

Understanding and effectively dealing with

Hostile-Aggressive Parenting (HAP)

Information for legal and health care professionals, judges, court workers, school officials, students, community support agencies and other professionals involved with children and families being adversely affected by high conflict separation and/or divorce.

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ABSTRACT

Hostile-Aggressive Parenting (HAP), which is a serious form of child abuse, is encountered in most high conflict child-custody disputes. This article describes two categories of HAP, the first being mild to moderate and the second, severe. All forms of HAP require only one simple, uniform, yet effective, step by step approach to be successfully dealt with. This article was intended to be used by legal and health care professionals, the courts and others in the community who work with families where high conflict divorce and separation exist.

This document has been written with a purpose to bring greater awareness and understanding of **Hostile-Aggressive Parenting** and its remedies. The recommendations and procedures contained in this document can, with the meaningful support from the court, legal and health care professionals and other supportive persons in the community, effectively control and in most cases eliminate this form of child abuse as well as reduce much of the needless, most severe and protracted litigation in our family courts today, which is causing so much harm to children and families.

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Public input invited

At the time of this printing, this document was still under development and is being circulated to members of the public as well as to recognised legal and health care professionals for their feedback and comment. All comments and suggestions from any source are welcomed. Should you wish to provide comment on the contents of document then please forward your comments in writing to:

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Part 1

Hostile-Aggressive Parenting – What is it?

Hostile-Aggressive Parenting (HAP) is defined as: *A pattern of behaviour/actions of a parent or guardian, either direct or indirect, that either; 1) creates undue difficulties or interference in the relationship of a child with another parent or guardian involved with the parenting and/or rearing children and/or, 2) promotes or maintains unwarranted unfairness or inequality in the parenting arrangements between a child's parents and/or guardians.*

Hostile-Aggressive Parenting is most apparent in child-custody disputes and is used most often as a tool to align the child with one of the parents during litigation over custody of the child. However, HAP can be present in almost any situation where two or more people involved in a child's life are at odds with each other over how a child may be raised or influenced by the parties. The focus of this document is on **Hostile-Aggressive Parenting** as it applies to custody and access disputes relating to separation and/or divorce.

Hostile-Aggressive Parenting is not limited to just parents but also applies to any guardian - grandparents, extended family members, babysitters and to any other person who may be involved in caring and rearing of a child. Any form of interference to a normal, healthy relationship between a child and a person (most often the parent) caused by another person or agency having some control or influence over the child, is wrong and ultimately causes emotional and psychological harm to the child. Throughout this article the word "parent" shall be considered synonymous with "guardian".

Although parents with hostile-aggressive tendencies may include the sole or primary parent, the non-residential parent, or even parents engaged in joint parenting, it is sole custodial parents who are most often reported to practice **Hostile-Aggressive-Parenting**. Sole custody is a contributing factor to hostile-aggressive behaviour in parents. Although most complaints of Hostile-Aggressive Parenting are directed against mothers, some attribute this to the fact that approximately 85%-90% of sole custody awards are to the mothers but some professionals do support the notion that HAP may be influenced by gender. Although this article does not look into the issue of gender as it relates to HAP, a number of studies would support the conclusion that gender may be a factor in which parent may exhibit HAP behaviour. In the area of gender, some research has shown:

- That children who live with only their mothers are nine times more likely to have conflict with their mother than if they lived with only their father.¹
- That children were more than twice as likely to have no contact with the other parent when they lived with their mother.²
- Children living with dads felt positively about moms; children living with moms were more likely to think negatively of dads.³
- That mothers are almost five times as likely to badmouth dads as dads are moms.⁴

- That of children killed by single parents, single mothers are 24 times more likely to kill children than dads.⁵

Readers who may be interested in the perspective of gender as it relates to HAP should research this subject more thoroughly through other sources.

Although every family situation may be different, when situations involving **Hostile-Aggressive Parenting** are carefully looked at, one or more of the causes outlined in this document can be identified in almost every case.

In general, parents exhibiting **Hostile-Aggressive-Parenting** have not succeeded in getting on with their own life and remain, instead, controlled by their negative emotions and continue to exercise power and control over their ex-spouse's life and their ex-spouse's parenting. High degrees of conflict during custody settlements and litigation are almost sure signs in these affected families. Hostile-aggressive parents are unable to appreciate the needs of their child and in many cases view their child as a possession belonging to them and to no other person, especially not the child's other parent. Hostile-aggressive parents will use the child as a weapon against the other spouse and family members whenever they have the opportunity. **A parent engaged in Hostile-Aggressive Parenting will often feel encouraged to intensify their aggressive behaviour when they realize that the courts fail to exercise sanctions against them for their abusive parenting practices. He or she will also take comfort in that the community in general will choose not to get involved, probably because they don't know what to do.** This explains why hostile-aggressive behaviour is often observed in those having sole custody of their child. Angry and vindictive sole custodial parents are often able to bring a reign of terror and revenge on to a non-custodial parent and their family, their goal being to get them out of the child's life or at the very least to severely damage their child's relationship with the other parent and other parent's family.

Hostile-Aggressive Parenting is considered by health care and legal experts as being an unhealthy, anti-social behaviour which is emotionally damaging and contrary to the best interest of a child. Simply stated, it is dysfunctional parenting, emotional child abuse and to the parent who is the target of **Hostile-Aggressive Parenting**, a form of discrimination.

Identifying Hostile-Aggressive Parenting

Although some of the underlying causes Hostile-Aggressive Parenting may be related to mental health issues, it must be emphasized that HAP in itself, is not considered to be a mental health condition. HAP is simply a pattern of negative and emotionally abusive behaviour by a parent/guardian which in almost all cases is easily identified through observation of the specific actions of the parent/guardian. A parent who engages in behaviour that is considered HAP may not necessarily be suffering from a mental condition nor would a person diagnosed with a mental health condition necessarily exhibit HAP. Because identifying HAP is done through simple observation of the interactions of the parents/guardians with their children and with the other parent, determining the presence of HAP does not require the qualifications of a health care professional to identify. With an understanding of the information and background contained in this document, almost anyone from child advocates to day care workers, can competently identify HAP and know what to

do to help minimize the damaging affects of HAP on children irregardless of whether the person(s) exhibiting HAP require some form of mental treatment or not.

Part 2

The underlying causes of Hostile–Aggressive Parenting

There are a number of reasons why parents or other family members engage in **Hostile-Aggressive Parenting** when exercising their parental/guardian authority. It is important for all persons who have to deal with persons exhibiting HAP behaviours so that they can better understand why these persons are behaving in this manner. Some of the main causes, described briefly, are:

Anger and revenge

Anger and revenge and the inability to control it, are the most common underlying causes of **Hostile-Aggressive Parenting** behaviour. Usually, when a couple separates, there is a lot of pain and hurt caused by the separation. Unfortunately, many parents are unable to deal with their hurt in a positive way and, instead, focus their emotions in a damaging way towards their former spouse and family. Their anger and need for revenge against the other parent takes control to some extent. In severe cases, these emotions can become the main motivating factors in those persons' lives. Although anger and revenge are basic human reactions, they can be kept largely under control and their adverse affects on children eliminated if the appropriate intervention strategies are employed through the court process coupled with the proper support from the community.

Jealousy and fear

In some cases, parents may fear that their own relationship with their child is not strong enough and worry that their child may develop a stronger relationship with the other parent. Some parents may fear that they may lose custody of the child to the other parent. As a consequence, the fearful parent will resort to **Hostile-Aggressive Parenting** in the hope of strengthening their own bond with the child at the expense of the child's relationship with the other parent. Jealousy and fear are often high up on the list when a parent believes that their child may want to spend more time with the other parent or when custody is yet to be determined by the court. Some parents may resort to HAP fearing that the court may reduce their involvement with the child.

Power and Control

Some parents simply have a desire for power and control over the child and the child's other parent and the child literally becomes their tool to accomplish this. Often this thirst for power and control over the other family situation can last for many years. The use of the child as a means to have power and control over the other parent is most common in situations where a child has been placed under the sole custodial power of only one parent or where one parent has a significantly greater period of time with the child. In addition to the money that will often flow to the custodial parent from the non-custodial parent, parents who have custody of children are often able to make further financial demands and accounting of their former partners, year after year. Religious conflicts between parents are also a power and control issue, with parents of different religions wanting the children to follow the beliefs of his/her own religion.

Hostile-Aggressive behaviour as a court strategy

It is known in the legal community that if conflict exists in a family during separation or divorce that the courts will often apply the misguided concept of awarding sole custody to one parent in order to put the sole custodial parent “in control” over the children and, as it usually turns out, the other parent.

Many members of the public and the legal community claim that a bias in favour of mothers exists in the family courts today. Many believe that the courts will give custody of the children to the mother almost exclusively, with little regard to the father. Analysis of Canadian case law supports the claim that there is a bias based on gender in favour of mothers in the family court system.⁶

Some claim that because of the bias in the courts, some mothers who want to win sole custody in family court will deliberately create conflict prior to going into court as they believe that it is to their advantage to do so and the odds are in their favour. This may explain why many fathers experience access denial problems in the weeks and months prior to going to court.

Some claim that some parents are actually being encouraged by their solicitors to give lip service to any form of mediation, to make unfounded allegations and generally maintain a high level of conflict prior to going to court. Those in legal circles know that often the courts will grant sole custody, usually to mothers, should conflict exist prior to a court appearance. Calls to police and social services prior to court are common-place as parents attempt to disadvantage and frustrate the other parent, often forcing the other parent to call the authorities to seek help. This tactic is then used by the parent to claim conflict and to insist that the court grant sole custody to them. Unfortunately for the children, this strategy often works, with the result that the youngest, most defenceless children are then placed into the care of a parent who exposes the children to a lifetime of hatred and revenge, a behaviour pattern which many children end up learning and carrying into the next generation.

Lawyers and the adversarial court process

Lawyers play a significant role in creating hostilities and encouraging a parent to engage in **Hostile-Aggressive Parenting**. Although there are many fine and outstanding family law lawyers who sincerely try their best to resolve a family’s differences, unfortunately, there are a number of lawyers who use unnecessary inflammatory, derogatory and exaggerated language in affidavits, which helps to keep emotions high and court battles going. There seems that the prevalent thinking in the court system today is to give care and control of children to only one person where conflict exists. Some of the less caring lawyers, aware that courts tend to give power and control to only one parent when conflict exists, may encourage their clients to go so far as to provoke conflict as part of an overall strategy to win in court. Some lawyers have been exposed for putting barriers to the release of information critical to a child abuse investigation, because this information would place their client in a bad light. Unfortunately, the obligation of a lawyer to work in the best interest of their client, sometimes works against the best interest of the child, which undoubtedly will cause conflict with the other parent.

Social workers, counsellors and other health care professionals

Although there are many highly qualified and caring social workers, counsellors and other health care professionals, unfortunately, there are a number of those who are known to provide one-sided reports favourable to anyone who is willing to pay the price for their services. These unethical third parties will distort and manipulate the facts in a manner intended to conceal the behaviour of the hostile-aggressive parent while exaggerating any minor faults of the other parent. In some cases these unethical persons will submit false allegations and slander the parent they are trying to paint as a bad parent. Hostile-aggressive parents will often take their children to these contracted professionals after coaching the children to say certain things about the other parent when they are in the presence of these hired professionals. The report done by these types of professionals is then used in court by the hostile-aggressive parent against the other parent to further harm and in some cases completely sever the relationship between the child and the other parent. Some parents have reported that some third parties demand more money to continue their work or threaten to not finish their report. Many parent's who have reached the end of their financial abilities, drop out of the game, leaving the children stranded, often with the children being put in the care of the parent with resources to make it through the financial war. It has been widely reported and there is evidence to support the position that some social workers, including those working for government sanctioned agencies, have biases which result in highly inaccurate and flawed reports.

