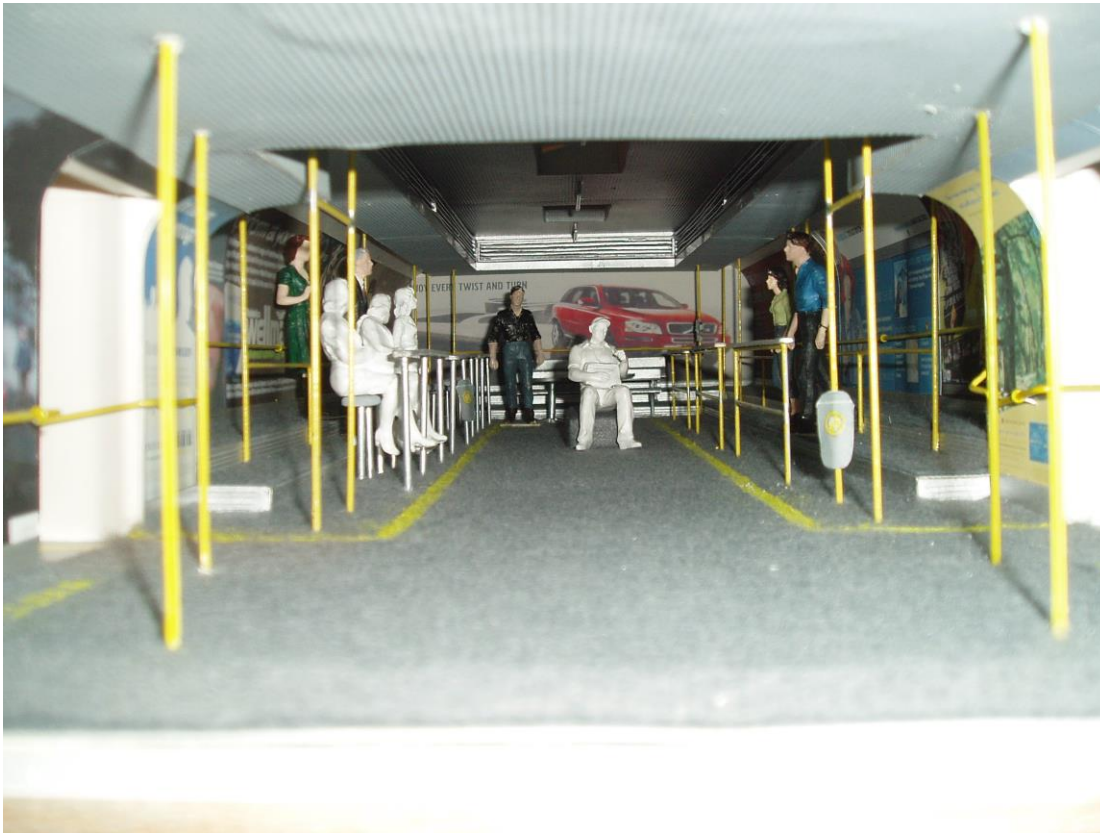
***"Cows are normally so... placid"***



***"You know they're buying a house... Notting Hill... It's got a roof terrace"***



**Image of the set's model box, designed by Miriam Buether**



## **Interview with director Sacha Wares**

### **Why did you choose to direct this play?**

I first read *My Child* last autumn when Mike Bartlett submitted it for the Young Writer's Festival. I was so moved by the writing and immediately felt that it was a story I could connect with emotionally. I was incredibly impressed by the economy of the writing, the fluidity of the form, and the rhythms of the language. I was also very excited by the challenge presented by the last scene of the play. The last few moments of the drama are incredibly physical and demand inventive and imaginative staging solutions. When I first read the play I couldn't really imagine how this might be done, and I felt excited by the prospect of looking for a way.

### **What is it about?**

The play follows the story of a man in a state of crisis. His marriage is over and he is desperate to try and stay in contact with his young son. His former wife believes he is an inadequate father and is determined to push him out of her life as well as her son's. As the man struggles to work out what to do, he finds himself faced with a moral dilemma – whether to stay true to his beliefs about what a good father should be (beliefs that he has inherited from his own parents) or to try and become the kind of man his ex-wife and son admire.

### **What are the themes?**

There are many themes in the play. Primarily, I would say the play explores how the break up of family affects everyone involved and how patterns of behaviour and cycles of manipulation are passed down through generations. It also asks big questions about what values might be getting lost in our increasingly aspirational, success-driven society and whether it is right to let those values die.

### **What interests you about these themes?**

Like so many people, I come from a family that became splintered after a divorce. So, on a personal level, I connect very strongly with the story and what it says about the way both adults and children resort to complex manipulation tactics in times of emotional crisis. I am also very drawn to the central question in the play about what constitutes the best way to survive in a success-driven culture. We are all faced every day with choices about how to live and for me it is very interesting to work on a play that gets to the heart of this debate and asks us to really think about the values we hold.

### **What preparation have you done?**

My main preparation for this play has involved lengthy discussions with the playwright about how he sees the play, what his inspirations were, what he wants the audience to feel, and what he believes the dramatic action is scene by scene, line by line. In addition, I have researched key aspects of the story in a variety of ways: interviewing experts, going on 'people-watching' expeditions, and fact-finding over the internet. Here are a few examples:

- I interviewed a doctor, as well as carers who work with the elderly, about the illness that affects the Older Woman character.
- Using the internet, I researched the procedure of DNA testing that the father and the child undergo.

- I spent time in estate agents in Notting Hill finding out about property prices and looking at the people who - like the characters in the play - are in the process of buying property in this area of London.
- I also spent an afternoon in Hamleys watching young people playing on the new PS3, since this is an object the child in the play is very keen to own, and I wanted to find out more about what games he might be playing with his friends at school.

To research ideas for the set design, myself and the designer, Miriam Buether, spent a lot of time in the different locations mentioned in the play, taking photographs of people and places which we then used as the basis for the set design. The design incorporates a lot of advertising images and for two months before I went into rehearsals I carried a camera everywhere I went, taking pictures of all the different posters I saw on the street and the tube. This was a really interesting part of the process. On a practical level it helped me compile a list of the adverts we could use in the production, while also making me acutely aware of how powerfully our society is influenced by advertising.

### **What methods will you use in rehearsal? Describe your working process.**

Games will be a really important part of the rehearsal process for this play, since all of the characters are involved in complex game-playing with each other, and it will be really important for the actors to find this spirit of 'play' if the production is to communicate an exciting, live feeling of risk.

This first week has been spent playing two different rehearsal games. The first involves the actors making decisions about where they can score points against each other in each of the scenes. It's a fun game in which the actors place stickers on each other each time they think they have scored a 'point' in the argument, counting them up at the end to see who comes out best and worst in each scene. The second exercise is a very physical one in which the actors have to decide whether they are 'pushing' or 'pulling' each other on each of their lines. The game helps the actors be specific about what they are playing at every moment, and also creates a real physical intimacy and sense of daring within the company.

This week we also began physical training for the two actors who will perform the violent fight. Our choreographer arrived from Paris and spent an afternoon teaching the two actors how to fall safely, how to make violent physical contact without hurting one another, and how to build their strength and stamina. Since then, the two actors have trained for an hour and a quarter everyday, so that when we come to choreograph the fight they will be physically prepared to do it.

