

# Divorced Fathers at Risk of Parental Alienation: Practice and Policy Guidelines for Enhancing Paternal Responsibility

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*A significant proportion of non-residential separated and divorced fathers find themselves at risk of parental alienation and absence from their children's lives, despite increasing levels of paternal involvement in child rearing in two-parent families. This article briefly reports the results of a study of divorced fathers' lived experiences, and their perceptions regarding their children's needs, paternal*

*responsibilities to those needs, and the responsibilities of social institutions to support fathers during and after the divorce transition—setting the stage for a broader discussion of (1) needed reforms in socio-legal policy to maintain and enhance paternal involvement in children’s lives post-divorce, including the feasibility of a rebuttable legal presumption of shared parental responsibility in contested child custody cases, and (2) practice guidelines to engage this at-risk and under-served population in a constructive clinical process. Above all, the key to engaging divorced fathers is to validate their parental identity, and combine advocacy efforts with counseling focused on enhancing their role as active and responsible parents.*

**Keywords:** fathers, divorce, family studies, children

The purpose of this article is to examine practical and effective ways of promoting responsible fatherhood involvement after parental separation and divorce. The phenomena of parental alienation and the absence of fathers in children’s lives after divorce are global social problems, which have profoundly negative effects on children’s well-being. Father absence is associated with diminished self-concepts in children, youth crime (85% of youth in prison have an absent father), poor academic performance (71% of high school dropouts have an absent father), and homelessness (90% of runaway children have an absent father). Fatherless children are more likely to be victims of abuse, and have significantly higher levels of depression and suicide, delinquency and promiscuity, behavior problems, substance abuse, and teen pregnancy (McLanahan et al, 2013; Crowder & Teachman, 2004; Ellis, 2003; Ringback Weitoft, 2003; Jeynes, 2001; Leonard, 2005; McCue Horwitz, 2003; McMunn, 2001; McLanahan, 1998; Margolin & Craft, 1989; Blankenhorn, 1995; Popenoe, 1996; Parish, 1987). And children of divorce consistently report that they wish they had more contact with their fathers and feel abandoned when fathers are not involved in their lives (Fabricius, 2003; Braver, 1998; Warshak, 1992).

Paternal alienation is the forced removal of a capable and loving father from the life of a child, most prevalent subsequent to a legal maternal custody decree attendant to divorce,

accompanied by maternal denigration of the father resulting in a child's emotional rejection of the father. Despite its prevalence, paternal alienation is often discounted as a social problem, father absence misunderstood as a matter of voluntary disengagement in most cases, and barriers to continued father involvement ignored by service providers. This article will examine some of these barriers, and ways of overcoming them, both at a structural and clinical level. It will be argued that the key barrier to continued responsible father involvement after divorce is the present framework of child custody determination, and that viable alternatives are needed, such as a legal presumption of shared parental responsibility for children after divorce in contested child custody cases; this is a fundamental first step in addressing paternal alienation and father absence. Another barrier is the lack of effective support services available to divorcing fathers, as current practice methods are ineffective in engaging these men. I will thus discuss new directions and guidelines for both socio-legal policy and direct practice with divorced fathers.

### Research on Divorced Fathers at Risk: A Father-Centered Perspective

What do we know about separated and divorced fathers, and more particularly noncustodial fathers, including those who are absent from their children's lives? In 1990 I published the results of my first study of divorced fathers and paternal alienation, with a follow-up study in 2010. To my dismay, I found that the situation with regard to father absence and paternal alienation is worse today than it was twenty years ago. In cases where parents cannot agree on parenting arrangements, the judiciary continues to award sole custody to one parent, usually the mother, removing the father as a primary caregiver, and this is done as a matter of routine. At the same time, the deleterious effects of sole maternal custody decrees on fathers and children are more pronounced today than they were twenty years ago, as fathers' involvement with, attachment to, and influence on their children before divorce have increased in the interim (Marshall, 2006; Higgins & Duxbury, 2002; Bianchi, 2000; Lamb, 2004). Twenty years ago I found that fathers who lost contact with their children suffered a grief reaction containing all the elements of a bereavement, the result of child

absence, loss of the father role, and the constraints of the new “visiting” relationship (Kruk, 1991a). Today they are manifesting a more pronounced reaction of post-traumatic stress, as they are more acutely aware of the harms their absence is causing their children (Kruk, 2010; Kruk, 2015). At the same time, apart from a few self-help groups, effective support services for fathers are virtually non-existent. And fathers mainly suffer in silence, in quiet desperation. Those who have the courage to speak about their woundedness and the woundedness of their children are subjected to a mean spirited cultural response, where all talk of woundedness is mocked (ibid.). Professional service providers often fail to recognize fathers’ grief as a reflection of their lost attachment with their children on the one hand and, in focusing on fathers’ deficits, their untapped strengths as parents on the other.