Listed below are just some of the indicators that should possibly raise concerns with third parties who work with children. The issue of unethical persons who work with children is more effectively covered in other literature. Some of these warning indicators would include:

- Will provide counselling or therapy with the child upon the consent of only one parent without giving the other parent the opportunity to be involved in the process within a reasonable period of time after first meeting the child.
- Will make statements about a child's relationship with a parent without ever providing an opportunity to meet the child and the parent together.
- Do not have an established place of business that they provide services from
- May often ask parents to hold meetings in coffee shops or other public locations.
- Will not disclose copies of their curriculum vitae or other evidence of their experience and past history
- Do not have published criteria, risk indicators or procedures they follow when doing work or are unwilling to provide copies of these tools for review.
- Will claim to have professional credentials but not a member of good standing with any professional body that regulates the profession locally. Some of these people have licenses granted in other countries or geographical areas which are not recognized locally but speak as if they are licensed locally. Some of these persons may refer to themselves as "therapists" which in many areas is not a regulated profession.
- Make claims and statements about children or parents in areas of expertise that they are not properly qualified or licensed to make.

Sole custody awards

In a high number of cases where **Hostile-Aggressive Parenting** has been reported, it is the parent with sole custody of the child who is identified as being the hostile-aggressive parent. Sole custody awards, in fact, generally result in higher levels of conflict than with joint custody arrangements⁷. One reason for this is that the sole custodial parents are now in a position to exercise their revenge with impunity, confident that the non-custodial parents, in most cases, have little or no rights. The old saying “Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely” often holds true in sole custody awards. Parents with sole custody may change the school or the child’s religion without the consent of the other parent. Custodial parents can, and often do, unilaterally change the child’s surname and give the child the surname of another person they enter into a relationship with. This can be very upsetting to the natural parent and extended family members.

Published statistics in most jurisdictions show that mothers are awarded custody of the children in the vast majority of times. The vast majority of complaints of hostile-aggressive parenting is also made against mothers. Although **Hostile-Aggressive Parenting** by sole custodial fathers can also be a problem, it would appear that this scenario is much less common. Research shows that sole custodial fathers are far more likely to include the mother in the parenting of the child than is a sole custodial mother to involve the father, thus explaining the reason for fewer complaints of **Hostile-Aggressive Parenting** by fathers.

Financial Incentives

Personal financial gain is also another strong motivator to hostile-aggressive parents. Gaining custody and control of the children involved is often desired as a way of increasing one party’s personal financial gain to the disadvantage of the other parent. **Hostile-Aggressive Parenting** can help achieve this by helping to gain custody and child support for the child. For the parent with custody of the child there are huge rewards – child support payment, income tax credits and other child tax credits. Between child support and the other tax benefits, the amount of money involved is usually amounts to thousands of dollars per year, much of it tax-free.

On the opposite side is the fear of the parent of becoming the non-custodial parent. This anticipated result encourages other parents to resort to **Hostile-Aggressive Parenting** for the same reason. The financial windfall associated with child support does little to promote cooperative parenting and ultimately increases animosity, anger, revenge, disorder and breaks down harmony. Child support laws are very punitive to the party who loses custody of the child.

Mild to severe psychological problems

In a small number of cases, severe psychological factors may be the cause. In most cases, those who exhibit severe hostile-aggressive-behaviour suffer some form of mental or emotional disorder which is affecting their ability to be rational. Many of actions of HAP parent are identified as patterns of behaviour associated with a form of mental illness referred to as “Borderline Personality Disorder” or (BPD). Persons dealing with HAP parents should conduct research into BPD to see if this mental health problem may be a factor in their case. A history of mental problems with other family members or a history of dysfunction in a person’s family may be signs of a mental condition.

Some HAP parents may carry their hate of the other parent on for years and years, never seeming to be able to forgive or to find peace with the other parent, no matter what the other parent may try to do to attempt to improve the situation. Some of the problems that the hostile-aggressive parent may have may relate to their own childhood experience and have absolutely nothing to do with the other parent. Still other parents may have delusions about the other parent and may really believe in their own mind, certain things about the other parent. For example, they may really believe that the other parent is sexually or physically abusing the child. In most cases there may be little or no evidence to support such conclusions. Sadly, child protection services can be misled by the hostile-aggressive parent into believing the parent's fantasy. This can and often does, results in a child being placed under even greater control of a hostile-aggressive parent.

Third party reinforcement/involvement

In many cases grandparents, babysitters and former family friends may also exhibit Hostile-Aggressive Parenting at times when they have authority over a child. For example, a daycare provider may prevent telephone communication between the child and the other parent while at their home because of instructions from the hostile-aggressive parent and without ever questioning the reasons for these instructions. Some grandparents, who provide care for the child at times, may be given similar instructions by their hostile-aggressive son/daughter. Tragically, some grandparents comply with the wishes of their hostile-aggressive son/daughter out of fear that their son/daughter will "punish" them for not following their orders. Similarly, teachers at school may help to keep a loving and caring parent away from their child based simply on the destructive wishes of a hostile-aggressive parent. Doctors and other specialists may also be deceived by the hostile-aggressive parent into taking a position which helps the hostile-aggressive parent spread their hatred of the other parent.

In such situations, these people become collaborators to the hostile-aggressive parent and end up helping the hostile-aggressive parent spread their sphere of hate and revenge. These collaborators, in fact, become unknowing contributors to abuse of the very child they mistakenly believe they are helping to protect. Any parent, especially a sole custodial parent, who instructs others to interfere with the child's relationship with another parent should be listened to with great caution and should be asked to submit their requests in writing with third party evidence to support their claims. Such parents who also exhibit a number of the identifying behaviours or risk factors of a hostile-aggressive parent should be considered highly suspect for child abuse and their motives questioned.

In most cases, these collaborators cooperate with the hostile-aggressive parent because they lack knowledge regarding Hostile-Aggressive Parenting and have been led to believe by the hostile-aggressive parent that they are doing the right thing and helping to protect the child. These collaborators have been given one-sided and misleading information about the separation and divorce by the hostile-aggressive parent. It must be remembered that HAP parents are usually masters of deception. The collaborators have been brainwashed into thinking that the hostile-aggressive parent is the good parent and that the other parent and extended family are bad influences. These collaborators usually lack the accurate and unbiased information about the family's situation needed to make an informative and fair conclusion on their own. Hostile-Aggressive parents will go so far as to relocate their child to a new babysitter or a new school

should they see that for some reason or another, that their collaborators have begun to see the truth of what the hostile-aggressive parent is really doing to their child and how wrong it is.

Part 3

The outcome of Hostile-Aggressive Parenting

Hostile-Aggressive Parenting, if left unchecked, will result in adverse, long term and often life-long consequences for the child, the child’s siblings (if any) and extended family members. Without effective intervention by the courts and the community, Hostile-Aggressive Parenting may cause the parents to remain embroiled in bitter conflict lasting for many years. Not only will Hostile-Aggressive Parenting affect the children and the parents but the entire community in which the family lives. In a study by Statistics Canada, hostile parenting has been identified as the most damaging form of child abuse. Children will perform poorly in school and will be lacking in the social skills needed later in life to be contributing members of society. Statistics Canada reported that children who were exposed to hostile or ineffective parenting were nine times more likely to show behavioral problems than children who were not exposed to hostile or ineffective parenting.⁸

A child who is raised in an environment where Hostile-Aggressive Parenting is practiced may eventually consider this type of behaviour to be normal and thus practice engage in this style of parenting themselves as they mature into adults and enter into their own personal relationships. Children learn to imitate the confrontational or aggressive behavioural styles that they observe in their parents⁹. A parent who engages in Hostile- Aggressive Parenting during their child’s growing years will likely cause significant harm to their own child’s psychological well-being.

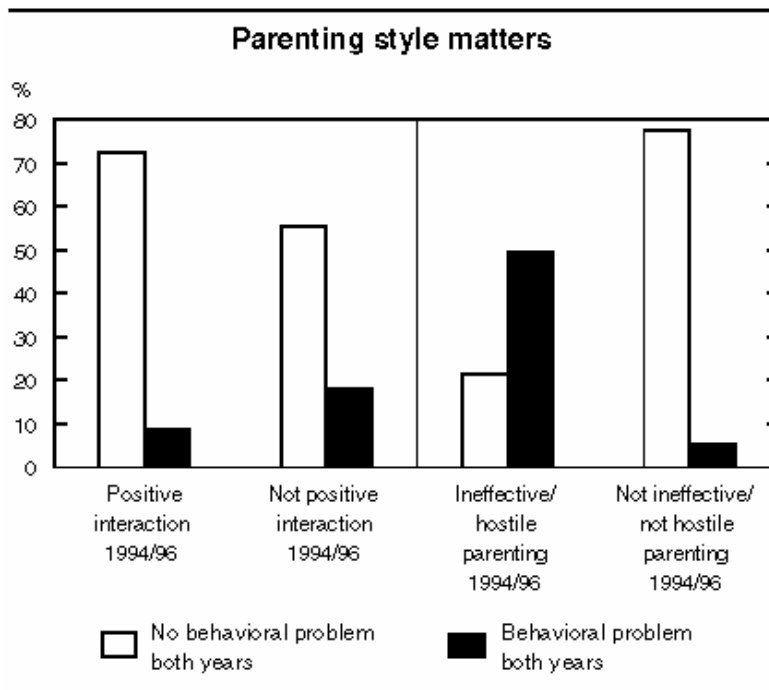


Chart from Statistics Canada National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth Cycle 2 showing that children subjected to the influences of hostile-aggressive parenting suffer behavioural problems

Parental alienation syndrome

One of the most serious and far reaching consequences of a child's exposure to Hostile-aggressive Parenting over a period of time is a psychological condition which the child may develop called Parental Alienation Syndrome or PAS. In many situations Hostile-Aggressive Parenting is so unrelenting and the child's awareness that the parent having control of them is so great, as to cause the child to begin to hate or fear their other parent and members of the other parent's family.

Under such conditions, a child is literally programmed by the hostile-aggressive (or alienating parent) to embark upon a campaign of denigration against the "hated" (or targeted) parent and the targeted parent's family unit. The child exhibits little if any ambivalence over their hatred, which often spreads to the extended family of the allegedly despised parent. Not only parents, but once loved grandparents and even other siblings can become the "enemy" of a child who has been brainwashed by a parent into believing that everyone who is associated with the "targeted" parent is bad and is to be avoided.

In today's political climate where mothers obtain sole custody of the children most of the time, it is, not surprisingly, that it is mothers who are reported to initiate such programming most of the time, while fathers and their extended families are the targets of such abuse. Sole custody transfers such awesome legal power on to one parent, that it is easy to understand how it can be abused, especially in the hands of someone driven by anger and vengeance.

This is one of the contributing factors that explains why so many fathers and their families are missing from the lives of children today.

It must also be noted, however, that in a small percentage of cases, the father is the primary programmer and the mother comes to be viewed as the "hated" parent. Research, however, shows that fathers are far more likely to include the mother in the parenting of the child than is the mother to involve the father.

In situations where Hostile-Aggressive Parenting is severe, children themselves may also exhibit the same behaviour as the hostile-aggressive parent and actually participate in this behaviour with the hostile-aggressive parent. The children may join together with the hostile-aggressive parent in a bizarre relationship in which they all share in the denigration of the other parent.

Although the steps outlined in this article will in most cases, reverse and even eradicate Parental Alienation Syndrome if detected in its early and intermediate stages, parents and children affected by advanced Parental Alienation Syndrome where psychological damage has been done, will likely require therapeutic and professional intervention in addition to the steps outlined in this document. In the majority of the times, lessening the amount of time the child is under the influence of the HAP parent is helpful at lessening the destructive influences of the HAP parent.

If the targeted parent has genuinely been abusive to the child (physically or emotionally), then the concept of PAS may not be applicable. In the vast majority of cases, Parental Alienation Syndrome

is induced largely through the destructive influences of only one of the parents. Generally, children are resilient enough to withstand a fair bit of emotional or physical abuse before they reach the point of hating a parent. It is not normal or healthy for any child to hate a parent without a good, solid reason. Some children have been abused for years in intact families, yet when apprehended by child welfare authorities were found to still love their parents. A child living under the influence and control of an HAP parent can be induced to hate the other parent through subtle, yet powerful, influences of the HAP parent. It is known that, in abusive situations, children often remain loyal to the HAP parent who is abusing them and may become strongly aligned to the abusive HAP parent, sometimes to the point of being dependant on the abuse.