### **What challenges might you face?**

This play presents two especially big challenges. The first is that, because of the huge age range of the cast, I need to try and find a way of working that is useful and effective for a group of performers with vastly differing levels of experience. The second concerns the stage violence and the necessity to find a physical language that will communicate the real ferocity of the drama, while also ensuring the physical safety of the performers and the audience in a very intimate, enclosed space.

### **What do you want the audience to leave talking about?**

What is particularly exciting about this play is that there are no 'goodies' and no 'baddies'. Nothing is simple, and the way the story is told forces the audience to reassess what they think about the characters all the time, so that our sympathies are constantly shifting. Ideally, I'd like the audience to leave the play debating with themselves and one another about the choices each of the characters make – asking what they might have done differently or better to change the painful outcome.

**Describe your journey in becoming a director.**

When I left school I went to America for a summer to work as an apprentice in a theatre festival. I was there for three months, working in all the different departments of the theatre and learning what happens in a professional theatre environment. I then went to QMW College London University/ Central School of Speech and Drama to do an English and Drama degree. The course was partly practical and partly academic. On the practical side, I majored in stage design. On leaving University, I spent some time directing in fringe theatres, and also working part time as senior script reader for the National Theatre. I then did a year as trainee director at the Donmar Warehouse, learning from the rehearsal processes of experienced directors like Sam Mendes. When I left the Donmar I began directing at a professional level (firstly at the Bush, then the Gate, Sheffield Crucible and the Royal Court), while also continuing to script read for the National Theatre and Royal Court. After a few years of working, I felt I wanted to broaden my influences more, and so I applied for a bursary to spend some time researching contemporary theatre practices in Europe. I travelled for three months visiting ten European countries, seeing over 80 plays. Subsequently, I spent some time researching in the archive at Odin Teatret in Denmark, before returning to London and continuing my work as a theatre director here.

**Who/what are your influences in & beyond theatre?**

I have been influenced by a number of European theatre directors and dance choreographers – not directly in terms of their aesthetics, but the way each of them has striven to find their own individual voices as artists. Some directors I particular admire are: Ariane Mnouchkine in Paris, Frank Castorf, Christoph Marthaler, and Christoph Schlingensiefel at the Volksbuehne in Berlin, and Romeo Castellucci in Italy. Choreographers whose work has had a profound impact on me include Pina Bausch (Germany), Alain Platel (Belgium), and William Forsythe (Germany). I also have huge admiration for British writers Caryl Churchill and Debbie Tucker Green, and director Simon McBurney. These artists all work in very different ways from each other, but have in common a determination to stay true to their own vision of what theatre or dance is, to give expression in their own original way of seeing the world, and to constantly push themselves to make new discoveries about the field they work in. The majority of them also create work that is politically engaged, asking profound questions about the world we live in now.

Whenever I see their work, I am reminded of the importance of courage in making theatre and the fact that imitation is pointless - the main thing to aim for is the development of one's own distinctive taste, opinions, skills, and vision.

## Education Ideas (2)

Try the games used in the rehearsal room:

1. Select a scene for students/actors to run through and get a feeling for. Then they repeat the scene making decisions about where they think their character can score a point against the other character. The actors place stickers on each other each time they think they have scored a 'point' in the argument, counting them up at the end to see who comes out best and worst in each scene.
2. The second exercise is a very physical one in which the actors have to decide whether they are 'pushing' or 'pulling' each other on each of their lines. The game helps the actors be specific about what they are playing at every moment, and also creates a real physical intimacy and sense of daring within the company.
3. After the games run the scenes again and see what affect they have had.

## Notes from rehearsal: choreography of the fight, 17 April 2007

Choreographer	<b>Juha</b> Marsalo
Actors	<b>Ben</b> Miles, <b>Adam</b> Arnold
Stage Manager (SM)	<b>Tamara</b> Albachari
Director	<b>Sacha</b> Wares (SW)
Writer	<b>Mike</b> Bartlett

Adam who plays Karl says we don't just want to present good guy/bad guy. The character is not evil. It's a tricky situation, he's the step dad. Juha says – he is aggressive.

They start to warm up on the floor. They circle their bodies and practise rolling and getting up smoothly. Juha: think of being in a small bed lying on your side and rolling over. Keep your body in a tight ball – that's the strength - then spring out onto your back, then in again. The rolling sometimes looks like break dancing and demands a lot of physical strength. Juha: all the movement has to be physical. There is difficulty getting up and you have to make a decision but keep it physical. Juha to Ben: it's important you get up then fall. Don't stay on the floor too long.

Ben is bruised from yesterday's fight rehearsal. Juha: it won't get better now because you are going to continue to work on the same places. It will eventually, you won't die. Both the actors arrange to have massages to aid the process.

SM, Tamara suggests to Juha that they put the movements together to show Sacha in the afternoon. All discuss the series of movements in relation to the text: get up, push/punch, fall down, get up etc. The boy says 'Dad stop it'. Juha doesn't believe that would make the Dad get up. SM says the boy means he wants Dad to do something. Ben says his character doesn't want to fight but needs to. He has the urge but he has a conscience.

Debate whether Karl stays still in centre or moves. Juha tells Adam not to be too mean – avoid, contain, you don't want to kill him. Juha: it has to be as focussed as when you action your lines. It goes together with how you do it.

They keep repeating the sequence up to the boy's line. Juha doesn't think it's right that the Dad gets up immediately. He wonders if he would get up, face Karl and then attack. Ben thinks that if Mike had wanted that he would have written it in the text because he is so specific. SM helps to clarify the text. They try again and practise a kick at this point.

Sacha and Mike arrive. (They have been working on the difficult incontinence scene with the other actors) SW is very clear: when the Dad's rage comes, it comes. If he waits he will lose it, he'll be inhibited because of his conscience. Juha: but the energy level is already high. We need to increase the level. SW: yes it needs to raise. Juha: I think the kick will work. SW: I see (but I'm open) push, push, push, explosion. It's important the child is not near. If Dad sees him it will stop him in his rage. The child is a spectator rather than participant. Also Karl is not a superhero. Good if the movement happens *across* the space as well as *along*. Juha: if this was really rock and roll, I would directly dive (towards the audience.)

SW shows photographs of the set. It is decided that Ben can kick off posts that will form part of the set. SW confirms that sightlines to the floor are poor so best that Ben is up mostly. Mike: by this point it's not about

Karl, its blind rage and Karl should not be involved in the fight at this point. We see the same fight again but now he becomes a spectator.

SW: what I want us to register is that it goes on longer than a usual exciting theatre moment. I want it to repeat and to show the futility and that he's tired. The interesting focus is the energy that is being spent.



*Adam Arnold (Child) and Ben Miles (Ben) during the choreography of the fight scene*

**Although it is unlikely that the character, Man, would have contacted an organisation such as Fathers 4 Justice, the following information gives some insight into the difficulties some fathers have to deal with when facing custodial cases. It also shows how the organisation operates.**

## **Fathers 4 Justice**

### **Origins**

**Fathers 4 Justice (or F4J)** began as a fathers' rights organization in the United Kingdom. It disbanded in January 2006, following reports of an alleged plot by members to kidnap the son of Prime Minister Tony Blair. However on May 20th 2006 the UK Fathers 4 Justice returned.