A remarkable finding in my 1990 study of 80 noncustodial fathers (which examined the impact of divorce and the phenomenon of father absence) was that rather than there being a positive correlation between pre- and post-divorce father-child relationship patterns, there appeared to be a strong *inverse* relationship; that is, those fathers describing themselves as having been relatively highly involved with and attached to their children and sharing in child care tasks during the marriage were more likely to *lose* contact with their children after divorce, whereas those previously on the periphery of their children’s lives were more likely to remain in contact (Kruk, 1991b). Whereas the previously less involved and attached father, now responsible for his children during access visits, finds his fatherhood role enhanced, the highly attached and involved father, faced with markedly diminished contact and rigid access arrangements, finds himself involuntarily disengaging from the lives of his children. I thus concluded that father absence after divorce is the result of a combination of structural constraints and fathers’ own psychological response to the loss of their children and the pre-divorce father-child relationship (Kruk, 1992a); psychological factors, however, are less salient in paternal alienation situations as socio-legal barriers diminish and discourage ongoing involvement (ibid.; Maldonado, 2005).

My 2010 study of 82 divorced fathers’ experiences, and fathers’ perceptions of their children’s needs and paternal and social institutional responsibilities in the divorce transition (Kruk, 2010),

found a marked discontinuity between pre- and post-divorce father-child living arrangements, even more marked than in the 1990 study, in the direction of equal or shared parenting before divorce shifting to sole maternal custody after divorce. Despite the fact that fathers are taking a much more active role in child care tasks before divorce today than they did 20 years ago, their chances of obtaining the legal outcome they desired are even worse than before. In their accounts of their divorces, noncustodial fathers painted a bleak picture of forced estrangement from children's lives. The major themes that emerged were those of grief and loss, broken attachments, access denial, parental alienation, non-existent support services, the adversarial system heightening conflict, legal abuse, false allegations, and financial losses. My 2010 study also revealed one key finding previously unreported in the father involvement literature: separated and divorced fathers define the "best interests" of their children in terms of their children's needs, and these needs can be roughly divided into physical and "metaphysical" needs. Both are important, as in some cases physical needs were emphasized by fathers, but in most cases children's emotional, psychological, social, moral and spiritual needs were seen to be of paramount importance. As far as paternal responsibilities are concerned, most fathers cited the responsibility to just be there for your kids, in some form of loving parental capacity. Fathers are seen as responsible for actively demonstrating their love for their children, to enable children to develop to their optimal capacity—physically, emotionally, morally, and intellectually. The responsibilities of social institutions, on the other hand, are primarily to support fathers in the fulfillment of their parenting responsibilities, with fathers recognized as having equal rights and responsibilities as mothers vis-a-vis their children. Fundamental to fathers is the need for all social institutions involved in the lives of children and families to recognize fathers as parents of equal value, status and importance in children's lives as mothers. Removing gender bias in the court system, reported by fathers as firmly entrenched, includes dealing effectively with the problems of parental alienation and false allegations of abuse. Fathers indicated that access to mediation for parents during the separation and divorce transition is fundamental, and professional support services for fathers should be made available. Most important for fathers, however, is reform of the sole custody system in the direction of equal or

joint custody.

In sum, the fathers in my 2010 study identified three main issues facing divorced fathers: the lack of access to their children (including the lack of access enforcement); the court system's gender bias as a barrier and the need for gender equality in the legal system; and the need for legal system reform, toward greater recognition and valuing of fathers via joint custody, and moving away from adversarial resolution.

### Implications for Policy Reform: Advocacy and Empowerment

It is now recognized that if fathers are to be constructively engaged, their perspective on their own needs and those of their children during the divorce transition must be recognized and acknowledged by policymakers and service providers. A systematic and integrated approach is required to include fathers in research, policy development, and implementation and evaluation of services (Eardley & Griffiths, 2009; Father Inclusive Practice Forum, 2005).