For further information about Parental Alienation Syndrome, readers should review materials and books by Dr. Richard A. Gardner, a clinical professor of Child Psychiatry, Columbia University, College of Physicians and Surgeons, New York City. He is considered one of the world's top authority on this subject. Other professionals as well have written books and papers about Parental Alienation.

Part 4

Categories of Hostile-Aggressive Parenting and examples of associated behaviour

Hostile-Aggressive Parenting (HAP) generally can be categorized into two levels, the first being mild to moderate (the most common) and the second being severe. Identifying the behaviours of hostile-aggressive parents is the first step to determining the category and deciding on the necessary corrective actions to be taken.

The majority of hostile-aggressive parents fall into the mild to moderate category. Parents in this category are often able to keep their abusive parenting behaviour from being noticed by others or to keep it at a level that others will likely turn a blind eye to it. In the severe category, the abusive parenting is more conspicuous, with others in the community being able to identify many of the symptoms. The campaign of a hostile-aggressive parent in the severe category may be almost continual. In the severe category there may be frequent intervention by police and other support agencies as well as open defiance to court custody and access orders. Many of these parents have become quite bold, confident as they are that the system does little to establish consequences for their actions.

There are a minority of parents, however, whose **Hostile-Aggressive Parenting** is so chronic and deep-seated that they may be considered fanatical. Often parents in this category may suffer from emotional or psychological disorders. It is in this category that the hostile-aggressive parent's behaviour towards the friendly parent and the child is likely to be alarming. The hostile parent may utilize a wide variety of hostile and aggressive tactics designed to make life difficult for the friendly parent and to disrupt their child's relationship with the friendlier parent.

In severe cases of HAP, many of the symptoms seen in the mild to moderate category are likely to be present to a significant degree as well as one or more of the symptoms identified in the severe category. The hostile-aggressive parent's level of hostility against the target parent can be very pronounced. The rationalization that the hostile-aggressive parent uses to justify their behaviour becomes more frivolous, and more absurd than in mild to moderate. The hostile-aggressive parent describes the other parent as all bad and attempts to program his or her hate of the other parent into the child in what is described by health care professionals as "Parental Alienation."

Under such extreme circumstances, sanctions may be necessary against the hostile-aggressive parent. Transfer of parenting responsibilities from the hostile-aggressive parent to the target parent may be necessary so that the target parent can provide greater care, control and protection of the child and prevent further emotional harm to the child by actions of the hostile-aggressive parent.

Examples of mild to moderate Hostile-Aggressive Parenting

In the mild to moderate category of **HAP**, most parents exhibit a number of recognizable behaviours. The extensive list below have been compiled from interviews with hundreds of parents, guardians as well as legal and health who have either experienced or witnessed **Hostile-Aggressive Parenting**. Should a parent or guardian engage in a number of the behaviours listed below, then the parent should be considered as a risk to the child's development. The list is below is not sorted in any particular order.

Some of these examples are:

- 1) **Will badmouth the other parent in front of the children.** *Hostile-Aggressive Parents will often say bad things about the other parent and constantly try to put a negative perspective on many of the things that the other parent does, even when they are reasonable things.*
- 2) **Not willing to participate in any reasonable form of written communication.** *Hostile-Aggressive Parents generally try to avoid written communication such as letters, e-mails or faxes as these documents generally provide evidence to reveal their abusive and uncooperative behaviour. Some HAP parents may send typewritten notes on occasion but often will not put their signature on their notes.*
- 3) **Will tell the other parent and other third parties to deal only with their lawyer at times of minor conflict.** *The HAP parent wishes to frustrate the other parent and believes that their lawyer will help them makes things more difficult and further frustrate the other party's efforts to communicate.*
- 4) **Will frustrate telephone communication**

Frustrating telephone communications is one of the most common behaviours that HAP parents demonstrate. The HAP parent will often attempt to frustrate phone communication in the following ways:

- *When the phone rings, they will pick up the phone but then immediately hang up the phone on the calling party.*
- *Will not answer the phone when the other parent calls.*
- *Turn off their answering machine when they see that it is the other parent who is calling which makes it difficult for the other parent to leave messages.*
- *Use the call block feature on the phone so that the other party cannot ring through to their number even though the other parent's actions would not warrant the blocking of calls.*
- *Will hang up the phone immediately at the end of a conversation without giving the other parent a chance to respond.*
- *Not return phone messages left by the other parent even when left on an answering machine*

Often the child will observe the telephone manners of HAP parent which sets a bad role model for the child. The Hostile-Aggressive Parent wishes to limit the child's contact with the other parent and frustrate the other parent. In some cases, HAP parents are trying to get the other parent to do something that they can use as an excuse to call police.

- 5) **Will order their child not to answer the phone when it rings, thereby limiting the child's telephone contacts with the other parent.** *Many children in this situation are aware that their other parent is trying to call but are often too fearful of the HAP parent to pick up the phone even though they would like to.*
- 6) **Force the child to speak to the other parent or family members on speakerphone or listen in on conversations.** *Some HAP parents will force the child to converse with the other parent over a speakerphone or will listen in on the child conversation's so that they can hear their child's live telephone conversations with the other parent. HAP parents are literally paranoid about anything that their child may say to the other parent or about what the other parent may say to the child.*
- 7) **Say that the child does not want to speak to the other parent.** *HAP Parents will not have the child call the other parent at prescribed times, even court ordered, and then say that the child did not want to speak to the other parent. Very often these children are afraid to even ask as they know the HAP parent will not be happy and may punish them in some ways.*
- 8) **Will encourage the child to defy the other parent's authority and even grant the child permission to do things which the other parent has deemed to be inappropriate.** *This could range from allowing a young child to stay up far to late at night or not do his/her homework. This is especially harmful with a teenage child as it encourages the child to manipulate one parent against the other to avoid discipline and consequences. Hostile-aggressive parents will allow the child to make decisions which clearly the child should not be making.*
- 9) **Will tell the child that they cannot alter the parenting times outlined on the court Order as the court does not allow this.** *HAP parents try to deceive children by telling them that they cannot spend more time with the other parent because the court Order prohibits it. Although the HAP parent know otherwise, the HAP parent wants the child to think that it is the court's fault so that they can deflect blame away from themselves.*
- 10) **Will play on the children's feeling of guilt and sympathy.** *Some examples may include telling the child that they will be lonely or not loved if the child leaves to go with the other parent or telling the child that they were really looking forward to the child spending time with them for a specific event or function, even though it was the other parent's parenting time. Children find it very difficult to express their wishes when put under pressure by the parent they are with at the time or against the wishes of the parent that they perceive to have the most power and control over them.*
- 11) **Will be uncooperative when it comes to working out summer and holiday schedules for children.** *The hostile-aggressive parent will make all kinds of excuses and employ all sorts of tactics to impede the negotiation process. The hostile-aggressive parent's intention is to create uncertainty with the other parent, to create difficulties with the other parent's schedule*

and to hopefully through the delay, to minimize the amount of time that the child will have to spend with the other parent.

- 12) **Fail to involve the other parent in the choice of daycare providers.** *Quite often the hostile-aggressive parent will chose friends or people they know who will accept their side of the story without questioning them. They will search out to find day care providers who will side with them or bend the truth in their favour to help them make things difficult for the other parent. The daycare workers these parents choose often are ones who they know will not get "involved" to help resolve problems or will keep silent about reporting irregularities involving the children. Such daycare providers become, in effect, collaborative supporters to child abuse.*
- 13) **Choose third parties over the other parent to care for the child when he/she is ill and not in school, regardless of the other parent's availability and willingness to care for the child.** *The hostile-aggressive parent will use every opportunity to keep the other parent from having the chance to parent the child regardless of the wishes of the child or other parent.*
- 14) **Deny access to the children by pretending that they are too sick or they have too much homework, or delay their availability.** *The hostile-aggressive parent will use every opportunity to keep the other parent from having the chance to parent the child regardless of the wishes of the child or other parent.*
- 15) **Create difficulties for the children to see the other parent on special occasions.** *Hostile-Aggressive parents will attempt to prevent the child from being with the other parent on special occasions such as birthdays, Father's or Mother's day, special family gatherings, etc.*
- 16) **Attempt to force themselves upon the other family at functions.** *Hostile-Aggressive parents may show up unannounced at special events such as the funeral of a member of their ex-partner's family when they know that they are not invited or welcomed. This is often done to disrupt the peacefulness of other family's function.*
- 17) **Insist that the non-custodial parent return the children precisely on time while not respecting these same rules themselves.**
- 18) **Unwilling to make arrangements with the other parent when situations arise which reasonably warrant some flexibility.** *For instance, a hostile parent may refuse to vary parenting time to allow a child to attend events such as dance rehearsal, birthday parties and other events because they are desired by other parent.*
- 19) **Unwilling to have a third party act as a mediator, coordinator, or have any other professional involved in helping the parents co-parent the children effectively.** *The hostile-aggressive parent does not want any other third parties involved who may bear witness to their Hostile-Aggressive Parenting. Quite often, the Hostile-aggressive parent will claim that third parties are biased as a way to justify not wanting to have them involved.*
- 20) **Take the children to counsellors, doctors or other professionals without the knowledge or permission of the other parent.** *The hostile-aggressive parent will often take his/her child to a professional such as counsellor or family doctor to obtain documentation such as letters of support or opinions which may help them win to disrupt the child's relationship with the other parent. The HAP parent will not want the professionals to obtain any input from the other*

parent as they do not want the professional to be influenced by information from the friendly parent, which often is only the truth. Professionals who provide support to HAP parents under such circumstances are referred to in the industry as “hired guns”. Sometimes these professionals are approached by the lawyer of the HAP parent and often convinced to provide information to support the one side.

- 21) Unwilling to participate in mediation or any kind of parenting program, which involves the participation of all the members of the family.** *Hostile-Aggressive parents are usually afraid of their abusive parenting being exposed at such meetings. They often do not want other members of their family, often the children, to be revealing family secrets to outside third parties.*
- 22) Unwilling to consider any kind of fair and equal parenting arrangement for the children when such an arrangement is desired by the other parent and/or the children.** *Most Hostile-Aggressive parents cannot stand the thought of the other parent getting the same rights as they do with their children. Although children can adapt to a variety of parenting arrangements, HAP parents will insist that for reasons of consistency and predictability that the children must be with them for a greater amount of time than with the other parent.*
- 23) Make unilaterally plans for the child on the other parent’s access time.** *HAP parents will sometimes plan activities for the child during the child’s time to be with the other parent. For instance, a custodial parent may sign a child up for a sports activity which may involve the child participation on the days that the child will be with the other parent. Although having both parents show cooperation and to support a common interest of the child is good, this may be considered controlling and abusive when the other parent has less than 50% time share with the child, which is usually the case with most non-custodial parents.*
- 24) Not inform the other parent of upcoming school activities, events, or holidays when the child’s regular schedule at school may not be applicable.**
- 25) Not inform the other parent when the child is injured.** *HAP parents will often not inform the other parent if the child has injured themselves or is required to go to the doctor’s office or hospital. The HAP parent will tell the other parent days later and sometimes not until the other parent’s regular parenting time.*
- 26) Not allow the child to have any pictures or memorabilia involving the other parent in the home, including the child’s own room.**
- 27) Throw out or destroy pictures of the other parent and remove pictures of the other parent from all photo albums. This often will include pictures that their own child may have.** *The HAP parent has very little, if any, respect for the past, even if there were some good experiences to remember. Their anger is so intense that even the picture of their former spouse in their home will negatively affect them.*
- 28) Discard or sell gifts given by the other parent while they were together** *The hostile-aggressive parent will “clear house” by throwing out wedding gifts, wedding gowns and rings and other memorabilia relating to the couple’s past relationship. Items which could be of immense value to a child in later years are discarded with little consideration.*
- 29) Contact their child’s school or daycare and attempt to discredit the other parent and to prevent the other parent’s involvement with their child’s activities at the child’s school**

or daycare. *When they contact the school or daycare, HAP parents will use the same tricks that they used in court - they will often make unsubstantiated claims and exaggerations against the other parent to cause maximum harm to the other parent's credibility in an attempt to minimize the other parent's involvement with the school or daycare.*