It was founded by Matt O'Connor, a marketing consultant and father of three. O'Connor had become incensed with family law after a court temporarily barred him from seeing his two young sons outside of a contact centre, following separation from his wife in 2000. On 17 December 2002, O'Connor and a small group of supporters staged their first protest by storming the Royal Courts of Justice dressed as Father Christmas. In January 2003 O'Connor officially founded Fathers 4 Justice. Initially the group targeted the homes of family court judges and family lawyers' homes and offices with traditional protests.

From the onset, they championed the cause of equal parenting, family law reform and equal contact for divorced parents with children. F4J protestors interrupted the UK national lottery draw in May 2006. F4J is well-known for its campaigning techniques of dramatic protest stunts, usually dressed as comic book superheroes and frequently scaling public buildings, bridges and monuments. However, some members of F4J have a documented history of intimidating attacks on CAFCASS and court staff.

### **Activities**

On 21 October 2003, campaigners Eddie Gorecki and Jolly Stanesby scaled the Royal Courts of Justice, dressed respectively as Batman and Robin. The following day, the group's members rallied through London around a military tank in solidarity with Gorecki and Stanesby.

A significant escalation in the protesting style occurred nine days later when group member David Chick scaled a 120 foot crane near Tower Bridge, London dressed as Spider-Man. The Metropolitan Police set up a cordon around the area that disrupted traffic through some of East London for several days.<sup>[3]</sup> Chick was subsequently cleared<sup>[4]</sup> and published a ghost-written autobiography in February 2006.

F4J's campaigning policy has always been that its organised publicity stunts and protests should be humorous, non-violent, and ultimately harmless. The group advocated non-violent protests aiming to cause disruption rather than damage. The choice of the superhero costumes was based on the claim that "fathers have the role of superhero in the lives of children". Protests have not been restricted simply to fathers as female supporters have adopted similar disguises and joined in the protests.

On May 20, 2006, a group of Fathers 4 Justice campaigners interrupted the broadcast of the UK National Lottery programme on BBC One, delaying it for a few minutes before the live draw was resumed.



On Sunday December 10, 2006 Fathers-4-Justice US staged a re-enactment of the Boston Tea Party, titled the 'Boston "Custo-Tea" Party' in protest at perceived corruption in the family court system in which lawyers provoke battles between parents over custody of children for profit.



### **Flour bombing**

On 19 May 2004, a major alert was caused when two members of the group threw purple flour bombs at Tony Blair during Prime Minister's Questions at the House of Commons. This protest, along with a purple powder attack on the Liberal Democrat candidate in the 2004 Hartlepool by-election, Jody Dunn, appeared to signal a departure from the group's declared profession of nonviolence. Following the House of Commons incident The Times wrote that the group "has succeeded in becoming the most prominent guerrilla pressure group in Britain ... within eighteen months of its founding."

### **Internal strife**

Shortly after the May 2005 election, Matt O'Connor called a truce with CAFCASS, the government body responsible for providing reports on the suitability of non-resident parent contact. In June 2005 a breakaway group was formed, the 'Real Fathers For Justice'. Disillusioned with F4J founder Matt O'Connor, the rebels called for democratic control of the pressure group and financial accountability. Since its formation the group has continued a campaign of direct action. On 6 February 2006 activist Mike Downes pelted education secretary Ruth Kelly with an egg outside Salford Magistrates Court. In April 2006 two of their members climbed onto Westminster Abbey, with a dummy attached to a cross. In May 2006 activist Andrew Tindale handcuffed himself to Minister Beverly Hughes at the G-Mex Centre in Manchester. In July two activists ran onto the centre court at Wimbledon during the quarter final match between Roger Federer and Mario Ancic. The pair wore t-shirts with the Wimbledon logo and the slogan "Family Law: It's a Racket". Carrying Rackets and tennis balls, one of them managed to serve a ball at the Royal Box before being led away by security. The stunt prompted an announcement by Wimbledon that they may have to increase security.

In November 2005, the group suffered further negative publicity when the prime-time ITV programme *Tonight With Trevor McDonald* exposed some of its members as violent and obnoxious in their behaviour. However, it was claimed that these were never members in the first place and the program gave no right to reply. Some members were expelled but the organisation defended its position and attacked the documentary. On 23 November 2005, Fathers 4 Justice ended its truce with CAFCASS and the Child Support Agency, calling for a public inquiry into family law.

### **F4J temporarily disbands**

During January 2006 the British newspaper The Sun published a story in which it claimed that members on the fringes of Fathers 4 Justice planned to kidnap Leo Blair, the young son of Prime Minister Tony Blair 'for a few hours as a symbolic gesture'. The Police said that they were not aware of such a plan, but probably it had never got beyond 'the chattering stage'. Downing Street refused to confirm or deny the existence of a plot as it does not comment on matters concerning the Prime Minister's children. But they did manage to release an image to the Press as soon as the story broke.

Fathers 4 Justice founder Matt O'Connor condemned the alleged action and threatened to shut down the campaign. Within days, Fathers 4 Justice had been disbanded. However, an F4J splinter group, the 'Real F4J', continued operating. On April 13, 2006, Maundy Thursday, two members climbed 40 feet up Westminster Abbey with a dummy on a cross, claiming that fathers are being "crucified" in the courts over access to their children.

### **Impact**

Fathers 4 Justice's main impact remains upon media coverage and legal treatment of fathers' rights issues in the UK. The use of high-profile and disruptive stunts has garnered significant UK media coverage. Matt O'Connor has sold the rights to his story to Harbour Pictures written by Shameless writer Danny Brocklehurst. A significant, unintended result of the F4J campaign has been the exposure of flaws in security at high profile British institutions such as Buckingham Palace and the House of Commons, at a time when the British government is particularly concerned with the threat of terror attacks by al-Qaeda-affiliated groups.

Donations to the group went to a non-profit limited company owned by O'Connor. F4J does not have charitable status, but in June 2005 the group launched a related charitable foundation, Fathers 4 Justice Foundation, to work with young offenders from fatherless families.

### **Criticism (also see following pages)**

Critics of the organisation claim that the inequalities which F4J claim to fight against are exaggerated. For example, one of the primary goals of F4J is to establish equal parenting rights after divorce, claiming that in 40% of family court cases the father is denied or is restricted in contact with their children.

Often opponents and supporters appear to inhabit completely different worlds. Court staff and supporters cite the 'best interest of the child' principle, and point out that in the majority of cases contact orders are made. F4J activists frequently object per se to attending court in order to be granted contact with their children, to contact with their children being constrained by legal order and promote the adoption of an assumption of 50/50 parenting. Defenders of the status quo hold that the 'best interests' of the child must be paramount, and that on occasions this will mean limiting the access of an absent parent to their children. Other critics have challenged that while there are occasions that fathers are prevented from seeing their

children, there are many other cases of absent parents failing to maintain contact even when allowed by the courts, or making agreed maintenance payments.

Fathers For Justice claim that the good intention of lawmakers (The Children Act was intended to make child contact matter easier) has been undone by an institutionalised sexism which discriminates against fathers. Critics counter that judges are required to operate under a "presumption of contact" principle in family courts which forces them to provide, whenever possible, contact between fathers and their children. Mainstream media outlets such as the terrestrial television channels have gone as far as to attack this principle (which is in any event over-riden by the 'best interest' mantra) for being biased in favour of men, as they say it has led to children being forced to see fathers who have abused them in the past.