My research findings on divorced fathers point to the need for social policy reform in two main areas: child custody outcomes, toward a framework of equal rights and responsibilities between mothers and fathers, as children need to preserve their relationships with both parents if they are to adapt well to the consequences of divorce; and the child custody process, away from adversarial resolution toward the use of non-adversarial processes such as mediation.

From the perspective of fathers themselves, paternal alienation and father absence are endemic in contested divorce cases, and the legal system is the main problem in this regard. In particular, adversarial divorce and "win-lose" sole custody decisions are highly problematic, as the "winner-take-all" sole custody framework removes a loving parent, usually the father, from children's lives, and exacerbates conflict between separating parents. Within the present legal framework of child custody determination, not only are fathers' responsibilities to their children overlooked (apart from their financial obligations), but also the responsibilities of social institutions to support fathers are not addressed. Social institutions such as the court system, child welfare and

family services, education systems, and health care services are not held accountable in this regard.

There is thus a need for a viable option to the sole custody approach in contested cases, one that recognizes the salience of each parent in children's lives. Shared or equal parenting responsibility, defined as children spending 40-50% of their time in each parent's household, is one such alternative; the "approximation standard," in which the amount of time a child spends with each parent after divorce is equivalent to the relative time each parent spent with the child before divorce, is another. Such legal presumptions are based upon the principle that existing parent-child relationships should continue after separation. In the case of shared or equal parenting responsibility, in the interests of preserving children's primary attachments with each of their parents, it is argued that post-divorce parenting arrangements should be equal in time allotment; in the case of the approximation standard, in the interest of stability in children's relationships with their parents, it is posited that the post-divorce parenting arrangements should reflect pre-divorce parenting arrangements. In cases of dispute, however, when both parents see themselves as primary caregivers, the norm in most North American families (Marshall, 2006; Higgins & Duxbury, 2002; Bianchi, 2000), shared parental responsibility, defined as children spending roughly equal time with each of their parents, may be the best legal presumption in the absence of established family violence or child abuse. In the interests of reducing conflict and maintaining primary relationships, both of which are compromised within a sole custody approach, a legal framework of shared or equal parental responsibility is a viable alternative, currently being implemented in a number of jurisdictions around the globe.

A legal equal parenting presumption would be rebuttable in cases of established family violence and child abuse, as courts would use the same criterion to remove a parent from a child's life for children of divorce as for children in two-parent families: the "child in need of protection" standard rather than the indeterminate "best interests of the child" criterion, which places judges without expertise in child development and family dynamics in an untenable position.

How would abuse allegations in child custody disputes be handled within a legal framework of shared parental responsibility? When child or spousal abuse allegations are made in the context

of divorce and contested child custody, an immediate and thorough investigation of the allegations would be undertaken by a competent child welfare authority. Child exposure to spousal violence should be a legal basis for finding a child in need of protection. Spousal violence is also a criminal matter, and allegations of family violence should be part of a criminal process, not left to be settled in a divorce hearing devoid of fact-finding and investigation. The family court should not have to resolve conflicting criminal allegations, as litigants are entitled to more than “proof on the balance of probabilities” when their relationship with their children is at stake. Family courts should not function as “quasi-criminal” courts; family violence is a criminal matter that needs to be dealt with in criminal court.

For a shared parental responsibility presumption to work, viable dispute resolution alternatives are also needed. Reform in the child custody process, away from adversarial resolution, would include facilitating the development of parenting plans via structured mediation processes, and more intensive support in high conflict cases. The use of mediation would be enhanced within a legal framework of shared parental responsibility, which provides an incentive for parents to turn to support services that assist them in developing a shared parenting plan after separation, as opposed to turning toward the adversarial system in an effort to “win custody” of their children.

Social workers and other human service professionals have been notably absent in the politics of reform with respect to child custody determination, and are desperately needed as allies in policy reform efforts. The best way to support divorced fathers, according to fathers themselves, is through such advocacy and activism, breaking apart the custodial/noncustodial and residential/non-residential parent dichotomy and advancing the cause of equal parenting. The international equal parenting campaign is a progressive social movement, and human service providers play an important role in arousing the public conscience to the injustices of the adversarial system and advancing viable alternatives, and educating politicians and lawmakers in this regard.