- 30) **Supply the school with false or misleading contact information about the other parent and family designed to make it difficult for the school to contact the non-custodial parent in the event of an emergency.** *The hostile-aggressive parent wants school officials to only recognize themselves as the parent and not the other parent and extended family.*
- 31) **Will tamper with notes and communications from the school so that the other parent will not be informed or obtain information intended for the other parent.** *The hostile-aggressive parent will sometimes intercept items such as notes from teachers, school pictures, etc. from the child's school so that the other parent will not get these items.*
- 32) **Will refuse to participate in activities at the child's school when the other parent is present.** *In some cases the other parent may be doing another totally separate activity in the school but the hostile-aggressive parent will not want to even be at the school, knowing the other parent is in the same building.*
- 33) **Will object to the other parent (usually the non custodial parent) taking the child to any kind of counselling or other third party professional.** *The hostile aggressive parent is often fearful of the child disclosing things to other third parties without their knowledge which may affect their situation with the court.*
- 34) **Refuse to disclose important and relevant contact information to the non-custodial parent.** *The hostile-aggressive parent may refuse to disclose such information as place of employment, phone numbers, contact numbers, health card information, etc., when there is no valid reason to keep this information secret. Many times, this information can be important to the other parent in the case of an emergency.*
- 35) **Attempt to spread their hate and animosity to the friends and/or extended family of the targeted parent.** *The hostile-aggressive parent needs to be seen as the better parent and to achieve this goal will resort to many tactics to undermine the credibility and reputation of the other parent.*
- 36) **Feed misinformation to professionals in order to obtain letters supporting their side** *Hostile-aggressive parents will often present themselves quite well to professionals such as doctors, nurses, police officers, etc. They are often masters of deception and will often feed these professionals with one sided information in order to mislead professionals so that they can extract opinion or recommendation letters from these professionals which can favour the HAP parent. Often the HAP parent will use these letters to block the other parent's access time with the child or use the letters in court against the other parent.*
- 37) **Proclaim to have been awarded custody of the children by the court because the court deemed them to be the better parent and the other parent to be a lesser of a parent.** *Hostile-aggressive parents will use a court decision, even if flawed and unjust, as a tool in their war against the other parent.*

- 38) **Will threaten the child with loss of their love should the child ever want to live with the other parent or should the child show affection towards the other parent or other parent's extended family.** *A common thing that hostile-aggressive parents say to their child is that they will never be welcomed back again if they ever go to live with the other parent.*
- 39) **Will coach the child to “spy” on the other parent.** *Many HAP parents will ask the child to report back to them about activities in the other parent's home and will tell the child to keep their “spying” activities a secret from the other parent.*
- 40) **Will make claims in court documents that there is parental conflict, while doing nothing to reduce such conflict.** *In many cases, the hostile-aggressive parent actually creates the conflict before going to court as a strategy to win custody in court and then blame the other side for the conflict.*
- 41) **Will send the child to the other parent's home in old and undesirable clothes and keep any newer clothes that the other parent may have sent the child in when the child came to their home.** *In this manner, the hostile-aggressive parent will indirectly benefit by making the other parent purchase more than their share of clothes for the child.*
- 42) **Will take the child out of the country on extended trips or holidays without leaving the other parent any details or contact information.** *HAP parents want to show the other parent that they have full control over the child and extended times away are one way in which these parents can demonstrate their power and control.*
- 43) **Will extort favours or materialistic things from the other parent.** *HAP parents will demand that the other parent purchase clothes and toys for the child or make concessions to transportation even though they are receiving money for child support. If these demands are not met, the HAP parent will punish the other parent by tightening control over the child.*
- 44) **Will ask the Court to issue a restraining order against the other party when there really is no need.** *HAP parents often want a restraining order to help make the other party look bad in court and also to set up the other parent for stalking or harassment charges later on. Once the restraining order is placed it becomes very easy in the future for the HAP parent to turn any little argument into a grounds for police intervention and arrest. When police see that a restraining order is already in effect, it is assumed that the person was already a troublemaker and immediately take harsh steps against that parent.*

Examples of severe Hostile-Aggressive Parenting

Parents and/or guardians who practice severe **Hostile-Aggressive Parenting** will usually be highly noticeable by a number of people and their behaviour will in most cases be considered objectionable by most other reasonable people in the community. Most parents in this category have engaged in a high number of the examples in the mild to moderate category in addition to some or several of the examples of the severe category. Children under the care and control of any parent who exhibits the behaviours below should be considered at high risk of psychological harm. Below are some of the identifying behaviours exhibited by parents in the severe category:

- 1) **Openly violate court orders and agreements, especially in relation to parenting time.** *HAP parents will ignore or challenge the authority of almost any court when it comes to parenting time – if they believe that they can get away with it. Hostile-Aggressive parents will constantly look at ways in which to deprive the other parent/guardian of time with the children and will challenge the resolve of the court to correct it. This is most commonly referred to as “access denial.”*
- 2) **Continue to exhibit anger towards the other parent, months or even years after the original separation of the couple.** *Hostile-aggressive parents in the “severe” category may literally exhibit their hate and anger towards the other parent for the rest of their life. Seldom can they ever think or talk about their former partners without evoking negative emotions..*
- 3) **Forge court documents.** *Some HAP parents have been known to have their lawyers or other parties tamper with court documents and in some cases even forge a judge’s signature to fabricate a false court Order.*
- 4) **Kidnap the children and go into hiding.** *In some rare situations, HAP parents may flee with the children without any warning and take the children to another state, province and in some cases another country, leaving no trace of where they were taking the child. In some situations, parents have been successful in hiding the children for years.*
- 5) **Fabricate false allegations against the other parent involving sexual or physical abuse of the children.** *Very Hostile-Aggressive Parents will go so far as to make false sexual abuse or physical abuse. Often parents will claim that children are “afraid” of the other parent. HAP parents will call police and Children’s Aid officials with their fabricated stories, knowing that an investigation often may result in the other parent losing contact with the child for extended periods of time until an investigation is complete.*
- 6) **Arrange anonymous allegations of abuse to police and children’s Aid Agencies.** *Sometimes Hostile-Aggressive Parents will make anonymous phone complaints to agencies in a effort to get the agencies to begin an investigation involving the child and the other parent. The HAP parent wants to create as many problems to the other parent or family as possible.*
- 7) **Create interference at the other parent’s place of employment or volunteer position in the community** *The HAP parent will employ a number of tactics to adversely affect the other parent in his/her career to satisfy their need of revenge and thirst of power and control over the other parent. This may even include trying to get the other parent kicked out of volunteering at their children’s school or at other functions in the community.*
- 8) **Not allow the child to be with or to communicate with the other parent on Father’s Day, Mother’s Day, birthdays and other special occasions.** *The HAP parent will ignore special days and discourage the child from showing respect for the other parent. Some children may actually wish to communicate with their other parent but will be afraid to mention this to their HAP parent who in most likely the non-custodial parent.*
- 9) **Impose on the other parent’s access time with the children.** *HAP parent will sometime show up at activities where the non-custodial parent may have taken the child during their time with the child. The HAP parent and then come over and speak to the child while they are supposed to be spending time with the other parent. Some HAP parents may be so overbearing and controlling as to impose on the other parent’s time with the child, even when the other parent may be subjected to supervised access with the child. Although there may be times,*

such as school concerts, when contact between parents may be unavoidable, HAP parents usually go out of their way to have contact with the child, not the other parent.

- 10) Threaten or intimidate third parties who try to assist the family or third parties who may have witnessed the parent's Hostile-Aggressive Parenting.** *The HAP parent will use intimidation tactics and veiled threats to ward off the involvement of outside third parties who may wish to offer help to the child. In some cases HAP parents may even threaten third parties with legal action or police action should they get involved in the family's matters. HAP parents want to get rid of any party who may be trying to advocate for the children by bringing valuable information regarding abuse of the children by the HAP parent out into the open.*
- 11) Relocate the child's place of residency further away from the other parent, family and friends for the purpose of tightening control on the child and eliminating the other parent from regular involvement.** *In some cases, hostile-aggressive parents will move away to another community using excuses such as work reasons to justify their move but in reality the purpose of the move was to make it more difficult on the other parent to see the child.*
- 12) Instruct the child's school not to provide information or report cards to the other parent and/or attempt to keep the other parent from attending school activities or events.** *Although major research studies have shown that involvement of parents at the child's school, especially non custodial parents, can be beneficial to the child's performance at school, HAP parents will use every trick in the book to keep the other parent out of their child's school life.*
- 13) Change their child's surname.** *Changing a child's surname is someone done almost exclusively by mothers. HAP parents will sometimes change their child's name sometimes to insult to the other parent or as a show of power over the other parent. HAP parents may change names on school records and other documents, often without following proper legal change of name procedures. Maiden names are often used and in some cases mothers will even change the last name of their child to be the same as their most recent common law spouse. Surnames become a flavour of the day with HAP parents and change as often as they change partners.*
- 14) Get the child to call the other parent by their first name** *The HAP parent wants to humiliate their former spouse and will pressure their child to call their other parent by their first name. Quite often while the HAP pressures the child to call the parent by his/her first name, the HAP parent will insist that the child refer to their new partner as mommy or daddy.*
- 15) Reject registered mail.** *Although most hostile-aggressive parents will try not to leave evidence of their behaviour, some in the serious category will even turn away registered mail that may be sent to them regarding their separation, divorce or parenting arrangements.*
- 16) Provide the school with false or misleading information about the other parent to keep the other parent and family uninvolved.** *For example, a hostile aggressive parent may provide the names and phone numbers of people to call should their be an emergency at school yet avoid mentioning the other parent or family members, even though they may be more able to provide assistance in the event of an emergency at school or daycare.*

- 17) **Attempt to physically harm the other parent.** *Some HAP parents may go so far as to attempt to murder or maim the other parent either themselves or through a third party “hit” person.*
- 18) **Commit acts of vandalism against the property of other family members.** *Such things could include damaging the other person’s car or home.*
- 19) **Have fits of intense anger/verbal abuse against the other parent in front of the child or other third parties.** *These outbursts by the hostile-aggressive parent often cause fear and anxiety in the child. These types of outbreaks are an indicator of emotional instability.*
- 20) **Threaten the other parent with physically hurting the child if the other parent does not give in to their demands.** *Some HAP parents have been known to murder their children as a means of seeking revenge on their former spouses.*
- 21) **May attempt to extort money for additional time with the child.** *Some hostile-aggressive parents will literally tell the other parent they can see the child but only if they pay money.*
- 22) **Continue to act against the best interest of their child even after this abuse has been identified by third parties.** *The hostile-aggressive parent will refuse to follow the recommendations and advice of mediators and outside third party professionals even after hostile parenting behaviours have been brought to the attention of the HAP parent. HAP parents will continue their campaign of terror no matter what others have to say.*
- 23) **Offer money or bribes to outside third parties to bear false witness or to assist in making false allegations of child abuse against the other parent.** *Some HAP parents may be so bold enough as to involve others in the use of false allegations.*
- 24) **Make false allegations of harassment against third parties who are trying to help the family.** *HAP parents will allege that the other party is having them harassed by having friendly third parties to call them in an attempt to assist the family resolve its problems. The HAP parent will attempt to put these third parties in an unfavourable light with the court so that the court will discourage input from these other helpful third parties. The HAP parent will do almost anything to get rid of any third party who is trying to assist.*
- 25) **Will seek out lawyers in their community with a known reputation of not caring about children or families.** *Hostile-aggressive parents may fire and hire several lawyers as they attempt to find the most unscrupulous one they can find.*
- 26) **Have their lawyer attempt to intimidate the child’s school.** *Unethical lawyers working for HAP parents often attempt to intimidate third parties by telephoning them or writing to them in an attempt to intimidate them. Lawyers have been known to call school officials in an attempt to solicit information favourable to their client which is often done in a manner to distort the truth. Some lawyers will lead school officials to believe that they must restrict access to one parent and that the school must do as the HAP parent tells them to.*
- 27) **Avoid acknowledging the child should he or she accidentally meet the child and the other parent together in public.** *HAP parents will often turn and walk away in another direction in a store or shopping mall should they accidentally meet their child with the other parent. The HAP parent’s anger is so strong that it blocks their ability to even act civilly in public.*