Members of the group are also alleged to have conducted a variety of intimidating attacks in order to terrorise court staff and family lawyers. These attacks include throwing purple (the group's colour) paint on the outside of CAFCASS buildings, pushing rotten meat/fish through letterboxes, sending fake bombs, hate mail and verbal abuse. NAPO (the union for CAFCASS staff) has compiled a file of the incidents. Fathers 4 Justice have admitted to incidents involving CAFCASS property but deny involvement in the harassment of individuals. (see: fraught nature of protest, above) During protests outside CAFCASS offices individual case workers were identified by name in a similar style to animal rights protesters. One office was invaded by F4J members who tied up an employee said to suffer from a heart condition.

[www.fathers-4-justice.org](http://www.fathers-4-justice.org)

## Media comments on F4J

“...when historians look back on British Society at the start of the third millennium they will accord a small but important chapter to the men in tights.”

*The Times Newspaper, January 2006*

“...fiercely intelligent, charmingly foul-mouthed and a fantastic turn of phrase...few could equal O'Connor when it comes to taking a conversational thread, yanking, unravelling and generally running with it.”

*Will Self, Author, GQ Magazine, June 2006*

“Fathers 4 Justice masterminded some of the biggest political stunts of recent years.”

*Esquire Magazine, 2005*

“No comment.”

*PR Office, Scotland Yard*

“Matt O'Connor should take out a full page advertisement apologising for starting Fathers 4 Justice.”

*Yasmin Alabiah-Brown, Evening Standard*

“Fathers 4 Justice? The worst campaign group I have ever heard of.”

*Downing Street Press Spokesman*

Imagery used by F4J



### **Education Idea (3)**

Write a monologue in the voice of 'Man' – the father in My Child

**The following two articles by respected journalists, Decca Aitkenhead and Yasmin Alibhai-Brown dispute some of the issues claimed by Fathers 4 Justice and challenge some of the organisation's methods.**

### **Sins of the fathers by Decca Aitkenhead, The Guardian May 8<sup>th</sup> 2006**

Fathers4Justice, in its colourful three-year campaign, helped create the impression of an unjust legal bias against fathers in the family courts. And, because family court hearings cannot be reported, the myth was allowed to flourish. Parents involved in contact disputes are often banned from discussing the proceedings, even with close friends and family, so most of us have no idea how judges decide which parents can have access to their children. But it is now widely believed, due largely to the stunts of divorced men dressed as Batman, that judges are denying fathers access to their children on little more than the say-so of vindictive ex-wives.

This is simply not true. In fact, family courts have a legal obligation to operate under a "presumption of contact" - meaning they must strive, wherever possible, to ensure that fathers see their children. Fathers4Justice claimed that the courts deny access in 40% of cases, but the actual figure is 1%. Even though two-thirds of contact court cases involve allegations of domestic violence - often towards the children as well as their mothers. The family courts require exceptional circumstances to overrule this presumption of contact, and, indeed, some of the Fathers4Justice campaigners had been denied access for good reasons. The plot to kidnap Leo Blair, which led to the disbanding of the organisation earlier this year, offered an instructive insight into its members' concern for a child's wellbeing.

If a divorced father abducts his daughter, takes her abroad and goes to prison for the crime, you might think that no court would dream of granting him access to her again. When a court hears that a child is accusing his father of sexual abuse, most people would expect the man to be, at the very least, banned from further contact with his son. A father who has been repeatedly violent towards his ex-wife and children surely stands little chance, one would assume, of being allowed anywhere near them.

In fact, the father in each of these three cases has been granted access to his children by a court of law. The mothers are legally obliged to make the children see their fathers - even when the children are weeping and pleading not to go. If the mothers fail to force children, kicking and screaming, to visit a father who has abused them, they risk being sent to prison or losing custody. "And there's nothing - nothing - you can do about it," one explained. "It's not about what your child wants, it's about what the court wants. The courts want fathers to have contact. And if you don't play ball, you will lose your child."

The three women involved in these cases tell their stories below. All three were scared to speak, and would only do so anonymously. Their cases are shocking - but they are far from isolated, nor are they legally anomalous. The little-known but astonishing truth about the family justice system is that it routinely grants contact orders to men who have been violent towards their partner and children.

Women's Aid chief executive, Nicola Harwin points out a bizarre contradiction in government policies on domestic violence. On the one hand, the criminal justice system is pursuing prosecution more aggressively than ever before. On the other, the family courts are practically being instructed to ignore it. And in the current post-Fathers4Justice climate, Women's Aid's demands for more safety measures risk being dismissed as alarmist propaganda for the anti-father agenda. But, says Harwin, "this isn't about being pro-women or anti-

men. It's pro-the safety of children. We want fathers to care for their children. We don't want to end up with more children being murdered."

### **Case 1: Jane and her daughters**

Everyone had warned Jane not to marry her husband. "He was the vintage macho figure. The bad boy, basically." When he began beating her up, she realised that they had been right - but by then she was six months pregnant. Even the night before she went into labour he kicked her in the stomach. "I was so glad to go into hospital to have the baby and stay for a few days, just to get away from the violence."

The beatings continued after their daughter was born, and throughout her second - accidental - pregnancy. After their second daughter arrived, he took care of the elder girl. "Every single day he'd make her cry and scream. I could see their relationship was very poor." But what Jane did not know was that he had started to sexually abuse her. "I had no idea it was happening. He told her to keep it a secret, or all her favourite toys would be thrown away."

When he attacked Jane in public at the bus stop one day "I just thought, that's it." She took the two children and left. He tracked her down and made threats, so she obtained a restraining order. But the family court had granted him a contact order. "He'd come to the house and verbally abuse me, not play with kids. My solicitor said, 'If you allow him into the house, you make a mockery of the restraining order. The court won't believe you.' So I had to stop the contact."

He took her back to court for breaching the order. "I put everything on paper explaining why. I had doctors' reports about the violence; I had police reports of all the threatening incidents after the separation. There was the attack at the bus stop in front of people. And yet, in court, he was able to lie. And the court believed him."

The judge granted supported contact at a centre. "But every single time, my elder one would say, 'I don't want to go.' I made her. But then she was wetting the bed and having nightmares. Her mood changed." The doctor referred the seven year old to a therapist, who quickly called in social services. They interviewed the girl alone. "She told them exactly what happened. It was extremely sexually graphic." The report was sent to Cafcass.

"I wanted contact stopped - so we went back to court, and the court ordered another report." But the report accused Jane of putting ideas into her children's heads. The father was granted supported contact at a centre, plus an hour a week of unsupervised contact.

When the first contact session came, the children refused to get in the car. "Can you imagine the trauma, for me to get them in the car? They were crying, screaming, 'Mum I'm scared.' I couldn't force them." The second time, she called the police and told them that she could not get her children in the car. An officer arrived, and the children begged him not to make them go. "But then I had the Cafcass officer ringing me, saying, 'Why can't you get them into the car?' I said, 'I can't force them.' He said, 'Well, you should.'"

