

Parental Alienation

### **New Challenges for a Family**

On Monday, 10-year-old Valor Howell, who was allegedly abducted by his mother from Grand Forks in 2004, returned to Canada. The reunion may be a joyful one for his father and two teenage sisters, but it will also be the beginning of a new set of challenges for the boy, and the father that searched for him for nearly seven years.

"The question now is how to repair your bond," said Vancouver lawyer Lorne MacLean, who specializes in family law.

"The boy might not remember his father, and two older siblings, or he may have a negative viewpoint about the father due to parental alienation," said MacLean.

"You have to get the child to reorient; the child will have a distorted view of past events."

Valor was found after police were called to settle a scene between the mother and son in a Chandler, Arizona laundromat.

When Valor's identity became known, the mother, Jamie Howell, was arrested, and the boy was reunited with his father, Garrett Taylor of Kelowna.

Taylor had spent years using private detectives and public forums, like Facebook, to try to track his son down. After the alleged abduction, he was awarded sole custody by a B.C. court.

Abduction, or simply disappearing with a child, is "the highest level of gatekeeping or access-blocking, and it is clear that a parent who does that cannot make proper decisions on behalf of the child," said MacLean.

Parental alienation, physical distance and sometimes even abduction is not uncommon in high-conflict cases, said Bob Finlay, a Vancouver family counsellor and mediator who specializes in reunification therapy.

Finlay hasn't worked with Taylor or Valor, but he said an abduction case like this would typically involve a destructive pattern of alienating the child from the parent left behind and creating dependency on the abductor.

"It would create terrible confusion for the child. You could get a bit of Stockholm Syndrome where the victim identifies with that parent, he could feel tremendous guilt, feel that he's abandoned her, especially now that she's in jail."

When a parent engages in alienating behaviours, and if the child is abducted at a young age, "the child would become totally dependent on the mother ... would be vulnerable and susceptible to being brainwashed and accepting a very bold lie as truth."

Finlay said it would be important for the father to deal with his negative feelings about Valor's mother's actions "privately." (Taylor had a very public online presence appealing for Valor's return.)

"He may not recognize that the child may have loyalty to the mother, and genuine affection," said Finlay.

While this story has a happy ending, cases of parental alienation are notoriously difficult to resolve.

In 2008 an Ontario judge ordered a 13-year-old boy to be forcibly removed from his father and transported to the United States to the Family Workshop for Alienated Children to be deprogrammed of his negative attitude toward his mother.

When parents have a child, and either through divorce or a breakdown in a relationship must negotiate an entirely new set of shared parenting arrangements, they have to think with their heads, not their hearts, counsels Finlay.

"It's normal that this is a very, very difficult process," said Finlay. "You have to plan a future for your child with someone you may have negative feelings about, while going through a grieving process of your own."

Putting the child's needs first is most important. If the other parent makes access difficult or impossible, don't give up.

"As difficult as this is, your child needs to know that you're still trying and that will count for something as they get older."

This article by the [Vancouver Sun](#) is named; *Boy's return to Canada means new set of challenges for family.*