- 28) **Self-inflict physical injuries.** *HAP parents may inflict injuries, usually bruises, upon themselves and then report this to doctors and police in an attempt to frame the other parent. Usually there are no witnesses to the actual incident where physical contact was claimed to have occurred although the hostile-aggressive parent will claim that this harm occurred during some time when a minor conflict, possibly verbal, occurred.*
- 29) **Totally severe any relationship between the child and other step parents and extended step parent family.** *HAP parents desire to destroy any positive relationship that their own child may have developed with step parents or step siblings. The HAP parent takes the position that once the relationship is over between the parents, then the relationship that any child may have with the other parent or family is also ended.*
- 30) **Severely restrict the child's access to a telephone.** *Some hostile-aggressive parents may restrict all access to a phone in their home by their child in order to prevent the child from communicating with the other parent. Some parents may change to cellular phones which they keep with them at all times. Some children are not even allowed to know their phone numbers at home, thus preventing phone contact by the child's friends.*
- 31) **May coach their children from previous relationships to bad mouth their most recent partner and involve the children in their hate campaign of the target parent.** *This is very damaging to the child, as the child is being taught to hate another person for no reason whatsoever.*
- 32) **Exercise total control over children's access to phone with use of cellular phone.** *Some HAP parents may totally control the use of phone with children but using a cellular phone and not having any home based phone. In this way the HAP parent can have total control over the phone where the child cannot even use, should the HAP parent not be watching the phone. The HAP parent has total control over incoming and outgoing calls to the child.*
- 33) **Engage in tape recording child's telephone calls and involve others in this illegal practice.** *Some HAP parents will tape all their children's telephone calls between the other parent. Although this may be warranted out of fear of inappropriate dialogue for limited amounts of time, generally HAP parents will tape record conversations over many months and even years. HAP parents will also get other family members, such as grandparents, involved in illegally tape recording conversations between the child and parent. Under more appropriate conditions, a parent with a concern should deal with the problem in an open manner with the other parent and child, but not continue to record conversations over an extended period of time.*
- 34) **May threaten and/or intimidate their child.** *The HAP parent may threaten or intimidate a child by telling them things to make them scared or sad such as destroying a pet or refusing to give the child something that the parent had previously promised to give to the child.*
- 35) **Tell the child to remain silent about incidences where the child has been abused or where the child has witnessed abuse in the home.** *Many HAP will threaten or intimidate their children and get the children to be part of the HAP parent's pattern of lies and deceptions. This is emotionally harmful for the child and sets a very bad role model for the child in that it teaches children that it is OK to lie and to hide the truth.*

In the majority of cases, it is the sole custodial parent who generally exhibits the behaviours listed under severe **Hostile-Aggressive Parenting**. This is because the custodial parent has greater legal control over the child and knows that the other parent has little, if any, legal authority to challenge them and is therefore powerless to prevent such behaviour. Often, with HAP parents there may be also a number of additional risk assessment indicators present which may provide further evidence that the hostile-aggressive parent's problems are deep rooted. When behaviours in the severe HAP category are observed it is also advisable to review these additional risk assessment indicators.

Additional Risk Assessment Indicators

In most instances where signs of **Hostile-Aggressive Parenting** are present, some of the following additional risk factors would also likely be noted. The presence of these additional risk assessment indicators would further reinforce a conclusion of Hostile-Aggressive behaviour. Should any of these risk assessment indicators listed below be detected with parents who are also exhibiting a number of the behaviours/actions listed in the severe category, then it is very likely that the hostile-aggressive parent may have some deep seated psychological problems requiring professional treatment, which will adversely affect their ability to act in the best interest of the child. The following risk assessment indicators are often associated with HAP parents and they should also be referred to whenever HAP is suspected.

Additional risk assessment indicators are:

- 1) Past history of denial of children's access to a parent from one or more previous relationships. HAP parents with children from previous marriages often have children who do not have regular contact with their other biological parent and extended family. A high risk indicator would be if the parent has a child who has been totally alienated from any parent with whom the child once had a good relationship with.
- 2) Past history of being raised as a child in a home where Hostile-Aggressive Parenting was practiced by parents or guardians in that home against other parents or children. Quite often, parents and guardians suffering from HAP were raised by a parent who alienated them from another parent. H.A.P. behaviours can be passed down from one generation to the next.
- 3) Have siblings who have also been alienated from a parent or other family members.
- 4) History of physical or emotional abuse of a partner's children from previous relationship during the time that hostile-aggressive parent was cohabitating with their partner.
- 5) Past history as a victim of sexual or physical abuse as a child.
- 6) Previous attempts at suicide or threats of suicide to intimidate others.
- 7) Currently under medication for depression or mental illness or past history of mental illness or depression requiring treatment or medication.
- 8) Current use of drugs or alcohol or a past history of their use
- 9) History of bad relations with third parties such as neighbours, landlords, babysitters, in-laws or past friends.

- 10) Documented history as a perpetrator of child abuse or child neglect with child protection agencies.
- 11) Past history as a foster child or child receiving temporary care or assistance of local child protection agencies.
- 12) History of neglect of children such as leaving children alone in the home when the children were too young to be left alone.
- 13) History as a perpetrator of physical or emotional abuse against their partner during cohabitation
- 14) History as a victim of physical or emotional abuse by their partner during cohabitation.
- 15) Few or no long term friendships. Hostile-aggressive parents tend to constantly change their friends as people become aware of the hostile-aggressive parent's behaviour.
- 16) History of protracted litigation with one or more previous partners.
- 17) Poor relationship with parents or other members of immediate family.
- 18) Past history of conflict with in-laws and former in-laws from previous relationships.
- 19) History of having former partner(s) charged criminally for sexual or physical abuse. *(Often hostile-aggressive parents use false allegations against the other parent to get revenge)*
- 20) Children of the relationship may indicate a fear of reprisals by the hostile-aggressive parent should they speak about the hostile-aggressive parent's behaviour.
- 21) Children may verbally convey to others, a preference to be with their non hostile-aggressive parent or may express a very strong desire to live with the non hostile-aggressive parent.
- 22) Neighbours and friends of the family also express concern about the behaviour and motivation of the hostile-aggressive parent.
- 23) Anger management problem such as history of yelling at children, spouse and others.
- 24) A pattern of multiple, short term sexual relationships or promiscuous behaviours.
- 25) Past history of deceptive practices such as shoplifting, fraud, use of false or misleading information relating to abuse of welfare or immigration laws. *In many cases, HAP parents are good liars and masters of deception.*
- 26) Currently involved in an intimate or live-in relationship with a new partner. *HAP parents may become more determined to alienate children from a previous relationship in an attempt to make them more attached to a new partner.*
- 27) Past history of naming children from a relationship with the mother's maiden name. *HAP parents (mothers) will insist at the birth of their child that they want the child to carry their own last name rather than the name of the father which is considered normal for North American Tradition. Many HAP parents quite often have already made plans to leave their current partners at a future convenient time, and even pregnancy may be part of their plan of deception. HAP parents generally want to get things in place that will give them full control when they do make the move to separate from their partners.*

- 28) Past history of using a different surname to a partner they may have been married to as a form of disrespect to their current partner at the time. *Some HAP mothers have been know to resort back to their maiden name and sometimes use the last name of former husbands even while married and living with new husband. This does not include those professional people such as doctors who are happily married but who keep their original surnames for professional reasons.*

PART 5

Observable effects of Hostile-Aggressive Parenting on children

In most cases, children will exhibit some signs of being affected by **Hostile-Aggressive Parenting** to those with the knowledge of HAP. Some of the signs can be misleading to those without knowledge and experience to the point where outside third parties may be totally misled initially. Evaluating HAP can be very deceiving to unsuspecting observers, especially when children have been coached or have been made to have fears of their hostile-aggressive parent or guardian. Therefore, it is important that conclusions be based on observations of the child and parents/guardians over a period of time in order to provide greater accuracy in determining the presence of HAP and identifying who the perpetrator of the abuse is. These observable signs are affected by the age of the child and the intensity of the hostile-aggressive parent's campaign. Sole custody and control of a child can be a significant barrier to the evaluation of HAP. A child is at greatest risk when sole custody of the child is in the hands of a parent who is hostile and aggressive to the other parent. Sole custody in the hands of such a person, when there would appear to be another caring parent available, is often nothing more than a license to emotionally abuse the child. A non-custodial parent, even if they may have tendencies towards HAP, are not in an position to influence a child to any great extent as the custodial parent can easily take steps to reinforce their control over the child and diminish the non-custodial parents influence over the child.

Below is a sampling of just some examples of the widely-varied behaviours that may be observed in a child who is being adversely affected by Hostile-Aggressive Parenting:

May exhibit behavioural problems

Children exposed to hostile parenting likely will likely demonstrate a number of behavioural problems as a result of their exposure ranging from minor to serious. When children observe their own parent acting in an anti-social and aggressive manner for a period of time they often pick up on a number of these behaviours and consider them to be socially acceptable. Children under the influence of a hostile-aggressive parent may become themselves, selfish, self centred and have anger management difficulties. Children who are being hit or yelled at by a HAP parent will begin to deal with their own problems in the same manner, often hitting out at siblings or schoolmates. Many of these negative behaviours are often observable at the child's school. HAP behaviours picked up by a child from the HAP parent will, in many cases, seriously affect a child's development and interfere with their ability to lead a normal and balanced life. Some professionals may diagnose the child as having a conduct disorder but do not realize that the child's own parent is instilling these types of behaviours into the child.

Some young children who exhibit behaviour problems as a result of exposure to HAP parents do improve over the years. However, at least half or more get worse. Older children often develop a hostile, aggressive attitude as well as being disobedient and defiant to parents and authorities. Often these children get involved in more violent physical fights and may start to use weapons. They may steal or lie, without any sign of remorse or guilt when they are found out. They refuse to follow

rules and may start to break the law. Teenagers exposed to the influences of an HAP parent start to manipulate the parents so that they can get anything they want. Remember, when children witness an HAP parent lie and deceive people and get away with it, then the child may develop the same attitude. They see that if their parent can get away with it, then they can too.

Often, the parent who may have practiced HAP parenting when the child was younger, now find themselves held hostage to a child terrorist. HAP parents, fearful that the child may leave them and go to the other parent if they don't get their way, often fall prey by letting the child set their own limits. The fear of losing child support payment, alone, is enough to make a parent ignore good parenting just to maintain their legal control over the child. Many of these affected children get involved in criminal behaviour with their friends. They may steal cars, break into houses or shoplift. They may take risks with their health and safety by taking illegal drugs or having unprotected sexual intercourse.

May be overly quiet and reserved

A child under the primary control of a hostile-aggressive parent is often threatened with being punished if they say something about the parent's Hostile-Aggressive Parenting. To protect themselves, children become quiet, reserved and afraid to speak out about the HAP parent. The child will find that by saying nothing, even if it means hiding abuse against them, keeps them out of further trouble with their hostile-aggressive parent. This type of behaviour is not uncommon with children under 12 years of age.

May become defensive when questioned about the hostile-aggressive parent's behaviour

Sometimes their body language will give these kids away. When questioned about the HAP parent, they may squirm, become easily distracted or use phrases such as "I don't know" or "I want to go" or "I don't remember". Some children may forget things that the HAP parent has done that other children or witnesses can recall. When children are under the primary care and control of a hostile-aggressive parent they will often learn to say what the hostile-aggressive parent wishes them to say while hiding their real feelings. These children know that their HAP parent is trying to hide the truth and that the child may be punished for telling others the truth. Sometimes it is only these children's body language that will give them away during an interview.

