

A Child Under Relational Pressure: What I Need the Court to Understand



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- If I reject a parent I once loved and trusted, please do not assume my rejection towards one of my parents explains its own cause. Look at what happened before the rejection began, what changed, and what may have contributed to it.
- If I describe one parent as entirely good and the other as entirely bad, please look beneath that black-and-white thinking and consider what I have experienced, what I have been told, and what pressures may be affecting how I see each parent.
- I may sound firm and consistent in what I say while still feeling unable to express a different view, mixed feelings or affection that conflicts with what I believe others expect me to say or feel.
- My distress around a parent does not, by itself, tell you what caused that distress. Please examine how it developed, when it began, and what was happening around me at the time.
- Please do not make me responsible for deciding which parent should remain in my life. That is an adult decision, and carrying that responsibility can deepen guilt, fear and pressure between the people I depend on.
- Please help distinguish what I have directly experienced from what I have been told, overheard or come to believe about events and adult matters I may not have witnessed myself.
- If showing affection towards my displaced parent makes me anxious, guilty or disloyal, please ask why expressing that affection may make me fear disapproval, conflict or consequences.
- Sometimes I may use adult language, explanations or accusations that sound convincing but that I do not fully understand at my age, or that do not fit how I previously experienced and described that parent.
- I may become highly protective of the parent I feel responsible for, depend upon emotionally, or am afraid of disappointing, particularly if I believe their wellbeing or approval depends on my loyalty or taking their side.
- If my empathy for a parent has diminished or disappeared, please examine how my view of that parent changed over time, what I have experienced, what I have repeatedly heard, and what pressures may have contributed to that change.
- Please look beyond what I say in a single interview. Notice whether my behaviour, emotions or account change in different places, around different people, before and after contact, or when I express affection, disagreement or a different view that others may not welcome.
- Please allow me to have mixed feelings. A child who feels free in a relationship can love a parent while also feeling angry, disappointed, hurt, confused or frustrated by things that parent has done.
- Please do not assume that my strong alignment with one parent means I have freely chosen that relationship over the other. Alignment can also develop through fear, dependency, loyalty conflict, relational pressure, approval for taking sides, or negative consequences for showing closeness to the other parent.
- Look carefully at my relationship with each parent before the rejection began. Ask what changed, how quickly it changed, and whether what I say now fits with my earlier experiences, behaviour and relationship with that parent.
- Please consider all plausible explanations for my rejection, including abuse, coercive control, coercive relational interference, loyalty conflict, relational pressure, fear, attachment disruption, my own direct experiences with each parent, and reactive behaviour from a parent under prolonged stress, exclusion or loss of contact.
- Please take the pressure to choose sides away from me. I should not feel that I have to reject, avoid or stop loving one parent in order to feel safe, accepted or secure with the other.

Early intervention should be prioritised. Where safe and appropriate, psychoeducation, therapeutic support and clear behavioural expectations should be implemented and reviewed before prolonged parent–child separation becomes entrenched, with enforceable consequences considered where coercive or harmful conduct continues.

Written in a child's voice as a psychoeducational synthesis informed by psychological research, professional knowledge and intergenerational lived experience of disrupted parent–child relationships.