A new order gave the father unsupervised contact, but in the presence of Jane's cousin. During a visit, the father took his younger daughter to the toilet. "As soon as they got home, I could see something was wrong with her. She wouldn't go to the toilet, and would wet her clothes. She began locking the toilet door, and having terrible nightmares." One morning, she climbed into Jane's bed, lay on top of her and started kissing her on the lips. "She said, 'Daddy taught me how to do this, but he told me to keep it a secret.'"



Jane asked for contact to be stopped. Instead, the judge ordered more reports, and granted supported contact at a centre. The girls say their father has been rough with them during these visits, pushing and pulling them about, ordering off their clothes, and Jane has complained. But the order remains in force.

"So we have to go again this Sunday. And I don't know what to do. Every single time I have to force them, or trick them that we're going to McDonald's. We have to stop two or three times on the way because of their tantrums. But if I don't make them go, I'll go to prison.

"I tell you, sometimes I think if I have to go to jail I'll go to jail. But then there's no one to look after the children. And he knows that. I really don't know what will happen on Sunday. If I don't go, I'll be in contempt of court."

## **Case 2: Paula and her daughter**

Paula tells her story with the dulled calm of someone whose emotional range has been fused. She married a man from overseas, and struggled for years to put his violent insecurities down to cultural differences. The police would come to the house, but she could never bring herself to press charges. "With hindsight, to be honest, it was not a good idea to have a child," she says. "It's an awful thing to say, but to bring a child into that situation ... No."

When their first and only daughter was three years old, she left him. He tracked them down and began to stalk Paula, waiting and watching the house, imploring her to come home. The police were called regularly, but could do little. "In law, there have to be witnesses; there's a checklist to be met before prosecution is possible, and I didn't meet it."

At first contact arrangements were agreed informally, but during the visits he would be threatening and abusive towards Paula, in front of his daughter. "It was soon evident that it was more about coming to see me and trying to get me back than about spending quality time with his child. He was threatening me all the time, saying, 'If you don't come back to me, I'll take the child.'" The court granted Paula a residency order, and made him sign a pledge promising not to abduct his daughter.

Was she reassured? "A bit. I thought there was something legal that could help." But because he had formally promised not to abduct his daughter, he was granted regular, unsupervised, weekend and overnight contact. "And things didn't really change. He'd come and collect her, and it was basically an opportunity to be abusive. He'd cry and then get hysterical and then storm off with the child. My daughter would be thrown in the car. It was obvious it wasn't about the child."

But when Paula returned to court to object about his behaviour, which usually took place in front of their daughter, her solicitor warned her that she risked going to prison for breach of the contact order. "Without concrete evidence that he was harming his daughter, I was the one being 'hostile' - I was the baddie." After countless more hearings, the couple were ordered to conduct the girl's handover at a contact centre.

For a short while, it seemed to work. Three contact visits passed off peacefully. But the fourth time he collected his daughter, he did not bring her back. By the time Paula found out something had gone wrong, her daughter had been taken abroad.

Her ex-husband called to say that he had taken the girl back to his home country, and they were not coming back. Paula called the police. "It was the most frightening experience of my life. I was devastated; it was like someone had cut off part of me." It took two months, and the Hague Convention, for her daughter to be brought home to her, bewildered and traumatised. Paula's ex-husband was arrested and jailed for two years.

But on release he applied for contact again, and was granted a supervised order. After a year, the contact centre ran out of funds for supervision, and when the case went back to court again he demanded unsupervised contact. The judge gave him a supported order, which means that he can now meet his daughter at a centre among other parents, but will no longer be directly monitored.

"This is how the law works. Even though there's been a conviction - abduction - and domestic violence, the court seems to think that all that can be put behind us, as if nothing ever happened," says Paula. "You're appointed a court welfare officer, but the welfare officer wanted me to have face-to-face, sit-down meeting with my ex. He was violent towards me, he abducted my child, I had to flee him. How could they ask me to do that? But say no, and you're portrayed as hostile and aggressive. You are in a no-win situation.

"Supervised contact had been hard enough for me to accept, but I thought, he's being watched, it's her father. Whatever he has done, let's at least try. But this? Putting my daughter back at risk of an unpredictable father who clearly didn't think about her wellbeing when he abducted her? It's heartbreaking.

"There's so much history there, and it's not taken into consideration at all. The judge briefly looks at notes, just the notes from the last year or so; then makes a judgment. The safety and wellbeing of my daughter should be a priority, but clearly it is not. And I'm not even allowed to talk openly about the situation. The courts impose these things on you, and then forbid you even discussing it while it's going through court."

### **Case 3: Sarah and her son**

Sarah talks with the halting hesitation of someone who has been deeply, indelibly frightened. Sometimes she speaks so quietly that it is hard to make out the words. Her marriage to a man who had appeared to be "charm personified" had been ugly and shaming, for he had turned out to be an abusive, violent alcoholic.

The couple's only son had been just a few months old when they separated. Contact had been the one matter that his parents had always managed to agree amicably. Now a happy five-year-old, the son was seeing his father regularly. "I thought our boy had two loving parents. I thought there'd even come a point where we'd be friends. I thought the worst was all behind us."

But then her son began manifesting inexplicable, disturbing behavioural problems. He could not bear the dark, could not stand the bedroom door being shut and began to wet the bed. And then, one night when she was putting her son to bed, "he showed me and told me what his father had done to him in the genital area. His language wasn't precise but he was showing and telling me. It was your worst nightmare; the last thing I'd ever expected. To this day, I find it difficult to believe."

The following day, his nursery school teacher rang to say that he had told her too. Sarah took her son to the GP, who found bruising and a cut on the genital area. The last contact visit had been about 10 days before. Social services, the police and her solicitor got involved.

At the first family court hearing, the police could offer no DNA evidence, but the social workers believed that abuse had taken place. The judge ruled, on the balance of probability, that it had. Contact was ordered to be supervised, which Sarah accepted. "I never wanted my child to grow up and say, 'You kept me from my dad.' All I wanted was that the child was kept safe."

But the father did not accept the decision, so the case went to county court. A "fact-finding" hearing was ordered, which found that social services had failed to observe protocol. "The social worker was adamant that a child of this age could not lie with such complexity and consistency. He talked about it, he drew it, he

showed it. But because certain procedures weren't followed, it counted for nothing." Their evidence was instructed to be disregarded.

Other mums at the nursery had heard Sarah's son talk about the abuse in detail, but their testimony was negated. The police-appointed GP was apparently "too busy" to write a report. This time, the judge granted the father unsupervised contact. When the first unsupervised contact date arrived, Sarah's son flatly refused to go. "But I was told by Cafcass and legal advisers that, because my child did not want to see his father, then residency could, and would, be awarded to the father."

Sarah was taken back to court for failure to comply with the order. The judge threatened to transfer residency of the boy to the father. "The bottom line, in his eyes, was that I'd breached the court's order. I'd disobeyed the court." By now Sarah had run out of funds and was representing herself, but the boy's solicitor appealed to the judge. "He said, 'What was the mother supposed to do? Shove the child out the door kicking and screaming?'"

A psychiatrist recommended that the father meet with the child, and pledge not to abuse again. He did so - even though he had never admitted the abuse had happened. "This must have been overwhelming for my son. Of course a child wants to believe a parent when they make a promise, but how can a parent be relied upon when they've already violated that trust?" The judge ruled that they should progress towards unsupervised contact, with overnight stays and holidays in the very near future.

