

Can we force “spontaneous”  
reunification?

Systemic therapy with PA

  
**MEGGED**

# Shuly Megged

- Shuly megged (MSW) Social Worker and Family Counselor. The head of the Contact center in Nahariya Israel. Shuly Treats families in extreme neglect, at their homes, in projects in northern Israel. She is court appointed as an expert in Parental Alienation and works in co therapy with PA with Amittai Megged. A certified parent coordinator. A student of David Schnarch.

# Amittai Megged

- Amittai Megged (MFT) is the head of the training program for family and couples therapy at the Tel Hai academic college. He is the founder and director of the Megged School for Differentiation and Worthiness based Psychotherapy. Social worker by training, and a certified family therapist and instructor. Mr Megged is appointed by Israeli courts as an expert in PA. Mr. Megged studied family therapy with Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy, Harry Aponte, Dr. Susanna Bullrich, Dr. Daniel Gottlieb, Judith Grinbaum and Dr. David Schnarch. He is author of the 5 books; the last two are "Differentiation Based Couple Therapy" and "Being Worthy"

# To whom does our approach fit?

- Mild cases: PA is the result of custody and child support battles in the courts
- Moderate cases: PA is the result of a need to fulfill, through the child, the pathological emotional needs of the AP
- Severe cases: PA is the result of severe personality disorders with an impairment in judgment and reality testing

Our approach fits well with moderate cases

# Our method is based on the following approaches

- Bowen systems theory: differentiation and triangulation
- The Millan approach: family games
- Boszormenyi-Nagy contextual approach: loyalties, entitlement and worthiness
- Second order cybernetics

PARENTAL ALIENATION IS NOT THE  
PROBLEM  
IT'S THE "SOLUTION" TO THE  
COUPLE'S CONFLICT

1. In moderate cases of PA there is no real problem between the target parent and the child
2. And since there is no problem, there is no need to try and solve it
3. In pure PA there is no lack in parental skills, and there is no need to teach them
4. In estrangement and in hybrid cases the picture is different

- You will see that unlike approaches that try to bypass the couples' conflict and focus on parental behaviors and attitudes, we actually do the opposite. We focus primarily on the couples' conflict.
- We do so, because we understand PA as part of a dirty game (Millan group) between the spouses



The divorce is perceived by the alienating parent as a dirty move in the couples' game.

PA, therefore, is a counter move



# What do we need to deal with?

- Exposing the couple's conflict
- Exposing the real motives for the PA
  - The need to revenge the rejected parent for his/her actions (divorce, betrayal...)
  - The need to blacken the rejected parent so as to justify the alienating parent's actions (divorce, betrayal...)
  - Using the child as a source to fulfill the alienating parent narcissistic or borderline needs
- The aim of these revelations is to arouse shame, guilt and anxiety in both parents and lead the alienating parent to “spontaneously” free the child to meet and love the rejected parent.

# Creating a reframe

- Finding a reframe that both spouses can agree upon
- And start cooperating in favor of the children
- Instead of trying to achieve behavioral cooperation, we are trying to achieve spontaneous cooperation through agreement on the reframe

# The reframe

- The old paradigm of the alienating parent was: the target parent hurts the children and so I need to protect them from him/her
- The old paradigm of the target parent was: the alienating parent wants to hurt me, through the children, and this is unjust
- The reframe, which hopefully both can agree upon, is: there is good reason and logic in the feelings of revenge the alienating parent has towards the target parent, but he/she expresses them using, and abusing, the children, instead of aiming them directly at the spouse

# Reframe cont.

- We are validating the feeling of rage and revenge of the AP. On the other hand we confront him/her on the abuse of the children
- We confront the TP on his unfair treatment of the AP. On the other hand we acknowledge his/hers good intentions and treatment of the children
- Both parents feel attacked and acknowledged at the same time, and, in 8 out of 10 cases, were able to accept the new reframe and even start to cooperate to some degree

# After the reunification

- The problems and difficulties do not stop the minute the child returns to seeing the TP.
- Actually many start to surface
- What we will talk about now are interventions we use with the couple and with the whole family as ways to help maintain the changes that were made

# Techniques

- Reflecting team – case consultation in front of the couple or the family
- Playing “bad cop, good cop”
- Authenticity and using the self of the therapist
- Opening a Whatsapp group and using the content in diagnosis and therapy
- Circular questions: (to the child) who, between your parents, needs more your protection?
- Reflective questions: (to the AP): how did it happen that your 12 years old child thinks it is his duty to protect his 40 years old parent?

# Techniques cont.

- Confrontational questions: is it not pure cowardliness to send your child as a soldier to fight the TP?
- Dramatization, play and caricature
- Giving homework
- Paradox (to the TP): is it not fitting that you get this punishment from your ex wife after all those years that you have crushed her honor?
- Absurd (to the AP): how come you only managed to incite only one of your children against the TA? Don't worry, we will help you incite the other one.



# Techniques cont.

- Humor: that reminds me of a joke about a man who...
- Metaphor: that reminds me of a story...
- Shaming: sound like you are your mother's rag
- Blaming (to the AP): when you let your 14 year old child sleep with you in bed, do you really think you are protecting him, or maybe he protects you?
- Intimidation (to the AP): you taught your 5 years old daughter to totally disrespect authority figures (like the TP), don't you think that at 12 years old she will start to disrespect you too?

# The differentiation of the therapist

- 100% responsibility for being professional
- 0% responsibility for results
- Meta communication