According to fathers, human service professionals need to be on the front lines of policy reform initiatives in the socio-legal arena if they are to be helpful allies in fathers’ efforts to combat paternal alienation and father absence. The role of the service provider should thus include an



educative and advocacy component, with “noncustodial” status in itself being challenged as an appropriate post-divorce role for fathers. Fathers need to be fully informed both about alternative post-divorce custodial arrangements and alternatives to litigation in determining custody and access, empowered in relation to their continued relationship with their children, and helped to enhance their parenting and co-parenting skills during and after divorce.

Further, fathers themselves need to be directly involved in law reform efforts, and human service professionals have a role in mobilizing and supporting fathers in their to reclaim their rights and responsibilities to their children. A large hurdle for fathers is garnering public and political attention and support to deal with the social problems of paternal alienation, father absence and diminished father involvement after parental separation and divorce. These problems need to be made more visible, and constructive solutions advanced.

### Implications for Direct Practice: A Strengths-Based Approach

The first step in meeting the needs of divorced fathers, according to fathers themselves, is to recognize that they are capable and loving parents with strengths and capacities vital to their children’s well-being. The parenting “deficit perspective,” which assumes that men are uninvolved and disinterested or even dangerous to their children, is firmly rooted among professional service providers in the case of divorced fathers (Hawkins & Dolahitte, 1997), represents the major barrier to engaging men, and needs to be vigorously challenged (Eardley & Griffiths, 2009; Father Inclusive Practice Forum, 2005). At the same time, fathers are significantly affected by divorce and the threatened or actual loss of their children; this in particular occasions a grief reaction containing all of the major elements of bereavement. Secondly, it should be acknowledged that fathers have a strong desire and need for regular and frequent contact with their children after divorce. Many divorced fathers have an unrealized capacity to contribute to their children’s well-being. For the majority of fathers, traditional access arrangements are woefully inadequate; fathers want and are prepared to assume routine physical care of their children after divorce,

particularly those who had an active role to play in their children's lives before divorce. Third, it should be recognized that powerful psychological and structural factors constrain fathers' post-divorce contact with their children; the combination of these strongly mitigate against an ongoing father-child relationship. These constraints include the removal of fathers from children's lives via legal sole custody judgments, mothers as gatekeepers that limit men's opportunities for routine active involvement with their children, and service barriers to fathers' engagement in child and family support programs designed with an assumption that mothers are primary caregivers of children. Recognition of these barriers requires both a reassessment of prevailing assumptions and stereotypes on the part of practitioners, a reconsideration of traditional methods of intervention, and an active program of outreach to engage fathers.

In the realm of direct service, engaging divorced fathers in professional services remains a challenge, as both fathers and practitioners have described a "lack of fit" between men and service providers, emanating from two sources: the characteristics of men and fathers themselves (their resistance to counseling and therapy), and aspects of the therapeutic process (which have failed to successfully engage fathers).

Patterns of traditional gender-role socialization directing men toward self-sufficiency and control, independent problem-solving and emotional restraint have largely worked against fathers being able to acknowledge personal difficulties and request help. Professional service providers do not always consider such psychological obstacles to therapy and thus do not address fathers' unique needs. Working with men on the basis of what they themselves identify as their needs is critical. The research on separated and divorced fathers is clear in regard to their most pressing need: their continued meaningful involvement with their children, as active parents. The lack of recognition of this primary need is the main reason for therapists' lack of success in engaging divorced fathers.

A fear of self-disclosure and a feeling of disloyalty to one's family in exposing family problems are common among divorced fathers; a fear of losing control over one's life and the need to present an image of control or a "facade of coping" in the form of exterior calm, strength,

and rationality, despite considerable inner turmoil, were described by a large number of fathers in my studies. Fathers are often excluded from therapy partly because of assumptions of service providers about fathers' peripheral role in their children's lives, a perceived lack of co-operation, and their apparent lack of interest; a mother's assertion that a father is marginal in the child's life or not interested in attending therapeutic sessions is often not questioned. Professional helpers themselves are not immune from social expectations of how "reasonable" and "responsible" fathers ought to behave; the behavior of many fathers during the divorce transition may be completely at odds with these expectations, with actions and sentiments ranging from the worst excesses of male chauvinism to the pathetically helpless and "unmanly." Many practitioners simply do not acknowledge the extent of divorced fathers' difficulties, pointing to fathers' apparent freedom from responsibility after divorce, in contrast to the more visible difficulties experienced by their former wives and children.

