

I would like to share my story and experiences of domestic and family violence over the past [REDACTED]. The failure of the legal system has now resulted in complete parental alienation of both of my [REDACTED] years old.

I was in a long-term relationship with the father of my children from age [REDACTED], we were together for [REDACTED] years and have been separated now for [REDACTED] years. While in my relationship I experienced varying degrees of domestic violence and coercive control. I was told who I was and wasn't allowed to hang around with, was required to be home by a certain time and the multiple times I attempted to leave, he would threaten harm to me, or himself. When I finally built the courage to leave and did leave, the violence significantly escalated. I was accused of cheating, physically assaulted and had over \$7,000 of my property destroyed by my ex. I reported this to the police, no action was taken and even the insurance company would not cover my damaged property because the perpetrator was someone who lived in the same household. Even though this was an act of domestic violence.

For [REDACTED] months post separation I was subject to daily threats and abuse, some days I would receive more than [REDACTED] messages throughout the day. The messages were a combination of abusive attacks as well as threatening. When it came to our [REDACTED], my ex demanded I take care of the kids Monday to Friday and he have them every weekend. I was scared to attempt to enforce any other way and just wanted to keep the peace as much as possible when it came to the [REDACTED] I was required to complete the compulsory child support claim through Centrelink due to the separation and my ex said that if I didn't say we had a private arrangement where he provided me funds each month and if I enforced him to pay child support, he would kill me. Of course, he never gave me any financial support for the [REDACTED], while the [REDACTED] were with me, I paid for everything they needed. He would send me constant messages saying 'I will make sure your [REDACTED] hate you one day' and 'I'll be making sure these [REDACTED] know their mum was a whore who wrecked their family'. I was on my own, with little support, scared & threatened daily. All of these things are the reason I didn't seek formal custody arrangements from the beginning. I didn't want to die, I needed to be here for my [REDACTED]

After approximately [REDACTED] months of continuous abuse, I found some help through a women's legal assistance organisation, and with the help of a free lawyer I was able to get a court ordered intervention order. This did appear to assist at the beginning and the abuse did stop to a certain extent. Although the abusive messages and threats ceased for a while, my ex was still very much in control of my life. I had to drop the kids off and pick them up every weekend, either to his house or workplace. If I ever disagreed with his demands, he would threaten to keep the [REDACTED] from me. No matter what I was dealing with, I always kept the adult issues away from our [REDACTED] unfortunately this can't be said for my ex. He could never get over the fact that I had moved on with someone new, even though he has had several relationships in that time. He even went as far as telling the [REDACTED] that if he ever came face to face with my new partner, he would beat/ stab/ kill him. It got to the point; the [REDACTED] learnt not to speak of my new partner when they were at their dad's house as it just made things easier on them. Our [REDACTED] dealt with two different parents quite well, there were different rules at both houses and although 'co-parenting' was non-existent, the [REDACTED] were happy and doing well living Monday - Friday with myself and my partner for the past 5 years. We had been on family holidays, the [REDACTED] played basketball and had good friends and family around them.

Things dramatically escalated around two years ago, I am not sure why, but my ex become extremely hostile and abusive again and it was out of nowhere. Our eldest [REDACTED] was in his first year of high school, he was struggling a bit and experiencing some anxiety. He wasn't loving school, but I managed to get him there 90% of the time and with the help from the school had started talking to a psychologist and was passing most of his subjects. In November 2022 the school called me reporting my [REDACTED] had been caught with [REDACTED] at school. The school enforced a mandatory 5-day

suspension and were required to notify the police due to drugs on school grounds. When I asked my [REDACTED] where he got this from, he advised he took it from his [REDACTED] house. I called my ex to advise what happened and he laughed at me through the phone and said, 'what do you expect, he comes from a broken home, and this is your fault'. Apparently, it was my fault my ex chooses to have illegal drugs at his property, that my kids have access to. My ex demanded me to drop my [REDACTED] off to him and he would make him work if he wasn't at school. I dropped him off at his work at his request and that is the last time my [REDACTED] has been home and is also the last time I have been able to have a conversation with him. In the weeks following our [REDACTED] suspension, the police were required to have a follow up talk with our [REDACTED] about taking [REDACTED] to school. He wasn't going to be charged, it was just a conversation that needed to be had. His dad would not allow this to happen and this is probably due to fear that he was going to get into trouble as the drugs [REDACTED]. My ex became extremely angry about this, he told me he had told our [REDACTED] that I had called the police on him, which is false information. He sent me messages stating that I need to make the police leave our [REDACTED] alone or [REDACTED] will hate me forever. The next week when my [REDACTED] were due to come home, he messaged me saying that my oldest [REDACTED] would not be coming home tonight, he has some mental health issues and needs a break from school. He never allowed the police to speak to our [REDACTED] which resulted in him having to go to court in February 2023 and then he boasted about his [REDACTED] court appearance on his social media. He told me it was my fault that our [REDACTED] had to go to court and said that our [REDACTED] will never forgive me for this. My [REDACTED] also believes that I kicked him out of home, which is not correct, another lie my ex has concocted to turn my [REDACTED] against me. I also learned throughout this process, my ex was handed my home address on a court summons, by the police. I had gone to every possible effort to ensure he never had my address & still had an intervention order, so you can only imagine my reaction when finding out yet another way the legal system had failed me. My [REDACTED] has not returned to school since his suspension & being at [REDACTED] dad's house. My [REDACTED] turns [REDACTED] this moth, has not been in school for [REDACTED] months and is not working. I called in February [REDACTED] to report this to the education department & DCP and was basically told their list was 'too long' and a then [REDACTED] year old would not be investigated.. Another system that has failed both myself and my [REDACTED]