May express to their teacher, a desire to share their school related work with a specific parent

Teachers at school may be faced with a situation where a child may tell them that they would like to take their work from school to a particular parent or that they don't want a particular parent to come to school. The child may even ask to keep the work at school in order to get it directly to the other parent. They may even not want their custodial parent to know this. Children in this situation are wanting to share their accomplishments with the other parent they know appreciates their work. Hostile-aggressive parents are known to not share a child's work with the other parent and quite often will destroy it in spite.

May disclose their exposure to Hostile-Aggressive Parenting to third parties

A child may reveal to third parties, such as teachers and other family members, specific details of some Hostile-Aggressive Parenting acts they have been exposed to. Children will usually have the courage to speak up between the ages of 8 to 14 with a number of factors influencing when a particular child may begin to speak up. Some of the most common things that children may speak about may include such things as one parent saying bad things about the other parent or not being able to call the other parent on the phone. The child may even tell third parties that they want to live with their other parent, rather than the one they live with now. This is a sign that the child is reaching out for help from others and has not developed a total fear of the hostile-aggressive parent as of yet. This situation must be handled delicately so as not to place the child at greater risk of abuse at the hand of the hostile-aggressive parent. In most cases, the hostile-aggressive parent may punish the child for exposing things that the hostile-aggressive parent was trying to keep a secret. Third parties must demonstrate that the child can trust them by not turning them back into the clutches of the HAP parent.

May show greater affection to a parent/guardian contrary to the claims of the hostile-aggressive parent.

Hostile-aggressive parents will often attempt to paint a bad picture of the other parent/guardian they so that they can turn others against that other person, often as part of a strategy to isolate that person from others in the community. This strategy is most often used by custodial parents to turn school officials and babysitters against the non-custodial parent. Hostile-aggressive parents will often say that the child's relationship with the other parent is not good and that the child does better when he/she does not have contact with the other parent. This is usually done when children are younger as it becomes more difficult for the HAP to continue these lies as the child becomes more aware which is usually above the age of 8 years of age. However, when given the opportunity to see the child and the other parent together, many find that the child and the other parent enjoy a loving relationship together.

May show some anger/hate towards the custodial parent

Children, especially children above the age of 7 to 8 may begin to show anger directed at their custodial parent. Children at this age begin to come out of their shell and begin to develop a greater ability to reason and to differentiate right from wrong. Children who are being adversely affected by a custodial parent's Hostile-Aggressive Parenting, may at this age begin to start speaking of what it is that is bothering them. Children when questioned, if they have not developed a fear of their custodial parent, will be able to clearly say what it is that is bothering them. They may begin to speak about some of the things that the custodial parent may be doing that are listed in this document as being HAP behaviours.

May show excessive animosity/fear/hate towards the non-custodial parent

In some severe cases of Hostile-Aggressive Parenting, the hostile-aggressive parent may have been successful in implanting Parental Alienation Syndrome in the child **to the point where the child may express severe animosity, fear or even hate towards the non-custodial parent.** In some cases, children will literally run away or hide should they accidentally meet the alienated parent in public such as on a street or in a store.

This reaction in children can be very misleading to those without knowledge of parental alienation and the brainwashing of children by hostile-aggressive parents. To those without knowledge, it could lead them to believe that the non-custodial parent is actually a bad person or has abused the child.

Persons who witness a child, especially a young child speak very badly of another parent should be considered a possible victim of brainwashing. It is not normal for ANY child to express strong animosity toward a parent without very clear and understandable reasons. Should the child's animosity be directed towards a non-custodial parent, then this is usually further evidence that the custodial parent may be responsible for the child's hate of the other parent. When children are carefully questioned however for details of why they hate their parent so much, that is when the truth starts to become apparent. Seldom can children provide specifics to why they feel the way they do and only given general statements such as " he/she used to hit me" or "he/she was mean to me" Parental alienation can be suspected when interviewers start to ask for specifics and the child's recollection is vague or inconsistent.

Personality change when the hostile-aggressive parent is present

A change in the child's personality toward one parent may be noticed when the child is in the presence of both parents. Such a situation may occur at a school function where both parents attend. Persons may notice that the child is very affectionate with one parent such as holding hands and appearing excited and happy. As soon as the hostile-aggressive parent comes on the scene, the child will suddenly stop showing their affection to the other parent. The child recognizes the power that the custodial parent wields over them and in order to protect themselves, the child will hide the affection they would normally give to the non-custodial parent because they know the custodial parent will disapprove of this and may become angry.

SEVERE CASES OF HOSTILE-AGGRESSIVE PARENTING (HAP)

Legal Approaches

In the vast majority of cases, effective legal approaches will eliminate or at the very least, effectively control emotional and physical harm to children caused by **Hostile-Aggressive Parenting**. It must be noted that in the vast majority of cases, the behaviour of HAP parents will correct quickly once the watchful eye of the court or other trained specialists from the community have been brought into the case.

One of the main problems is that in recent years the courts have become too lenient when dealing with hostile-aggressive behaviours with parents. The courts failure to sanction those parents who are abusive to their children through HAP has actually resulted in a greater incidence of abuse against children caused by HAP. **To effectively deal with Hostile-Aggressive Parenting, the courts must apply positive motivators to reward parents for good parenting behaviour as well as effective penalties to discourage Hostile-Aggressive Parenting.**

Parents who continue to expose their children to **Hostile-Aggressive Parenting** need to be warned by the court that if they do not stop with their hostile parenting patterns, for whatever reason, court

sanctions will be imposed upon them, including reversal of primary care or even custody of the child. Court sanctions not only serve to "remind" the hostile parent to cooperate and to behave in a civil manner, but are very useful for the children as well. Effective sanctions set an example to the children and all family members that **Hostile-Aggressive Parenting** is not acceptable behaviour to our society and that the courts will not tolerate it. When a child feels reassured that the system will protect him/her from their hostile-aggressive parent it will give the child the courage to express their love to the more reasonable parent and will ease the fear they might otherwise feel if they were to admit to the hostile-aggressive parent that they themselves really want to see the other parent. In such situations the child can say what they know they must to satisfy the hostile parent's need to feel that the children love them more than the other parent but knowing at the same time that the hostile parent must take them to see the other parent and that what they say to the hostile-aggressive parent will not be somehow used against the friendly parent. Many times hostile-aggressive parents will pressure the child to say that they don't want to see the other parent. This of course is used as part of the strategy to justify what the child should not be seeing the other parent. In most communities there are biased social workers and counsellors who will support the hostile-aggressive parent's campaign to alienate the child from the other parent.

It cannot be emphasized strongly enough that one of most powerful incentives to get the hostile-aggressive parent to act in the best interest of their child is through a collaborative approach from the community and the courts. This is a very important factor in providing the children of separation and divorce with the support mechanism, outside of their parents, they so desperately need. Children are often afraid to express their wishes and preferences out of their fear of a custodial hostile-aggressive parent. Generally, children want a relationship with both parents and need the help of the courts and the community to ensure this without the children themselves, having to say it.

Part 6

Steps to intervene and effectively address Hostile-Aggressive Parenting

In all cases, identifying a hostile-aggressive parent is not meant to vilify any parent in the process, nor should a person who has been identified as HAP be automatically deemed incapable of being a good parent. Identification of HAP is part of the process to clearly identify what a parent is doing wrong and to clearly show what kind of behaviours the parent is engaging in that is wrong. When it comes to HAP, it is not the past history of HAP that is the most important, but the ability and willingness of the person(s) involved to correct their undesirable and harmful HAP behaviour.

In all cases, the main purpose of the intervention process is to give all parties (usually both parents) the fair and equal opportunity to correct their behaviour during a process of education, while at the same time provide relief to any children who may be adversely affected. One main objective of the courts and those in the community when helping families of separation and divorce should be to help make all parents in the community the best parents possible, not to just vilify those identified as HAP parents based solely on their past history.

During the intervention process any parent/party identified as HAP should feel reassured that their right to have a meaningful lifetime relationship with their child will be assured should they demonstrate their willingness and ability to act in the best interest of their child by correcting their HAP behaviour. Fairness and equal opportunity must be ensured to parents during every step of the intervention process as unfairness is one of the primary causes of conflict which in turn helps to fuel Hostile-Aggressive behaviour.

STEP ONE

Voluntary mediation, arbitration or family group conferencing (Most Ideal situation if successful)

Before the courts intervene in the parent's dispute, at least one of the parents should be able to show the court that a reasonable attempt to resolve ongoing problems through some form of meditative or family group conferencing approach was made prior to asking the court to intervene. The courts should always be the option of last resort in settling disputes. To minimize the potential for conflict or false allegations during mediation or arbitration, communication should be done with the assistance of at least one trained, neutral third party. Any attempts to enter into an out-of-court process prior to a dispute being taken to court should be monitored and documented by the third parties who are familiar with the process and trained to facilitate communication between the parents. If mediation is used as one of the processes, ideally "open" mediation is preferable as the mediator will be allowed to submit a report that may be helpful to the court in determining the willingness of each of the parents to negotiate in good faith.

In most cases, this first step is initiated by the friendly and cooperative party as they are the party who is adversely affected the most and the parent who most desires a solution to the Hostile-

Aggressive Parenting to be found. The friendly parent, with the assistance of a third party, should make a documented proposal to the other side which they feel will address the difficulties being created as a result of Hostile-Aggressive Parenting. Generally, a parent who initiates the mediation process, especially one who is willing to involve themselves in an “open” process, likely is the parent with the least to hide. At this time, those involved with mediation or arbitration should explain to both parents, the process of resolving the problems through the court process should a voluntary agreement not be successful.

In many cases, except in some severe cases, once a hostile-aggressive parent sees that a fair comprehensive review of matters will be undertaken by the court and that this is going to create nothing but expense and inconvenience to them, they may at this point elect to become a willing participant to a process that will avoid court. For those remaining parents who are unable to reach a reasonable agreement because of the resistance of a hostile-aggressive parent, then the process of dealing with the situation should move on to step two. It is important, however, that the parents, especially the hostile-aggressive parent, know that the court will not be tolerant of Hostile-Aggressive Parenting behaviour and that it will take the effective steps as outlined below to deal with it. The purpose is to motivate parents to settle matters fairly between themselves without intervention of the court.

Family group conferencing approaches as a meditative approach

In the vast majority of cases most parents using hostile-aggressive techniques do not want others in the community to see what they are doing or for anyone else to see the true facts. In most cases, HAP parents will modify or improve their parenting if they feel that there is a chance that others will see the truth. As a result of fear of the truth, these parents will modify their behaviour if they feel that others in the community, especially family members, take a direct interest in their family matter. The modification of parenting style by an otherwise abusive parent through community and family involvement uses the age old concept of “it takes a village to raise a child”. This approach to resolving family relationship problems can be a powerful influence on parents and extended family members.

Family group conferencing (FGC) is a participatory approach to case planning that was originally developed by the Maori people of New Zealand, in response to concerns that the child welfare system was removing Maori children from their homes and cultural ties at a disproportional rate. Based upon the success of this approach in New Zealand, FGC has been utilized as a case planning approach in many other countries and is spreading to many countries and jurisdictions. An underlying philosophy of the FGC model is that extended families have the commitment, resources and capacity to create safe and caring plans for children within their family unit. Family group conferencing can be extremely effective in dealing with Hostile-Aggressive Parenting.

Studies show that FGCs engage more family members than other case-planning methods, result in high degrees of family and professional satisfaction, and expand the quality of support available to families who have participated (for a review, see Lupton, 1999). Findings from child welfare studies where there was *not* a FGC provide support for the importance of active family involvement. Gleeson et al (1997), for example, found that an absence of active family involvement in case planning and decision-making can create a barrier to achieving permanence.

It has been found that FGCs did a better job than regular case planning approaches in promoting family unity, increasing safety for all family members, and reducing reports of child maltreatment and domestic violence. The study found that overall levels of abuse & violence had decreased significantly for the families using FGC approach.

