

Child Abuse Experts Applaud Legal Community for Rejecting Parental Alienation Syndrome

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BALA CYNWYD, Pa., July 12 /U.S. Newswire/ -- People who care about abused children finally have something to celebrate. Two recent high profile legal publications have rejected "Parental Alienation Syndrome" (PAS), a controversial label often used to discredit allegations of child abuse or domestic violence in family courts. According to PAS theory, children's disclosures of abuse by one parent are reinterpreted as evidence of "brainwashing" by the other parent. The solution proposed by PAS theory is to immediately award custody to the alleged child abuser.

The newly revised, 2006 edition of "Navigating Custody and Visitation Evaluations in Cases with Domestic Violence: A Judge's Guide," published by The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, includes a strong statement condemning the use of PAS which it calls a "discredited" syndrome that favors child abusers in custody determinations.

At the same time the Spring 2006 issue of the American Bar Association's Children's Legal Rights Journal provides a comprehensive analysis of all legal cases involving allegations of PAS. This definitive review concludes that science, law, and policy all oppose the admissibility of PAS in the courtroom.

"PAS is junk science at its worst," says Dr. Paul Fink, President of the Leadership Council on Child Abuse and Interpersonal Violence, and a former President of the American Psychiatric Association. Dr. Fink explains, "Science tells us that the most likely reason that a child becomes estranged from a parent is that parent's own behavior. Labels, such as PAS, serve to deflect attention away from those behaviors."

Judge Sol Gothard is glad to see that the legal community has joined other professionals in recognizing the harm that PAS can cause. Recently retired from Louisiana's 5th Circuit Court of Appeal, Judge Gothard has been involved in over 2000 cases of allegations of child sexual abuse. He states, "PAS has caused emotional harm, physical harm and in some cases, even death to children."

Joyanna Silberg, PhD, a Clinical Psychologist and Executive Vice President

of the Council, has also seen first hand the long- term emotional damage this so-called syndrome has caused. "How do you explain to young children forced to live with abusers why the courts have considered them liars and ignored their cries for help?" Silberg has found that it can take years for these children to get past their feelings of betrayal by the system that was supposed to protect them.

Dr. Silberg views PAS allegations as part of a larger strategy in which abusive parents try to fool the courts, attorneys, child custody evaluators, and mental health professionals into believing that their children and ex-spouses are crazy when they raise concerns about safety. She notes the recent case of Darren Mack, accused of shooting his custody judge and stabbing his wife to death. Mack successfully convinced a custody evaluator that he was a loving parent with no violent tendencies, notes Silberg.

Stephanie Dallam, MS, a researcher with the Leadership Council, has spent the last 10 years researching PAS. She traces the syndrome to a controversial psychiatrist, Richard Gardner, who described sex between fathers and their offspring as normal and natural. In his voluminous self-published writings, Gardner blamed abused children's suffering on our society's "overreaction" to sexual abuse, notes Dallam.

Dr. Paul Fink concludes, "Children suffer when law embraces a 'syndrome' just because a so-called 'expert' coined a snappy phrase. Increasingly, courts are seeing through the PAS charade and refusing to allow the courtroom to be used as theater for the promotion of junk science."

More information can be found at: <http://www.leadershipcouncil.org>