Now £45,000 in debt for legal fees, Sara cannot understand how the courts could disbelieve a child. "And he knows he hasn't been believed. He's a bright child. He says, 'Why do I have to see my dad on my own? Don't they believe me?' The child has clearly expressed that he doesn't want to have unsupervised contact with his father, and why. All he wants is to know that the abuse won't happen again. He wants a relationship with his father; just a safe relationship. I feel like I'm betraying him."

If Sarah fails to force her son to have unsupervised contact, she appears guilty of "parental alienation syndrome" - of poisoning her son against his father. "It beggars belief, because the contact was going so well. I was always happy about contact. Contact with his father gave me some time for myself. I've never alienated him from his father, nor wanted to. Why would I? He loves his father - but he's afraid to be alone with him in his house. It's not me who isn't complying; it's my son. And I can't betray his trust"

· All names and some other details have been changed. For more information about Women's Aid, visit [www.womensaid.org.uk](http://www.womensaid.org.uk)

**Misogynistic bullies don't deserve justice**  
**by Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, The Independent: 22 November 2004**

More bravado and bullying by the lads from Fathers4Justice. First they invaded a conference on family law in Devon where Jonathan "Jolly" Stanesby of F4J handcuffed Margaret Hodge, the minister for Children, and held her for 40 minutes. Not funny, Jolly. Then they warned of pre-Christmas mayhem for their 10 "most wanted villains", including Charles Clarke and Dame Elizabeth Butler-Sloss, the highly regarded family court judge who will not meet them.

Now they have turned on the BBC and the presenter Fiona Bruce because she fronts a documentary to be broadcast tonight that looks into allegations that some of the key members of the F4J defence force are convicted perpetrators of violence against their former partners. F4J "accuses" Bruce of being a supporter of Women's Aid, which helps such victims - a revealing objection, don't you think?

The makers of the "Families at War" programme, part of the Real Story series, say there is no generalised slur on the campaign itself, but a rout of self-made martyrs is not easily persuaded out of monomania and, anyway, this is not what this campaign group has come to expect from its friends on newspapers and in television.

Like fond parents of spoilt children, the media mostly excuses and delights in the capers of F4J, perhaps because there are a significant number of separated media fathers who feel an instinctive bond with these chaps who make a spectacle of themselves, dressing up as Batman - boys who never grew up and who expect us all to bow to their demands. Some feminist journalists too have fallen for the loveable rogues, describing them as the new suffragettes. To equate the struggle for universal voting rights with these bounders is blasphemy.

I wonder if the nation would so generously empathise with young Muslim men if they handcuffed David Blunkett and threatened Jack Straw, to protest against their victimisation by the iniquitous new anti-terrorist laws. And what if lone mothers in Cinderella costumes attacked politicians, intimidated judges and journalists, stopped traffic and created deliberate chaos to get the Child Support Agency to secure decent financial support for their children from absent fathers?

Intolerably large numbers of these custodial parents live in poverty and misery while the fathers avoid payments and the CSA lurches from one wretched crisis to another.

The chief executive of this enforcement body has just resigned after its computer system failed to deliver, leaving mothers (and some lone fathers entitled to financial support from working mothers) with no way of getting what they are legally owed. What have F4J to say about this issue? I can guess: the demands of the CSA are yet another bit of state oppression in their lives, the unspeakable tyranny that forces them to pay up for children they helped bring into the world.

Many of us who oppose and despise F4J's tactics are keenly aware that post-separation anguish is tragically suffered by too many fathers. There are indeed mothers who violate all agreements and provoke constant aggravation with the non-resident parent in the hope that the contact will eventually cease, thus emotionally amputating the child from the father and, unforgivably, from loving grandparents who have done nothing to deserve such punishment.

Some of my own acquaintances are among these vindictive mothers. In one case, one wife told me she was getting her husband to pay for a massive house renovation before chucking him out and bringing in her young lover to live with her and her three young children. She did too. And now the father is left begging to see his

kids while paying for their private education and everything else she demands. But he hates F4J because the image they have promoted of themselves is so offensively misogynist.

Saner and more temperate fathers' groups, such as Fathers Direct, are not; mothers and fathers are treated with equal respect. These groups work hard to dispel the myth that all separations end in ugly hate and wars. (F4J mocks their girliness.)

In a government green paper, Parental Separation: Children's Needs and Parent's Responsibilities, evidence is produced to show that more than 80 per cent of separated parents are happy with the access arrangements that they have worked out. Most lone mothers say they would like more involvement, not less, sometimes even women who have been terribly treated by the fathers.

Among the women who block or reduce access, a number do so because they are genuinely trying to protect their children. F4J gets very cross about these "recalcitrant mothers" and condemns Lord Justice Thorpe who has decreed that mothers can intervene in arrangements if children are getting anxious or depressed.

It is alarming to witness F4J imposing its uncompromising conditions on the law, society, politics, family life and the national conversation. Anyone who opposes them is given the treatment. The MP Clive Soley, for example, who has criticised these self-pitying warriors, gets regular warnings on the internet. One message says: "Watch yerself you wouldn't want to wake up one morning and find the BNP has stolen your seat."

This campaign has succeeded in getting the majority of Britons to believe that most departed fathers are desperately seeking justice in a cold world and that the only policy that will give them redress is an automatic 50-50 share in their children's lives. Family law is complicated and fraught, necessarily so. There cannot be absolutes, and in the end it is the children who have got to matter more than super-petulant parents.

In new research carried out by Young Voice, children of divorced parents are interviewed about their lives from the point at which the parents parted. The law may stress the best interests of the child, but in reality the thoughts and desires and needs of children are too often drummed out by noisy adults. Read their words and you get a glimpse into how different each child is and how they change too - happy one year seeing both parents then adamantly refusing to pack and repack and transport their lives.

Sarah finds it hard that there are such different rules in the two households she has to live in. Her mother doesn't talk to her dad about money but moans about it to her, and that gets her down. Jason didn't want to live with his dad, who then locked him up and blamed his mum. Rachel feels that "whoever you live with you have ups and downs, whether they are your dad's partner or your dad's frog".

Under-resourced family courts have to deal with these fragilities and with other problems of abuse, neglect, drug addictions, poverty and family relationships. Sometimes the courts do very badly; other times they manage incendiary situations sensitively. One change that would help to diffuse conflicts would be to open up the courts, so they are not shrouded in secrecy and easily maligned. With the surge in divorces, this is an imperative.

By now, I will have been posted on to the F4J website as yet another man-hater, an enemy to be pursued and brought into line. Maybe next they will start to mock kidnap their opponents and show them on a video, just for a laugh, just for the publicity.

### **Education Ideas (4)**

Choose one of the case studies or stories above and improvise ideas around the issues.

Write a monologue in the voice of

1. A child who is afraid to see their parent.
2. A vindictive mother who wants to get revenge on her ex partner.
3. A desperate mother who risks going to jail if she refuses to send her child to be with a potentially abusive father.

**Families Need Fathers (FNF) is another organisation that fights for fathers' custodial rights after divorce. Here it discusses what it calls a 'common form of child abuse (that) goes unrecognised which seems to go on in the play with the boy's mother constantly telling her son that his father is useless :**

## **Parental Alienation Syndrome.**

25<sup>th</sup> April 2007 marks the first anniversary of International Parental Alienation Awareness Day, initiated to increase public understanding of this common form of emotional child abuse which is insufficiently recognised and acted upon in the eyes of the law and the general public in the UK.