Although the actual process of facilitating a family group conferencing is not described in this document, using the process of family group conferencing as a first step in resolving issues relating to Hostile-Aggressive Parenting can have significant impact in the elimination of child abuse by HAP parents.

STEP TWO

Implement first stage of intervention plan for family

Quite often the hostile-aggressive parent will refuse to participate in mediation or any other process intended to resolve conflict. They know that by entering any kind of process that involves others in the process, that their hostile-aggressive behaviour may be exposed and that this will likely disadvantage them in the court. Hostile-aggressive parents will sometimes give lip service in an attempt to sway those involved to their line of thinking, but they are seldom successful providing those involved are properly trained. In some cases, lawyers representing hostile-aggressive parents may advise their clients not to participate in mediation, or if anything, to pay lip service to mediation so that their client does not look uncooperative to the court. A lawyer representing a hostile-aggressive parent has a legal obligation to help protect the hostile-aggressive parent by helping to hide the Hostile-Aggressive Parenting from the court or from any outside parties which places them in a conflict with the best interest of the child.

If the more friendly parent has demonstrated that they have attempted to resolve issues through a reasonable process but that because of the response of the hostile-aggressive parent this has failed, then the court at this time must provide whatever support it can to help the parent most willing to participate in a process to reduce conflict. This would be accomplished by ordering both parents into a program or process specifically designed to end or effectively control the Hostile-Aggressive Parenting. It is important that both parties be ordered to participate in any program or process so as not label one parent as all “bad” and the other parent as all “good.” The process of dealing with Hostile-Aggressive Parenting should equally involve BOTH parents as it is a matter of education which ultimately will benefit both parties.

Ordering the non-cooperative parent to attend a family group conferencing session and providing the authority for the family group to provide recommendations to the court can be very effective.

First stage interim court Order to implement provisions below (if required)

The court should provide a court order ordering the following to be implemented and completed within 90-120 days.

a) Have the family support group meet and submit recommendations (optional)

To provide valuable input from the family, a family group conference should be organized with the family providing its recommendations. The concept of family group conferencing is

somewhat new and its use will depend on the availability of trained facilitators in the area and the ability of the parents to gather a family network.

b) Immediate adjustment of parenting schedules to minimize damage to child caused by Hostile-Aggressive Parenting

To prevent any further chance of the child being emotionally damaged by the hostile-aggressive parent, the parenting schedules should be modified to promote greater involvement of the non hostile-aggressive parent in the child's life. If one of the parents can put forth reasonable arguments to show that this may be of benefit to the child, then the court should approve such a schedule as an interim measure.

c) Review of parenting history and parenting capabilities

Before the court gets involved in making any decisions relating to the most effective steps to eliminate problems between parents caused by Hostile-Aggressive Parenting behaviour, it is important that a thorough review of the parent's parenting patterns as part of a formal family evaluation process be undertaken. This evaluation process should include an analysis of the parent's past behaviour as it relates to the best interest of children and the rights of children in order to determine the suitability and capability of both parents to parent their own child.

d) Submission of parenting plans by parents

During the time that a formal assessment is being undertaken, both parents should prepare a comprehensive parenting plan which they feel is most suitable for the child. Each parent's parenting plan will be reviewed as part of the assessment process for the purpose of determining which parenting plan is best for the child.

e) Appointment of a neutral third party to assist the family and monitor their ongoing progress and report to the court.

The court should order both parents to appoint a neutral third party person to be part of a two person monitoring team. It will be the job of this team to help deal with any problems and to provide solutions to the parents to resolve any problems encountered. It will also be the responsibility of this team to report to the court any behaviour considered relevant to the best interest of the child. Persons on this team can also be given the responsibility of reviewing the past history of the parents as outlined in (b) as well as all mitigating factors relating to children.

At least one person of the monitoring team should be knowledgeable about the identifying signs of Hostile-Aggressive Parenting behaviour as well as Parental Alienation Syndrome.

f) Parent education

Any parent who has engaged in Hostile-Aggressive Parenting behaviour should be ordered by the court to attend at least one course specifically about teaching parents how to parent cooperatively and how to best understand what is in the best interest of their children.

g) Professional Counselling or psychological (* Optional)

Parents should be ordered to obtain professional help to deal with their behaviour problem when reasonable evidence would suggest that a parent may be exhibiting behaviour patterns that would be considered in the “severe” category of Hostile Aggressive Parenting.

h) Evaluation of parenting plans

The parenting plans submitted by the parents should be reviewed by independent third party persons or agencies, having the specific training to properly review and evaluate such documents. Based on a review of all the factors relating to the best interest of the child this evaluation should clearly state which of the two parenting plans best meets the best interest of the child. Reasons for determination must also be clearly provided for the court and the parties to review. The purpose is to ensure that where more than one parenting plan has been made available, that only the one that best satisfies the criteria considered relevant to the best interest of the child be used.

Once the court has ordered the above components, in the vast majority of cases, the hostile-aggressive parent will modify their parenting behaviour in a positive direction. This simple procedure could eliminate further emotional damage to the child and motivate the hostile aggressive parent to focus on positive parenting skills.

STEP THREE

Implement second stage interim court order (90-120 days)

When the components (a) to (g) of Step Two have been completed, the next step will be to have the parties come back to court to update the court on all of the requirements that were set down in step one. The court will now have reasonable evidence before it so that a realistic and effective court Order can be crafted. There is a good possibility by this time that the Hostile-Aggressive Parent has curtailed much of their destructive behaviour as they now are conscience of the fact that a continuation of their Hostile-Aggressive Parenting behaviour will likely result in sanctions by the court. Again, many of the hostile parents will be willing to settle at this point with only the very extreme and most contested cases left unresolved.

At this time, should a voluntary consent agreement be reached between the parties, then the Court should order that the one parenting plan which has was previously identified as being most child focussed become the current parenting arrangement ordered by the court. Ideally, the most suitable parenting plan should include an interim joint custody arrangement and meet all of the minimum criteria for the best interest of the child.

STEP FOUR

Third stage final court order

After the interim period has expired as stated in the court Order from step three, the matter will be brought back to court for a final determination of parenting arrangements. A second review of the family’s compliance to the previous court Order will be made by the third party team and a final report with recommendations will be submitted to the court. This may also include a revised parenting plan which may address any others issues not previously identified at Step Two of the process.

In most cases, the final court order will be just a formality with the court being asked to endorse a final consent order based on the most current recommendations of the family's monitoring team. Quite often this can be dealt with by the parent's solicitors or agents without the parents even having to attend court in person. In only a few rare situations will the court be required to significantly change any of the provisions of the previous court order and this will be in cases where the hostile-aggressive parent continues to disobey the court and to continue with their pattern of abuse. Those parents who demonstrate this level of defiance most likely have deep-seated emotional or mental problems which may make them unsuitable as primary caregiver to the child. At this point it may be necessary for the court to impose sanctions on the hostile-aggressive parent which may even include awarding sole custody to the friendly parent or giving the friendly parent enough control over the child's environment so as to lessen the impact of the hostile-aggressive parent's behaviours on the child. Should matters reach this stage, however, the court will have very reliable evidence before it, including recommendations which will make the court's final order a rather simple matter.

Collaborative Community-Based Support Strategies

Hostile-aggressive parents generally try to keep their behaviour pattern from being observed by their friends and others in the community. Most of the time they know that what they are doing to their children is wrong and do not want to be embarrassed for what they know most people in the community would consider to be wrong. These people continuously hide the truth behind a wall of deception and over a period of time become quite skilled at deceiving others. Often HAP parents may threaten and intimidate children to remain silent about abuse, causing children to be terrified of saying anything about their abusive parent's behaviour.

Members of the community can play a vital role in eliminating the harm done by hostile-aggressive parents. By refusing to participate in a hostile-aggressive parent's campaign of abuse against a child, they are helping to protect that child and helping to make the community a better place for all to live.

Schools and child care agencies and their workers

Schools and child care agencies are in the front line when it comes to dealing with the problems associated with families in conflict as a result of separation and divorce. Many teachers and school officials will undoubtedly have to deal with children from broken homes where parental conflict exists. Through their extensive day-to-day involvement with children, school and childcare workers may often be in a position where they are exposed to the behaviour of hostile-aggressive parents or may observe the effects of HAP with children they care for. Quite often, HAP parents will often drag the school into the conflict and try to get the school to take sides against the child's wishes.

Schools and day care facilities need to have appropriate policies regarding children who are being exposed to abuse by a HAP parent. Schools should also develop protocols when abuse by an HAP parent is suspected.

Some of the things that schools and child care agencies and their workers can do to help protect children are as follows:

- a. Ensure that all workers working with children are educated about Hostile-Aggressive parenting and its solutions as part of their training.
- b. Before accepting children into a child daycare facility, providers should ideally meet both parents before agreeing to provide day care services or at the very least provide both parents the equal opportunity to meet with providers. Make parents aware right up front that there will be no discrimination against either parent.
- c. At all times, schools and day care facilities should provide both parents with the same level of service, courtesy and access to information unless a clear court Order indicates otherwise. Schools especially, should be wary of discriminating against parents as this may violate constitutional laws and result in an expensive and messy lawsuit. Schools and daycare facilities must send a clear message to those children affected by separation and divorce that schools and daycare facilities are a safe place for children and that Hostile-Aggressive Parenting behaviour will not be tolerated.
- d. School officials should be willing to speak to the child and to be aware of the child's wishes and preferences if requested to do so. Quite often, children will report abuse to teachers they trust before they will report it to strangers such as child welfare protection workers. Again, school officials must consider the possibility of parental coaching of young children and interview children outside the presence of either of the parents. Children who have not been coached should be able to clearly articulate their wishes and preferences and provide clear reasons to support their wishes.
- e. Never interfere with one parent's access to services based on the word of only one parent. Should one parent try to interfere with the child's relationship with another parent or with one parent's relationship with the school or day care facility or any worker, then insist that the parent present a court order requires the school or day care facility to comply with these demands or at the very least, provide reasonable third party information, in writing, to support the parent's claims. Claims by HAP parents often begin to fall apart when they are asked for credible evidence to support their claims.
- f. In all cases where parents are requesting school officials to take some form of action which they claim is to protect the child, then some sort of evidence, in writing, should be provided to school officials to support a parent's requests. If a parent's complaints appear to be valid, then that parent should have no problem in obtaining a court Order in a reasonable period of time. Refuse to become a collaborator to child abuse by not being a part of a parent's campaign to abuse the child and/or the other parent unless the parent can provide you with evidence, in writing, to support their allegations.
- g. Studies show that the involvement of non-custodial parents in their child's education can have a positive impact on the child's learning experience at the school so parental involvement at school should be encouraged whenever possible. The best interest of the child must take president over the wishes of a hostile-aggressive parent who in most cases want to keep the other parent from involving themselves with the child's school.

- h. At the first sign of conflict between parents, insist that the parties use a neutral third party for communication. Insist that parents not involve teachers or daycare providers in their personal issues and instead have parents have a neutral third party appointed to deal with issues between parents. The third party can then communicate with school or daycare facility regarding any issues which may affect workers with these agencies. Should a parent not be willing to have a third party get involved then suspect that parent's motives. HAP parents generally want to have full control of the situation and generally do not want neutral third parties helping in the conflict.
- i. Have those working with the children maintain proper records and logs whenever hostile-aggressive parenting is observed or if the child exhibits signs that could indicate abuse. Such signs may be the child's sadness about not seeing one parent or about reporting abuse by a hostile parent. Remember, Hostile-Aggressive Parenting is child abuse and will likely affect the child in some manner at school.
- j. Be ready and willing to report Hostile-Aggressive Parenting and to provide reliable testimony to the court if be requested by the parents. Exposing HAP parents and supporting children who are victims of hostile-aggressive parents is one of the best ways to control and eliminate this serious form of child abuse.

Extended family, friends & community

Unfortunately, too often, friends and family tend to support those who are part of their family or group of friends without questioning how their support for the parent may be affecting the child. This approach can often be wrong and have devastating negative effect on a child. Many times, family members end up supporting the HAP parent without knowing it.

