

CENTRE FOR CHILD & FAMILY DEVELOPMENT

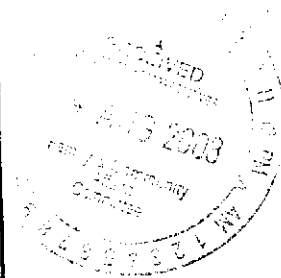
721A Riversdale Road Camberwell Vic. 3124

Tel. 9830 0422 / 0455

Fax.: 9830-0455

Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs
Child Custody Arrangements Inquiry
Department of the House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Submission No:	239
Date Received:	4-8-03
Secretary:	



31 July, 2003

Dear Madam,

I write in response to Nicola Roxon's Media Release regarding the Prime Minister and Minister Anthony's views on child contact arrangements in the event of family separation. I am a child psychotherapist and have worked with children parents and families in the UK and Australia for over 30 years. A significant amount of this work has been with separated and divorced parents and their children.

There are a number of observations I would like to make in relation to the current debate about child contact arrangements. Your media release states that all voices must be heard in the child contact inquiry. However the one voice that is significantly absent in this debate is the voice of the child. Children have both a right and a need to be viewed as active participants in decision making concerning contact arrangements that will affect every aspect of their lives.

Sadly children rarely tend to be consulted and their views and experiences are not treated with the respect and validity that they deserve. The current preoccupation with the rights of fathers is one example of this process since it suggests that children can be allocated like objects to one or other parent.

The findings of over half a century of research and clinical evidence into the impact of parental divorce and separation indicate that children are made vulnerable by a sense of fragmentation arising from ongoing parental conflict and by fragmentation associated with confused living arrangements.

It is therefore imperative in this debate to encourage both mothers and fathers to engage in a constructive dialogue that can lead them in turn to listen to their children and hear directly from them what the children perceive to be in their best interests. It is only within a climate of mutual respect and a sense of partnership that developmentally appropriate, growth enhancing child contact arrangements can emerge.

Yours sincerely,

RUTH SCHMIDT NEVEN
DIRECTOR