

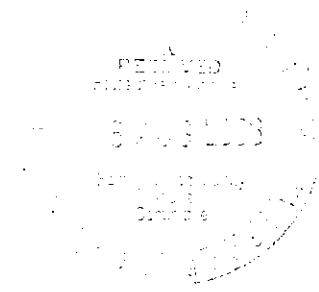
Submission No: 341

Date Received: 6-8-03

Secretary: .....

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Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs  
Child Custody Arrangements Inquiry  
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This submission is being made by myself and is not on the behalf of any other person or organisation.

Congratulations on having the inquiry. It's a pity the terms of reference are so narrow, but it's a start.

Main points of this submission:

- compulsory course needed for separating parents to educate them on their responsibilities, which are probably further reaching than they might think.
- Greater responsibility for the situation by parents
- Review how "the best interests of the children" is established

#### Mandatory training

Training is everywhere we go. We need training before we can drive a car. Training to handle food in a shop (in Victoria). We are offered courses when we seek to marry. It seems obvious to me that given children are so highly valued separating parents should be trained in how best to get on with life for the benefit of themselves, their kids and any future partners. Mandatory training might just prevent many situations going from bad to worse. Some suggested areas are:

- Getting along with the ex now that you've separated
- Moving on emotionally with your life. Your ex moving on with theirs (I DO NOT MEAN MOVING AWAY!!!)
- Re-partnering. Yes you can, but do it thoughtfully. Gets people to think about how they will go about dating.
- Possession of children – "They ain't your kids". Tackles the emotion felt by some parents when faced with their children forming relationships with others, including people they may not like. How to deal with this.
- Helping your new partner be a step parent. It does not come naturally. Where to get help (NOTE: this means there will need to be places where help is available – and remember, not everyone lives in a capital city)

- Your partner re-partnering. Dealing with hurt. Coping with seeing the influence this person will have on the kids
- Other family members. You may hate them, but their contact with your kids is important.
- The cardinal sin. Why it is not a good idea to fight with the ex in front of the kids. (focus on why not don't). Why you should not put the other parent down (it's not good for the kids, but it's also not good for you!)
- You too are responsible for ensuring your kids have a good relationship with your ex.
- Not the Brady bunch. Putting 2 families together – you might just have to.

A course should be mandatory for a number of reasons. I don't think I would be out of place in saying that men would be less likely to voluntarily attend a course. I don't mean to man-bash but let's face it, men aren't exactly known for their pro-activity. Plus, if it was mandatory for both parties it couldn't be used by one party against the other. Both parties would be receiving the same information. Provision would have to be made so that the separating party did not have to attend together. The other benefit is that it could assist in setting up networks of people. In 5 years of step-mothering, going from dating their dad, to relocating and being ready to marry I have not until the last month been able to find assistance with this very important role. My fiancée is limited in how to help me because he genuinely doesn't know how.

#### Greater responsibility

This goes much further than monetary issues. It seems to me that there are many people who don't take enough responsibility for their actions and for the influence they have on children's lives. Any changes that are introduced must have regard for children in the sense that they need to see that consequences result from the way people live their life and the choices they make. I think this is where fathers are getting so distressed about the family court and child maintenance systems.

If a court can order where children are to live, then why not order parents where to live? Put the responsibility back where it belongs – both parties. “You two created this child, you both need to be responsible for not the financials, but the time spent, teaching, playing, disciplining. The whole lot.”

No child should be removed from a parent who is ready, willing and able to care for the child. The adults have to take responsibility for the mistakes they made and get on with it.

I support the idea that custody arrangements should start off with a 50/50 split and work from there. It won't be practical for each family to be able to maintain 50/50 contact and so ex-couples that result with less than 50% custody must not be penalised by this and have this reduced contact be viewed as less important.

Review how “the best interests of the children” is established

I've not had too great an involvement in the making of custody decisions, but from my reading I suggest that the way in which what is in the best interests of the children is established is looked at very closely. The idea may itself be sound, but if the methods used are not robust then the system will be a farce.

Thankyou for reading my comments