Friends, family and neighbours should be cautious in believing negative comments from one parent about the other, even if it is their own family member who is giving them information. People in the community whose support is being sought by a parent should take the time to make themselves of the issues before providing their blind support. They should be especially cautious when it would appear that their support is sought to support what are considered as Hostile-Aggressive Parenting behaviours by one of the parents such as trying to restrict the child's access to the other parent. If it would appear that any parent is exhibiting any of the hostile-aggressive parenting behaviours listed in this document, then extreme caution must be exercised in supporting this parent. People in the community must to what is right for the child and to be careful to not cause harm to the child by providing their support to the HAP parent.

When extended family members and other people in a community refuse to support parents who abuse their children through hostile-aggressive behaviours, then those parents harming their child by HAP will more than likely change the way they parent their children. The concept that it takes a village to raise a child is still a concept that still works today. A community that stands united against Hostile-Aggressive Parenting, will help to send a strong message to parents who may be harming their children that this is not acceptable behaviour. Only when the community stands up can we hope to eliminate this most serious form of child abuse.

Health care professionals

Health care professionals in the community such as doctors and nurses should be very careful that they do not get themselves involved in the hostilities in a manner that hurts the child. Hostile-aggressive parents will often present themselves quite well to professionals such as doctors, nurses, police officers, etc. and are often masters of deception. HAP parents will often feed misleading and one-sided information to health care professionals for the purpose of extracting opinion or recommendation letters from these professionals which favour the HAP parent's position in court. Often the HAP parent will use these letters to block the other parent's access time with the child or use the letters in court against the other parent at some time in the future. In most cases, however, when professionals do look into matters more closely and seek information from the other side before writing such letters, they find that they have been duped by the HAP parent. Under such circumstances, many professionals can find themselves the subject of a disciplinary hearing or civil lawsuit. Any professional who is requested by a parent to support any action which would appear to be a hostile-aggressive action or a violation of the child's rights, should carefully and fully review the circumstances before taking action for one parent. Taking the time to speak to the other parent is usually one of the best things to do to protect both the professional and the child who may be under the control of a Hostile-Aggressive parent.

Sanctions for Hostile-Aggressive Parenting

Generally, it is recommended that the first level of such sanctions be an adjustment of the child's parenting time to lessen the amount of time the child is being exposed to the behaviour of the parent who has been identified as being hostile-aggressive. Being exposed to the influence of a hostile-aggressive parent is not good for the child and so the child's exposure to this negative influence must be lessened. Lessening the amount of time that the child spends with the hostile-aggressive parent will also provide relief to the child and reassurance that the hostile-aggressive parent's behaviour is wrong and will not be tolerated by others.

Seldom will any parent want to have their parenting time significantly reduced, especially if it is to be less than the other parent's time. Often, when faced with the choice of either improving their parenting behaviours or losing time, even the most hostile of parents will modify their behaviour rather than risk losing some of their parenting time with the child. Adjusting parenting time is a powerful motivator to better parenting and must be used liberally where the other parent is capable of caring for the child a greater period of the time.

Where parents live close enough to each other to accommodate the child at the same school, parenting time should be moved to a 50% equal time share providing the HAP parent is not exhibiting too many behaviours considered as severe. Equal parenting time maintains equality between parents which will help to reduce conflict and also give the child a more time away from the HAP parent.

If simply reducing time with the hostile-aggressive parent does not serve to improve the situation then the hostile parent should be ordered to undergo psychological testing, cooperative parenting courses and if anger is a problem, anger management courses. Ordering the parent to provide

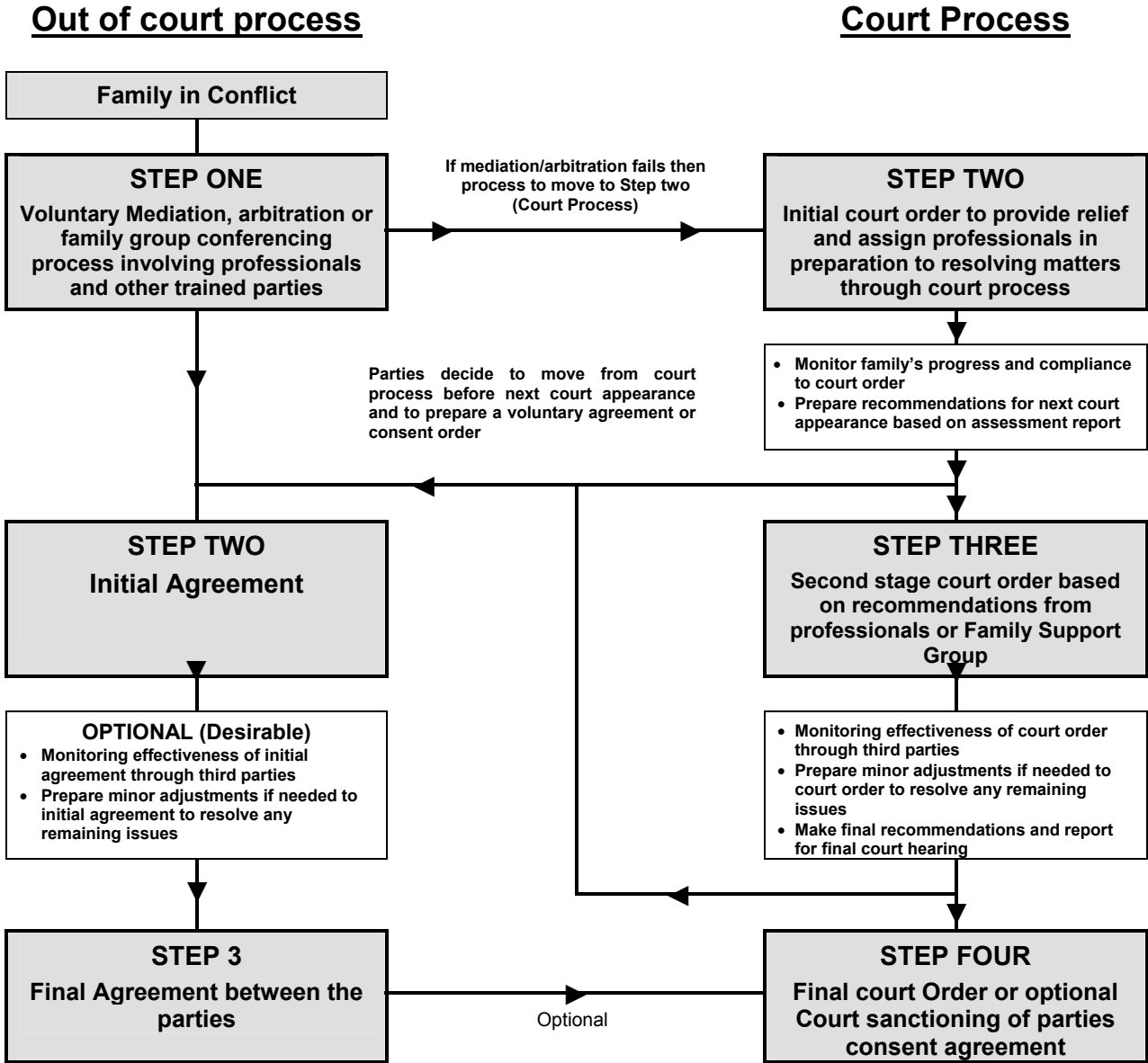
community work or to make a financial contribution to a worthy cause in the community can also serve as an effective sanction as well as a positive motivator to change their behaviour.

If the simple sanctions listed above do not serve to bring about more reasonable parenting attitude/behaviours, then mental health problems should be suspected and the hostile-aggressive parent's time with the child further reduced as part of a strategy to protect the child from further emotional harm. An analysis of the HAP behaviours listed in this document as well as the additional risk indicators should give some guidance as to parenting abilities of the parents. Parent's who exhibit behaviours that fall into the category of "severe" may have mental health problems and should be diagnosed by a competent mental health professional.

In extreme cases, custody may have to be awarded conditionally to the parent identified as being the most friendly on an interim basis in order to provide an environment for the child that is free of the hostile-aggressive parent's behaviours. The friendlier and more reasonable parent, of course, would be expected to adequately provide for all of the child's emotional and physical needs while in his/her care. Placing a child in the care of the more friendly parent gives the child a break from the emotional abuse of the HAP parent and allows the child to see that the system can do what is most appropriate for the child.

In all cases, however, sanctions against the HAP parent, based on past behaviour, should be removed once the HAP parent has been able to successfully demonstrate his/her willingness and ability to parent in a normal and healthy way.

Process of effectively dealing with family conflict where Hostile-Aggressive Parenting is a factor



Note: The process outlined here allows the parties in conflict to leave the court process at any time and enter into a voluntary consent agreement. Often, when disputing parties know that the outcome of the court process is very predictable and absolutely fair in every case, parties will move towards a voluntary process sooner, rather than spend more money and time through the adversarial court process.

PART 7 CONCLUSION

The simple and effective approach to correct Hostile-Aggressive Parenting can be highly effective in the vast majority of cases. The advantages of the approach outlined in this article can be summarized as follows:

- The approach is simple and the steps to implement the process are consistent in every case.
- The results are highly predictable.
- Overall results provide maximum recognition and support to the criteria considered relevant to the best interest of children.
- Cost effective – minimal use of courts, legal and health care systems. Much of the implementation and monitoring of the system can be done by lower paid trained specialists from the community, rather than highly paid professionals.
- Fairness and equality is ensured at all steps of the process.
- Maximum balance and consideration to parental rights, children’s rights and all elements of law and the principles of fundamental justice.
- Sound and time tested principles of the use of “consequences” for unacceptable behaviour are applied. Parties who behave in a hostile manner will be penalized and those who foster cooperative behaviour, rewarded. Maximum use of positive motivators is promoted throughout the process to foster cooperative parenting.
- The community can contribute in a very meaningful way and provide an effective support mechanism to help protect a child from Hostile-Aggressive Parenting.

The importance of early intervention in dealing with Hostile-Aggressive Parenting cannot be emphasized enough. Not to do so is likely to result in a worsening of the conditions that will predictably cause significant long term psychiatric disturbances in the child affected, with the possibility that parental alienation will take hold of the child.

In most cases it is recommended that both parents have the opportunity of sharing in the parenting of their children on an equal and consistent basis with an outside, neutral party monitoring the parents during an adjustment period. It is only when one parent cannot, or will not, inhibit his/her Hostile-Aggressive Parenting that custodial transfer to the more friendly parent should be implemented. Early intervention coupled with the support of the community can be instrumental in preventing progressively more pathological levels of HAP and even greater levels of emotional and behavioural problems in the children. Only in the most severe of cases should sole custody ever have to be awarded to one parent.

The presence and severity of Hostile-Aggressive Parenting (HAP) is only one of the factors in determining what is in the best interest of the child, but it is one of more significant factors. Other factors must be considered, but dealing with Hostile-Aggressive Parenting is crucial if one is to

make proper recommendations concerning the parenting arrangements in families where this most serious form of child abuse is a factor.

Notes

- ¹ Christofferson, op. cit., Chart 4, "Psychosomatic Symptoms and Select Background Situations of the Parents."
- ² Christofferson, op. cit
- ³ Clarke-Stewart, op. cit
- ⁴ Glynnis Walker, *Solomon's Children* (N.Y: Arbor House, 1986), pp. 27, 84-85
- ⁵ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect, Third National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect: Final Report Appendices (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Center of Child Abuse and Neglect, 1997), pp. A-63--A-64. Table A-11B, "Parent Structure by Categories of Maltreatment and Severity for Children Countable Under the Harm Standard." The estimated total for Mother Only Household is 264.1 children killed. For Fathers Only Household the estimated total is 10.8.
- ⁶ Gene Colman B.A., L.L.B., Gender Bias: Where do we stand?
- ⁷ Albiston, C.R., Maccoby, E. E., & Mnookin, R.R. (1990). Does joint custody matter?
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- ⁸ Statistics Canada - National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth – Cycle 2
- ⁹ Fauber et al., 1990