Parental Alienation Syndrome (PAS) occurs post family breakdown, where one parent 'brainwashes' the child against the other (usually the parent the child lives with) often leading to the other parent's complete removal from their child's life.

PAS is not acknowledged in UK courts and is only referred to as 'implacable hostility' on the part of the parent subjecting the child(ren) to this form of emotional abuse, which can have devastating life-long effects for all parties, both children and parents alike.

Families Need Fathers hear from thousands of individuals who have experienced the trauma of PAS, several of whom are willing to present their stories to the media in order that the courts and medical profession will acknowledge this very real form of child abuse.

- A member's son lives with his mother, and has been obviously subjected to PA since 2003 when he was 3 years old. This has caused severe disruption to paternal contact. The CAFCASS (Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service) Legal Officer and the High Court Judge blamed the breakdown of the father-child relationship on the maternal family, yet the mother was able to continue preventing the existence of a relationship, even banning the father from the child's school. The result of this parental alienation was **no** contact between the child and any members of the paternal family.
- A mother has sole legal residence of the children (they live with her), yet she is subject to the effects of parental alienation by the children's' father, as diagnosed by a forensic evaluation. She has recordings of father and son aggressively discussing their campaign against her, yet no-one involved (Judge, family therapist, parent co-ordinator) gives the severity of the situation the acknowledgement or treatment it deserves.
- A member underwent a 10 year battle to stop the alienation of his children against him and to have their right to parenting time with him upheld. This involved 40 hearings, 12 different judges, a succession of CAFCASS Officers and a psychiatrist's involvement, all of whom found him to be entirely focused on the best interests of his children. However, in 2004, the father was forced to withdraw his application. He said, "The mother's alienation is so engrained that I can see no further practical way forward."
- A member's ex-wife absconded with their children to Wales, gave false addresses and made false allegations of abuse, was untruthful in Court and won a full residence order in her favour. The father was granted no contact with the children, the schools or doctors. He has not seen or spoken to his 2 children for 2 years.

**Any parent, irrespective of gender, can be subject to this devastating experience.**

Jon Davies, FNF CEO, says “The denial of Parental Alienation can lead to the unnecessary tragedy of life-long separation between a child and their parent. This is a pattern which needs to change, and raising awareness is part of that process.”

**What do severely alienated children look like?**

- They have a relentless hatred towards the targeted parent(s).
- They parrot the Obsessed Alienator.
- The child does not want to visit or spend any time with the targeted parent.
- Many of the child's beliefs are enmeshed with the alienator.
- The beliefs are delusional and frequently irrational.
- They are not intimidated by the court. Frequently, their reasons are not based on personal experiences with the targeted parent but reflect what they are told by the Obsessed Alienator. They have difficulty differentiating between the two.
- The child has no ambivalence in his feelings; it's all hatred with no ability to see the good.
- They have no capacity to feel guilty about how they behave towards the targeted parent or forgive any past indiscretions.
- They share the Obsessed Alienator's cause. Together, they are in lockstep to denigrate the hated parent.
- The children's obsessional hatred extends to the targeted parent's extended family without any guilt or remorse.
- They can appear like normal healthy children until asked about the targeted parent that triggers their hatred.

By Douglas Darnall, Ph.D, from *Journal of Parental Alienation: Vol. 1 No. 1* - August 2005, Pg: 1 of 15

Judges, CAFCASS staff, social workers, and others often fail to recognise Parental Alienation as a genuine occurrence, and the children may lose a loved and loving parent for a long time or sometimes permanently. This can also have a long-term effect on the child's relationship with the parent causing the alienation, if during adulthood the child discovers that they have been misled.

Families Need Fathers is looking for personal stories and material which can be used by the media for Parental Alienation Day in order to raise awareness of this issue which can be so devastating for all involved.



**Media story of how celebrity couple, Alec Baldwin and Kim Basinger, are dealing with a custodial battle.**



A gleaming cavalcade of blacked-out people carriers pulls up presidential-style at the gates of a smart private school in a moneyed Los Angeles suburb and disgorges a contingent of shades-wearing security men. Then, when these bodyguards - some of whom carry small, handheld video cameras - are in position, the door of one vehicle opens and a child, pole-thin and deathly pale, emerges into the California sunshine.

She disappears inside, accompanied by her ever-present minders.

Even at this school, which plays host to the pampered offspring of some of Hollywood's most glittering names, it is a highly unusual scene. And what makes this tableau - witnessed earlier this week by her bemused school friends - all the more bizarre is that the 11-year-old in question needs this protection (if her famous mother is to be believed) not from a lunatic celebrity stalker or kidnapper, but from her actor father, Alec Baldwin.

In recent days, this has been the disturbing reality of the school run for Ireland Baldwin as the bloody custody battle between her Oscar-winner mother, Kim Basinger, and her former husband plumbs new and unspeakable depths.

Basinger, the star of *LA Confidential*, called in the beefcake protection team last week after 49-year-old Baldwin left a vituperative rant on the answer phone of their daughter for daring not to be at home when he rang to speak to her during one of their court-sanctioned weekly conversations.

In the shocking tape - suspiciously leaked to a show business website - a raging Baldwin (the star of *The Aviator* and *The Departed*) brands his daughter a "rude, thoughtless little pig. You don't have the brains or the decency as a human," he spits.

"I don't care that you're 12 years old, or 11 years old, or that you're a child, or that your mother is a thoughtless pain in the ass who doesn't care what you do as far as I am concerned. Once again, I have made an ass of myself trying to get to a phone. You have humiliated me for the last time with this phone."

But it was his sign-off to the two minute 12 second tirade - his threat to fly from his home in New York to Los Angeles to "straighten out" his daughter - that prompted Basinger to act. In an exclusive interview with the Mail, Kim's father, Don Basinger, said: "The problem is that violence and anger are part of Alec Baldwin's make-up. He can't control his temper and you can't tell what someone like that is going to do."

"On the tape, he said he was coming to 'straighten' Ireland out. He was very threatening and Kim brought in the bodyguards because she has to protect her daughter. A father can just go to a school and pick a kid up. I don't think Alec is a danger, but sometimes people do things and regret their actions later. Kim is worried about her daughter." So worrying was the anger in ex-alcoholic Baldwin's diatribe that a judge temporarily banned him from access to the daughter he and 53-year-old Miss Basinger have fought over since their highly acrimonious divorce five years ago.

Even so, given the level of hostility between them, few in Hollywood are under any illusion that the actress will seek to use his outburst to her advantage (hence the over-the-top presence of those bodyguards). And how ironic, given the latest turn in this blacker-than-black farce, that it is the 91/2Weeks star herself who faces jail at a forthcoming hearing over 12 counts of alleged contempt of court. Baldwin claims that she has continually ignored a series of court orders granting him visiting rights to Ireland. If, as is still a distinct possibility, she is found guilty and sentenced to the maximum two months in jail, it would be into the care of her aggressive father that the schoolgirl would be placed while her mother is in prison. Pity, then, poor Ireland - or "Addie, as she is known to her warring parents - in this mess as she plays hostage to the bloated egos of her mother and father.

