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Children's family bonds wiped out in the name of protection

By **Dr Stan Korosi** July 11, 2026



This is the latest in a series of articles we are publishing in TCW designed to challenge one of the most powerful orthodoxies shaping family justice across the Western world, an orthodoxy that is harming children and parents alike. You can read previous articles [here](#). Today's examines the importance of wider family relationships.

A SOCIETY that treats family relationships as disposable is not merely failing families: it is corrupting the moral foundations on which children, kinship and civic life depend.

This is one of the central failures of family policy. We are fluent in the language of risk, trauma, autonomy, safety and process. We are far less fluent in the language of loyalty, continuity, belonging, memory and repair. The result is a system that speaks endlessly about protecting children while allowing safe family relationships to disappear.

That disappearance is not always called alienation. It may be called safeguarding, neutrality, listening to the child, case management, or waiting for the evidence. But when delay, ideology and institutional passivity allow a

child's relationship with a safe parent, grandparent or wider family network to wither, the result is not neutrality. It is relational abandonment.



Relational disposability is the assumption that some family relationships can disappear without serious public concern; that a child's relationship with a parent, grandparent, sibling or wider family network may be treated as optional, replaceable or administratively inconvenient.

Family relationships as social infrastructure

Family relationships are often treated as private matters. In one sense, they are. The State should not own the family, dictate affection, enforce intimacy or impose one family form on a plural society.

But family relationships are not merely private lifestyle arrangements. They are fundamental to social infrastructure. They tell children where they come from, who belongs to them, who they belong to, who is responsible for them and whose love for them is special. But also, who they are allowed to love. It is these intimate family relationships where children first learn trust, responsibility, attachment, difference, conflict and repair.

Tragically they are also where harm can occur. Violence, coercion, intimidation, neglect and abuse must be recognised and acted upon. But protection from harm must not become a doctrine of family erasure. Children need safety and belonging. They are not rivals.

When protection becomes erasure

This is not an argument for imposing one family form. Children can flourish in different arrangements of care, though indubitably stable married families provide the best outcomes. But the critical test (and indeed measure) is whether a child's important family relationships are recognised, protected and allowed to develop.

Contemporary family policy fails that test. Courts are slow, services fragmented, and legal remedies expensive. But those failures point to something deeper: a system comfortable with the disappearance of relationships that should have been protected.

Parental alienation is the clearest expression of this wider disposability. It shows how a child's world can be reorganised through narratives of fear, contempt and erasure. A parent may be made to appear unsafe, morally disqualified, unnecessary or no longer real. The child may come to experience love as betrayal and family connection as danger.

But the mechanism travels beyond parental alienation. Any family network becomes vulnerable when one person, coalition, institution or ideology controls the narrative through which children are permitted to love, trust, remember or belong.

A society that cannot say why a child's safe relationship with a parent matters has lost more than a policy argument. It has lost its moral vocabulary.

The false comfort of neutrality

Much relational disposability hides behind the language of neutrality.

A court delays because it must manage process. A service refuses to intervene because the matter is contested. A school accepts one parent's account because conflict is uncomfortable. A policy framework treats one category of harm as visible and another as suspect. A professional avoids 'alienation' because it is controversial. A child's resistance is treated as self-explanatory because 'listening to the child' sounds morally sufficient.

Each act appears cautious. Because it appears cautious, it is rarely tested. Together, they consolidate rupture.

Some family relationships are not destroyed by one dramatic act. They are destroyed by accumulated over-caution, institutional cowardice and professional evasion: the assessment not ordered, the contact not restored, the false narrative not tested, the safe parent not supported, the grandparents not considered, the delay not treated as harmful, the repair pathway not funded, the ideology not challenged.

By the time the system is ready to decide, the relationship may already have ruptured. That rupture becomes self-justifying. The system then performs its final act of moral evasion: it treats the result of its own inaction as proof of its wisdom.

This practice is not neutral; it has little to do with the child's best interests. It is relational abandonment.

The right to family life requires timely protection

Family life is not merely a private sentiment. It is a protected human interest. In *Pisică v Moldova*, [https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#{%22itemid%22:\[%22001-197214%22\]}](https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#{%22itemid%22:[%22001-197214%22]}) the European Court of Human Rights found a violation of family life after authorities failed to act effectively in response to alienating behaviour and failed to enforce a custody judgment.

The case does not mean every allegation of alienation is proved. It means delay, passivity and non-enforcement can help destroy family life. Institutions can destroy relationships by doing too little, too late.

If family life matters, the State cannot treat children's relationships as private losses that become relevant only after they are gone.

The ideology of replacement

Relational abandonment carries an unspoken theory of replacement.

This is the fiction: the child will adapt. Another adult can fill the gap. The rejected parent was probably unimportant or dangerous anyway. Grandparents are secondary. Fathers are optional. Mothers are replaceable. Siblings can be ignored. The child's past can be rewritten. The family line can be narrowed without consequence.

Relationships are not interchangeable units. A parent is not simply a service provider. A grandparent is not merely an occasional visitor. A sibling is not just another child in the network. Family relationships carry history, identity,

memory and symbolic meaning. Some are unsafe and must be limited or ended. But where they are safe and meaningful, their removal is not administrative. It is developmental.



This is why parental alienation matters beyond its specialist field. It exposes the social mechanism by which family relationships are rendered morally removable.

A child is not only kept from a parent. The child is taught why the parent no longer counts and why family love is disposable. That is the ideology we should reject.

The families no one speaks for

The principle should be simple: children's family relationships are not disposable private interests. Where they are safe and meaningful, they are a common good. Relational justice does not mean forced contact, ignoring abuse, or restoring the nuclear family as the only legitimate form. It means protecting children from both unsafe relationships and the avoidable destruction of safe ones. This is not merely private sorrow. When family relationships become disposable, the effects travel outward into loneliness, distrust, alienation, institutional disillusionment and social fragmentation.

What relational justice requires

Family relationships must be recognised as social infrastructure, not private arrangements noticed only after they collapse. Children's continuity with parents, grandparents, siblings and wider kin should matter wherever those relationships are safe and developmentally beneficial. Systems must distinguish alienation, domestic abuse, coercive control, justified estrangement, poor parenting, ordinary conflict and hybrid cases. Delay must be treated as a harm amplifier. Courts, schools, family services and child protection systems should be asked one question: did they interrupt the harm, or help consolidate it?

The test of family policy

The test of family policy is not how elegantly it describes risk after a relationship has been destroyed. The test is whether it acts in time to protect children from both abuse and unnecessary relational loss. Some relationships are unsafe and must be limited or ended. That is not in dispute. But where a relationship is safe and meaningful, its destruction is a developmental injury to the child, a moral injury to the family, and a public failure by the institutions that allowed it. A society must decide whether children's family relationships matter enough to protect before they are gone. If it cannot, it should be honest about what it has become: comfortable with the disposability of its own families.