When my oldest [REDACTED] would not return home, my ex then decided that my youngest [REDACTED] was now going to be with him [REDACTED]. He messaged me saying we will be doing one week on and one week off, I did not agree to this. My ex lives an [REDACTED] [REDACTED] from me and my [REDACTED] school was 5 minutes from our home. My ex's girlfriend has a [REDACTED] who attended the same school as my [REDACTED] and therefore my ex said she can take him to school and pick him up the week he was with them. In this time, I decided to find a lawyer and start family court proceedings, I was unsure whether I would be able to get my eldest [REDACTED] home due to his age, but I knew I had to do something to prevent the same thing happening with my [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. My biggest fear was losing him to lies and manipulation as well. Although I wanted to try and keep our adult issues between us and leave our kids out of it, I was forced to tell my [REDACTED] I was forced to tell him because his father was lying to him telling him that I was trying to take him away from him, that I was going to try to send him to jail and send him broke. I had my [REDACTED] come home distressed, begging me not to send his dad to jail. I tried to explain to my then [REDACTED] that I just wanted a legal agreement for the 50/50 custody arrangement. Every time my [REDACTED] went to his dad's for his week, he would be fed lie after lie. He started getting into trouble at school, getting into fights, resulting in several suspensions. This was so out of character, [REDACTED] was such a good [REDACTED] and never got into trouble, in fact [REDACTED] previously had always loved going to school. In the five years prior to going to his dad's every other week, he had never even been in trouble at school. My [REDACTED] told me his dad was encouraging his bad behaviour and learnt it was because they were trying to convince him to want to change schools, to one closer to his dad's house. I also found out the girlfriend had recently moved in and was in the process of changing her [REDACTED] to be in a

school closer to them. My ex contacted me and said we are changing his school and when I disagreed he said well I'll just keep telling him to get in trouble until they expel him, then there won't be a choice. This cycle continued throughout the year and in October 2023 my [REDACTED] went to his fathers and has not returned. I found out they had enrolled [REDACTED] at a new school without my consent. I called the proposed school to stop this enrollment, and this resulted in my ex not sending my [REDACTED] to school at all for 3 weeks. I was getting abusive calls from my ex and also my eldest [REDACTED] started getting involved. I was still working with my lawyer, but this is a slow process. When my [REDACTED] was withheld from me I called her and she applied to the courts for an emergency hearing for a recovery order. I was told this generally takes 5-7 days - this ended up taking 8 weeks. For 8 weeks my [REDACTED] was withheld from me in his fathers care, being lied to, manipulated and emotionally abused. He was experiencing exactly what our [REDACTED] did for the whole year prior. I finally got a court date, although now I know the damage had already been done. My ex self-represented and blatantly lied to the judicial registrar, accusing me of being a physically abusive parent whom my children feared. His lies were seen in court, in the end the order was made for my [REDACTED] to return to me the next day, stay with me for two weeks until Christmas, then return to shared care.

Unfortunately, when I went to collect my [REDACTED] from school the next day he refused to come with me. Over the week before Christmas I made three attempts to get my [REDACTED] to come home. He was angry, upset and was repeating words and phrases I had heard from his father on many occasions before. He told me I was no longer his family, his real family was at his dads house and he could never come home because his brother would be so angry at him. The only option I had was to get the police to remove him, and I just couldn't do that to my [REDACTED] I could not put him in such an awful position which would essentially make the situation worse not better. My ex told me if I signed a consent order that my [REDACTED] will live with him 100%, he will ensure I can see him whenever I want and will send him to see a counsellor to help build our relationship. Neither of these things have happened.

It's now August, my [REDACTED] has not been home since October last year. I have seen [REDACTED] twice this year and the last time was in February. My [REDACTED] Birthday was 2 weeks ago, I cannot see [REDACTED] I cannot even contact [REDACTED] I have no contact with either of my children, they have blocked me on their phones and all social media. This is a result of their fathers lies and manipulation. I literally have all the evidence of messages from my ex and how the [REDACTED] suddenly changed. I send them letters every month, but I don't know if they are even being passed on. The only way I can attempt communication is through him, and I always end up getting abused. He needs to control me still to this day even though he has stolen my children & completely removed them from my life. My children have also been cut off from almost all of their extended family and friends with whom they were previously close with, even the [REDACTED]). She has been cut off due to not taking her brother's side and not agreeing with this situation. This is 100% due to the complete control the father has over them. He has and continues to lie about almost everything, he has falsely accused family members of sexual abuse and me of physical abuse, all of which have been proven to be complete lies. He has lied and manipulated anybody who will listen. He waited until the kids were old enough to look after themselves, but at a prime age of vulnerability. He has lied and manipulated them, just to hurt me, again all because I didn't want to be in a relationship with an abuser.

The legal system has failed both myself and my children. I know that if I was able to get to court for the recovery of my [REDACTED] in that first week, things would be different. His father would not have had such an extended period to fill our child's head full of lies.

After having to deal with the stress of what I have been through all these years, and continue to go through, I get a letter that I am now required to pay child support to my ex, because at the moment he got his way (which is not in the best interest of my children, and is the complete opposite of what

I wanted) he feels it is in his right to claim. Just another way to get back at me. He never paid one cent for [REDACTED] all these years, in fact threatened my life if I attempted to claim, now here I am legally required to pay him, even though I want my kids in my care as much as possible. They are only with him because he is an abuser.

This is parental alienation. It is domestic abuse, it is family abuse, and worst of all it is child abuse that is not recognised by law in Australia at all. The system continually fails the people that it is supposed to protect. Parent Alienation is real and it is extremely common. People need to be held responsible for their actions, not given all the power! Changes need to happen now!