When Baldwin sees his daughter every first and third weekend of the month, plus alternate birthdays and Christmases, the pair must, a judge has ruled, be accompanied at all times by a female carer appointed by the Los Angeles Superior Court. Also, phone calls with her father, who lost his battle for full-time custody in 2004, are strictly timed and limited (hence his anger when she was not there when he called).

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, in this climate of loathing, Baldwin's friends this week accused Miss Basinger of leaking the tape of his phone call to force him to drop the contempt charges against her. At the same time, in a cynical attempt to redeem himself in the eyes of an American public shocked by the virtual round-the-clock television broadcasts of the recording, Baldwin went on TV this week to make an emotional *mea culpa* and blamed his outburst on being barred from seeing his daughter by his ex-wife.

"Obviously, calling your child a pig or anything else is inappropriate. I apologise to my daughter for that," he said. "There's nothing wrong with being frustrated or angry about the situation. But as people often do, I took it out on the wrong person." He also dramatically announced that he was quitting the smash hit NBC sitcom 30 Rock, for which he received a Golden Globe earlier this year, and pledged to give up acting to devote his time to the issue of "**parental alienation**". (see previous pages)

"Although I have been told by numerous people not to worry too much, as all parents lose their patience with their kids, I am most saddened that this was released to the media because of what it does to a child," he wrote. "I'm sorry, as everyone who knows me is aware, for losing my temper with my child. I have been driven to the edge by parental alienation for many years now. You have to go through this to understand. (Although I hope you never do.) I am sorry for what happened. But I am equally sorry that a court order was violated, which had deliberately been put under seal in this case. In such public cases, your opponents attempt to take a picture of you on your worst day and insist that this is who you are as a person," Baldwin wrote.

"Outside the doors of divorce court, I have friends, I have respect from people I work with and I have a normal relationship with my daughter. All of that is threatened whenever one enters a court room."

"The mother and her lawyer leaked this sealed material in violation of a court order," Baldwin's spokesperson said Thursday. "Although Alec acknowledges that he should have used different language in parenting his child, everyone who knows him privately knows what he has been put through for the past six years."

"The voice mail speaks for itself," Basinger's spokeswoman said.

Meanwhile, Baldwin's lawyer, Vicki Greene, who says Basinger "has so contaminated this child she now doesn't even want to be with her father", has launched yet more legal proceedings to discover who leaked the explosive recording. His legal team claims Basinger has a "pathological need" to distance Ireland from her father. One court petition claims: "Over and over, she demonstrates that her resentments are more precious to her than the emotional well-being of her child."

For her part the actress denies any involvement in the voicemail message being released to the media. Her father told the Mail she believes the tape, which was made on April 11 when the actor called his daughter at 10.30pm from a Manhattan restaurant, was released by a member of court staff after Kim supplied it as evidence in a bid to get a restraining order against Baldwin. Don Basinger said: "Kim had to present it and from then on she was not in control. It could have leaked out from the courthouse or somewhere. Kim wouldn't release that tape knowing it would hurt Ireland. How could she want to hear somebody calling her daughter a pig over and over again on TV?"

What is beyond question, however, is that both parties - who announced earlier this year they had put their battles behind them for the sake of their daughter - are still seemingly content to make poor Ireland cannon fodder in their increasingly dirty war.

Don Basinger, Kim's father, told the Mail this week: "I know Alec loves Ireland and I'm sure she loves her father, but this has little to do with Ireland - it's all about bitterness. Alec is a generous and kind man in many ways, but he has a flaw - he can't control his temper. He needs to get some help. Ireland is in the same situation as Kim was before the divorce. She is uncomfortable in his presence. She is suffering verbal abuse and that can be just as bad and damaging as violence. She's witnessed his outbursts many times and I don't think a child could ever forget what he said on that tape. She was with me two weeks ago and she is handling it well. It's hard to get into the mind of a child, but she's very mature and strong.

Kim just wants to safeguard her child. The courts have nothing to do with it. Protecting her daughter comes first - regardless of the consequences, even if that involves going to jail or leaving the country. I think Ireland can reconcile with her father. He and Kim need to communicate. This has been going on for five years and they have each spent a fortune on lawyers.

In the end, they will realise that what they are doing is not productive and nothing has changed. Then I think they will say 'let's cool it and stop this'. I pray that will happen."

*by Paul Scott 28th April 2007. Daily Mail*

## **Education Ideas**

Improvise scenes where a parent makes a statement then a lawyer repeats it but changes it to provoke the other parent & lawyer.

Improvise court scenes with debates between parents lawyers/judges

Imagine you are a parent involved in a custody battle. Write lists of what make you scared, happy, sad.

Now write 2 short monologues starting with 'I want. . . ' the first is by the mother the second the father, both saying why they want custody of their child.

Write a third monologue by a judge deciding who gets custody how & why.

## Further Reading

Texts by the following playwrights and practitioners, mentioned as influences by Mike Bartlett and Sacha Wares can be found at the Royal Court Bookshop:

Chekhov, Samuel Beckett, Forced Entertainment, Tony Kushner, Edward Albee, David Grieg, Debbie Tucker Green and Caryl Churchill. A brilliant book called *Play in a Godless World* by Catherine Bates. Keith Johnstone's books *Impro* and *Impro for Storytellers*.

Two articles by the Spanish forensic psychologist, José Manuel Aguilar Cuenca, whose job is dealing with the emotional fallout from the family courts, translated by Julian Fitzgerald: *Children in the Parental Separation Process* and *Interview with J.M. Aguilar* in December 2005.

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An article "Should Courts Order PAS Children to Visit/Reside with the Alienated Parent? A Follow-up Study" written by Richard Gardner was published in the *American Journal of Forensic Psychology*, 19(3):61-106, 2001 and is reproduced on his website.

The book '*The Parental Alienation Syndrome*' by Dr Richard Gardner can be obtained from Amazon Books.

Read an abridged version of *A Guide to Parental Alienation Syndrome* by FNF's Stan Hayward, whose website is at [www.parentalalienation.co.uk](http://www.parentalalienation.co.uk)

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Read *The Spectrum of Parental Alienation Syndrome* (parts I and II), a comprehensive review of U.S. research on PAS by Deirdre Conway Rand Ph.D. (*American Journal of Forensic Psychology*, Volume 15, Issues 3-4, 1997, abridged). Full references to other academic papers are included.

Visit the F.A.C.T. Parental Alienation Links page.

See also the Parental Alienation website and the Parental Alienation Information Network website. Another site is The Rachel Foundation.

Journal of Parental Alienation:

<http://www.fnf.org.uk/law/pas.htm>

[www.fathers-4-justice.org](http://www.fathers-4-justice.org)

[www.fathersdirect.com](http://www.fathersdirect.com)

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These resources were created by Laura McCluskey for the Royal Court Young Writers Programme, as part of our Education work. If you would like to know more about our Education Programme the contact details are as follows:

Royal Court Young Writer's Programme  
Royal Court Theatre  
Sloane Square  
London SW1W 8AS  
**Tel:** 020 7565 5050  
**Email:** [education@royalcourttheatre.com](mailto:education@royalcourttheatre.com)

We would appreciate any feedback you have on these resources as we are constantly trying to improve our service to teachers.

Royal Court Young Writer's Programme:  
Associate Director            *Ola Animashawun*  
Administrator                *Nina Lyndon*  
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