

# **Family Bridges: Using Insights from Social Science to Reconnect Parents and Alienated Children**

Richard A. Warshak, Ph.D. — 2010

## **Citation**

Warshak, R. A. (2010). Family Bridges: Using insights from social science to reconnect parents and alienated children. *Family Court Review*, 48(1), 48–80.

## **Abstract**

This article describes an innovative educational and experiential program, Family Bridges: A Workshop for Troubled and Alienated Parent-Child Relationships™, that draws on social science research to help severely and unreasonably alienated children and adolescents adjust to court orders that place them with a parent they claim to hate or fear. The article examines the benefits and drawbacks of available options for helping alienated children and controversies and ethical issues regarding coercion of children by parents and courts. The program's goals, principles, structure, procedures, syllabus, limitations, and preliminary outcomes are presented. At the workshop's conclusion, 22 of 23 children, all of whom had failed experiences with counseling prior to enrollment, restored a positive relationship with the rejected parent. At follow-up, 18 of the 22 children maintained their gains; those who relapsed had premature contact with the alienating parent.

# **Reclaiming Parent–Child Relationships: Outcomes of Family Bridges with Alienated Children**

Richard A. Warshak, Ph.D. — 2019

## **Citation**

Warshak, R. A. (2019). Reclaiming–child relationships: Outcomes of Family Bridges with alienated children. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, 60 (8), 645–667.

## **Abstract**

A sample of 83 severely alienated children and adolescents were enrolled with the parents whom they had rejected in a 4-day Family Bridges educational workshop. The program was conducted after court orders had placed the children in the custody of their rejected parent. The parents who participated with the children in the workshop, and the professional workshop leaders, reported large improvements in the children's alienated behavior, changes that reflected statistically significant and large effects. The children's contact refusal with the rejected parent dropped from a pre-workshop rate of 85% to a post-workshop rate of 6%. Depending on the outcome measure, between 75% and 96% of the children overcame their alienation. The parents and children credited the workshop with improving their relationships and teaching them better relationship skills. Despite the children's negative initial expectations, most children felt positively about their workshop experience, regarded the workshop more like education than counseling, and reported that the professionals who led the program treated them with kindness and respect. All the parent participants and two-thirds of the children rated the workshop as excellent or good, but 8% of children retained their initial negative attitudes about the workshop and rated the workshop as poor. In sum, a significant number of intractable and severely alienated children and adolescents who participated in the Family Bridges workshop repaired their damaged relationship with a parent whom they had previously rejected for an average of 3–4 years.