An active program of outreach is essential as fathers report a lack of helpful support services, and they remain a highly vulnerable population. Service providers may need to be persistent and proactive, as it takes time to build and sustain engagement in the context of men's feelings of isolation, alienation or helplessness, and their tendency to wait until there is a crisis before accessing support. Yet fathers who were highly involved with and attached to their children and suddenly find themselves forcefully removed from their children's lives experience trauma writ large. The experience of being removed as a loving parent from the life of one's child via a sole custody order strikes at the heart of one's being. Suicide rates are reported to be of "epidemic" proportions among divorced fathers struggling to maintain a parenting relationship with their children (Kposowa, 2000); and "legal abuse" has been noted in divorced father suicide cases (ibid.). Ensuring that fathers are not disenfranchised from the lives of their children may thus be a form of suicide prevention. Being vigilant regarding symptoms of post-traumatic stress and suicidal ideation among divorced fathers is an essential role for service providers.

Direct practice can be tailored to meet divorced fathers' individual clinical needs in a number of ways. In both of my studies on divorced fathers (Kruk, 1994; Kruk, 2010) fathers

identified the need, in the initial and latter stages of divorce, for a combination of practical and concrete advice (specific guidelines about the options open to them and related legal procedures and practices) and emotional support. Lack of a clearly stated purpose and goals are a barrier to service provision. Fathers expressed a preference for a directive type of counseling with structured goal-setting and a pragmatic, problem-solving approach rather than one of emotional ventilation or in-depth exploration of dysfunctional family interactions. They were also, however, seeking an opportunity to talk about their feelings within a sympathetic, non-judgmental atmosphere with someone able to convey a genuine understanding of their experience of divorce and woundedness. They spoke of others' lack of understanding and a general public hostility to their feelings of loss, depression, and victimization. Discussion of such feelings should be encouraged for fathers, particularly of feelings behind fathers' overt anger. It is important for the practitioner to encourage examination of the emotional impact of divorce and child absence on the father; the service provider should take the initiative to combat fathers' emotional inexpressiveness by demonstrating a genuine understanding of fathers' feelings, normalizing the experience of having such intense emotions, stressing the importance of emotional expressiveness and reflective behavior to those who tend to see problems and solutions in more concrete terms, and bolstering fathers' self-esteem and their sense of parental identity. Practitioners should attempt to look beyond fathers' initial defensive poses, their indirect or uncooperative manner, or their "everything is fine" demeanor.

As part of exploring the emotional aspects of the divorce, the service provider's agenda should include a primary focus on the children of the marriage. Fathers will respond positively to services that they see will benefit their children, particularly when practitioners acknowledge the significant role that fathers play in contributing to their children's needs and well-being. Again, the most salient loss for noncustodial fathers is that of their children and the pre-divorce father-child relationship: fathers' grief is directly and primarily linked with the absence of their children. After divorce, noncustodial fathers locate themselves at different points along the bereavement continuum, with some fathers able to arrive at a resolution of their grief while others remain "stuck" at an earlier stage of the grieving process. It should be noted, however, that chronic grief,

involving intense and prolonged mourning and depression, is characteristic of absent fathers previously highly involved with and attached to their children. Clinicians need to be aware that such depression is not always overtly manifested--a “facade of coping” or overt anger may mask a prevalent sense of loss and emotional distress; neither should therapists assume that fathers’ grief becomes naturally resolved through the passage of time.

As divorce occasions a grief reaction for noncustodial fathers, linked to the loss of their children, bereavement counseling, in the form of giving fathers’ “permission” to grieve, freeing them to grieve through reassurance that expressing feelings and “grieving” is a “normal” reaction, would appear to be an indicated form of therapy. The resolution of grief for alienated and absent fathers, however, is highly problematic and resistant to psychotherapy. Thus a number of fathers in my study commented on the unhelpful nature of traditional counseling services when they had been sought; few felt that their grief could be resolved without reference to ways of restoring their relationship with their children. Focusing on the needs of their children, challenging men’s feelings of “victimhood,” and maintaining a focus on building positive relationships with their children are vitally important for fathers.

The most pressing need for divorced fathers at risk of paternal alienation and father absence, particularly those highly involved with and attached to their children before divorce, is their continued meaningful involvement with their children. In this context service providers have a professional responsibility to support the active involvement of fathers in their children’s lives. The clinical picture for fathers is most favorable if child absence does not become a reality, if fathers who had an active role to play in their children’s lives can continue a satisfying and unthreatened parental relationship with their children. It significantly worsens if child absence becomes routinized.

