

House of Representatives Standing Committee
on Family and Community Affairs

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

To whom it may concern,

Dear Sir/Madam,

I have just finished reading, with much interest and concern, an article in my local paper, the Merimbula News Weekly, regarding the Prime Ministers comments and suggestions regarding issues of residency for children after their parents separate.

My history: I have been a Sole Parent since my children's father met (in April/May 1996) and chose to live with someone else, in August 1996. On the 20th of this month, I will have been living a life that is contrary to the life I wanted for my children, 7 years. We were together for 11 years and had 2 young children when he left, a girl 5 years and a boy 8 months. I was 32 years old. Don't get me wrong, I now realise my mistake in putting my faith and trust in such an individual. In the intervening years, I have had to come to terms with his betrayal as well as cope with the reality of being a Sole Parent in a very "married" and "coupled" society, surviving on the Sole Parent Pension, for which I am eternally grateful. I have prepared both of my children for school, I continue to help them with their homework and support them in their areas of interest. I have provided for their education at a Catholic School, where there are 5 male teachers out of a total of 9 class teachers. This education will continue until they both finish high school. I have had to deal with being taken to the Federal Court in 2001 to have Court Orders regarding Access and Visitation changed. Despite the fact that the father had only had intermittent contact with the children during the previous 5 years, He was rewarded with the usual "every second weekend and half of every holidays" for being such an interested father. My protests on behalf of the children fell on deaf ears. Consequently, I had, in the early days, calls from crying, distressed children who asked me to go and pick them up. The father would then threaten me by saying that if I did pick them up he would "do me for breach of orders". In desperation, on this particular occasion, I called the Police and they, very kindly, went to check on the

children and called me back to let me know that they were fine. What has this done to my children, I ask? There have been many traumatic incidents, too numerous to put in this submission. I have had to spend close to \$20,000.00 on legal fees since the break-up of my marriage, just to protect and defend my children and myself. Many issues are ongoing and will probably continue to be until the children leave home. In short, I have been and continue to be the very best parent I can, under extremely trying and at times unbearably stressful and distressing circumstances. I feel I am qualified to have an opinion on this matter. The values and morals that an individual possesses are of immense importance when their children are involved. A parent who would have an affair and leave the family to pursue that affair, in my opinion, puts his/her children in moral danger if the children have to spend very much time with that parent. Just as a parent who physically, verbally, emotionally, financially or sexually abused anyone would be a danger to his/her children. In my case, the father is spending one weekend per month with the children (negotiated by the children as they were refusing to go at all this year). He is endeavouring to justify his actions by apportioning blame on me for his infidelity. How does this affect my 12-year-old daughter who is asking questions to try to get a balanced view of the circumstances that led to her father leaving her mother? His denial of responsibility is just exacerbating the problem, just as his father's denial did before him. In my opinion, there is no excuse for adultery or abuse and a person who commits adultery or abuse should not be given many privileges where his/her children are concerned.

In years gone by, many children, boys as well as girls, were raised by widowed mothers due to the legacy of wars, epidemics etc. During the wars of last century some villages lost all of their husbands and fathers. The question must be asked: how did these mothers raise their sons without the fathers? These men would be the grandfathers and great-grandfathers of today. I think the answer lies in the values, principles, and the moral code of the day. Look at us now. Today, we even ordained an openly gay individual into the Anglican Church! Where is this all going to end? We condone adultery. We support men who wreak absolute havoc on women's and children's lives, all in the name of equality. We listen to them bleating on about how much money they have to "give the Ex". We make women beg for financial assistance to help raise their children, through the Child Support Agency. My children's father earns just over \$80,000.00 per annum. For the second year in a row, I have had to apply for a Change of Assessment so that his current salary is taken into account and not his income of 2 years ago when he was on Austudy. I find this task demeaning and distressing, as I don't know what amount of money the CSA will deem he has to contribute to the financial security of the children. If he can play the tax system, who knows what the result will be? Some women even feel sorry for these men, believing their sad stories. What is all of this achieving? Just more generations of men (and women) who grow up to believe that it is OK to break peoples hearts and fracture families when they aren't getting what they want. Biology alone should not entitle a man to the privilege of spending time with his children. I do believe all children have the right to know who their parents are, however, I think we must protect them from morally corrupt fathers and mothers. I think it would be morally neglectful of us to force children to live in a "joint custody" situation, as this would not be in the best interests of the majority of children. Instead, I think we need to look at issues like why there

are so few male teachers at the moment? We need to encourage mothers to get their children involved in the community where there is a healthy proportion of married men and women for their children to mix with. This could be done through the Family Assistance Office, which would offer financial assistance with joining fees etc. Centrelink could talk to newly separated women who seek their assistance about the importance of good role modeling for their children. Surf Lifesaving, Scouts and Guides, Sporting Clubs, all offer good role models for children.

In closing, I ask you to consider the findings of research done in the USA. The researcher, Mr. M. Gary Neuman, asked many children, of various ages, what living arrangements they preferred. Some of these children had lived or were living in a "shared residency" situation. The overwhelming majority said that they preferred to live in one home with one parent and visit the other parent for weekends on a regular basis. I saw this on the Oprah Winfrey Show last year, which featured Mr. M. Gary Neuman, L.M.H.C. He is the Author of "Helping Your Kids Cope with Divorce the Sandcastles Way", Random House, 1998. I think it would be morally neglectful of us to force children to live in a "joint custody" situation, as this would not be in the best interests of the majority of children. Many thanks.

Yours sincerely,