Most fathers who have become disengaged from their children’s lives are looking for constructive alternatives to adversarial methods of reconnecting with their children, including therapeutic family mediation. Service providers with a positive orientation to mediation are valued by fathers. Above all else, the key to engaging divorced fathers is to validate their parenting identity,

and combine advocacy efforts with counseling focused on enhancing their role as responsible parents, rather than helping them adapt to their status as noncustodial parents.

Divorced fathers are also helped by practitioners who support mothers as co-parents. The norm of sole maternal custody is gradually giving way to a shared parenting norm. But for many mothers, societal expectations that mothers assume primary care and control of children act as a major barrier to shared parental responsibility, despite the benefits of shared parenting for mothers.

### Conclusion

The majority of divorced fathers today find that meaningful fathering is not possible within the bounds of sole maternal custody and limited paternal access; the very concept of “access” and the avuncular nature of the “visiting” relationship connotes for many fathers a *de facto* cessation of their parenting role. Fathers want and are prepared to assume routine physical care of their children after divorce, and to continue to share responsibility for parenting with their former spouses, within a parenting schedule that will allow them to preserve their attachment bonds and the level of involvement they enjoyed before divorce.

According to fathers themselves, the responsibilities of social institutions are primarily to support fathers in the fulfillment of their parenting responsibilities, by means of equality and fairness in court-determined post-divorce parenting arrangements, with fathers recognized as having equal rights and responsibilities as mothers vis-a-vis their children. From the standpoint of fathers, a legal presumption of joint physical custody is a bulwark against paternal alienation and father absence, and would allow them to maintain their relationships with their children after separation and divorce.

The shared parental responsibility approach to child custody determination may represent the most viable alternative to the “winner take all” sole custody model that places father-child relationships at risk. A presumption of shared parental responsibility would establish a legal expectation that existing parent-child relationships will continue after separation; in cases of

dispute, shared parenting, defined as children spending equal time with each of their parents, would be the legal presumption in the absence of family violence or child abuse. A shared parental responsibility presumption in contested child custody cases would allow divorced fathers to remain involved with their children or enhance their involvement, and would help mothers understand that fathers have critically important roles to play in the growth and development of their children after divorce. In removing the need for parents to compete to “win” their children, a shared parenting approach would communicate the expectation that parents jointly work out an arrangement of shared responsibility for child rearing, providing an incentive for choosing mediation over litigation to settle disputes. Finally, a legal presumption of shared parental responsibility would be a significant measure to address paternal alienation and father absence, particularly in the case of fathers previously actively involved with and closely attached to their children.

The fathers in my study spoke at length about gaps in service provision and the lack of support received from professional helpers. Respect for fathers’ strengths and capacities is crucial to engagement; alienated and absent fathers in particular report being stereotyped as and dismissed as “deadbeat dads,” assumed to be voluntarily disengaging from their children’s lives. Organizational policies and service information must recognize fathers’ aspirations for their children’s well-being, and their strengths in regard to contributing to this well-being, despite the fact that their capacities are unrealized. Service providers need to be active in the politics of reform with respect to child custody determination. The best way to support fathers, according to fathers themselves, is through advocacy and socio-legal reform. Fathers are seeking allies in their effort to remain responsible parents to their children.

Beyond child custody law reform, there are a number of innovative practices in direct service provision that would go a long way to engaging divorced fathers at risk of paternal alienation and father absence. These include combining education and advocacy with counseling roles, and connecting fathers politically in an effort to garner public and political attention and support in regard to the problems of paternal alienation and father absence. The lack of fit between service providers and divorced fathers at risk is best addressed by means of attending to fathers’ distinct

clinical needs, challenging their emotional inexpressiveness and providing a safe forum to speak about their feelings of attachment and loss, grief and woundedness. At the same time, a strengths-based approach, recognizing fathers' aspirations to their children's well-being and the experience, knowledge and skills that they can contribute to this well-being, is vital. Above all else, the key to practice with divorced fathers is to validate and seek to enhance their parenting identity and their parenting role.

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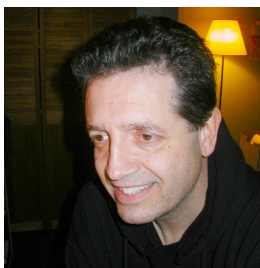
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