



# Assessment

with therapeutic trial (ATT)

[www.familyseparationclinic.com](http://www.familyseparationclinic.com)

## General information

The Family Separation Clinic is able to provide a number of court-based services, under court instruction, including expert assessment and recommendation for treatment. In many cases, we may also be able to deliver a treatment programme once the court has accepted and ordered it.

Please note that the Clinic does not carry out psychological assessments.

All treatment recommendations are planned and presented as part of the assessment process. The cost of any recommended treatment route is provided to the court after the assessment has been completed.

Exceptional costs associated with either assessment or treatment are agreed in advance.

*It should be noted that our rates exceed LAA legal aid hourly rates and we are, therefore, unable to carry out work fully funded by legal aid.*

The Clinic uses a differential approach to understanding the problem of a child's rejection of a parent and all assessments and recommended treatment routes are based on international research and established frameworks.

Occasionally, we carry out an initial paper-based assessment as a precursor to a full assessment.

## Assessment with therapeutic trial (ATT)

A child's vehement rejection of a parent after divorce or separation can present the court with significant challenges. Our assessment with therapeutic trial process is designed to offer the court unparalleled clarity in uncovering the underlying dynamics that are causing the rejection and proposals for treatment that are supported in the international research.

Whilst psychological reports are able to offer the court a view on the psychological functioning of the parents and a 'snapshot' of the problem, our assessment with therapeutic trial process provides the environment for a depth analysis of the family dynamics, how the child has entered into the rejecting position and how each parent responds to therapeutic input. Through this, we are able to offer the court a comprehensive opinion on the causes of the child's rejection and detailed proposals for treatment. All of our assessments are carried out by the UK's foremost experts in children's post separation relationship refusal and parental alienation.

The ATT is a therapeutically based intervention which sometimes utilises a team approach to supporting the family affected by parental alienation. Based on the work of Habib Davanloo<sup>1</sup>, in which those in therapy are actively confronted with situations which bring the internalised dynamics to the surface, this intervention is designed to assist families to confront the dynamics which have caused the child's resistance to a relationship with one parent. The ATT runs over a period of approximately twelve weeks and is a behaviourally contracted intervention in which parents are initially assessed and then informed about the dynamics that have caused the child's rejection. Throughout the process, parents are invited to work alone with a therapist using psychoeducational input and, where

appropriate, together with the other parent, to confront and change the dynamics that have caused the child to use the rejection of a parent as an unconscious coping mechanism. This assessment process is suitable for families including those where there are high levels of blame and where it appears that there is high conflict. The process is designed to produce a comprehensive analysis of the capacity of each parent to recognise and change behaviours in a therapeutic setting.

Each programme is tailored to suit the individual family following assessment of the paperwork. Intake of the family is based upon the analysis of dynamics to date and the willingness of parents to agree to the requirement to enter the programme under strict conditions of non-confidentiality between the parties, therapist and court. This is a different approach to standard or generic therapy, where confidentiality between therapist and client is almost always guaranteed. The purpose of this non-confidential approach is to bring clarity to the process and to reduce behaviours such as triangulation.

The process provides for an immediate depth assessment by enabling the family to replicate the problematic dynamic in a clinical setting. As part of the process, children are routinely observed with the parent they are rejecting and this is a condition of the family being accepted into the programme. The following table outlines our typical assessment structure.

PHASE	ACTION	PURPOSE
Phase One	Reading of the paperwork.	To understand the background to the case.
Phase Two	A meeting with each child, separately, of up to 1 hour per meeting.	To hear and understand the children's experiences of the family dynamics, to understand the children's relationship with each of their parents, and to observe, in a clinical setting, the responses of each child to input which is designed to test and evaluate their receptiveness to therapeutic input.
	A meeting with each parent of up to two hours.	To hear from each parent their perspective of the current position, their view of what needs to happen to create change and their understanding of each other's perspective.
Phase Three	A facilitated clinical observation of the children with the rejected parent in controlled conditions (and, where appropriate, with the aligned parent)	To observe the responses in the children in relationship to each of their parents and to test their responsiveness to therapeutic input.
Phase Four	Such work as considered appropriate to complete the assessment having considered outputs from Phase One Two and Three.	To observe the family dynamics and its responsiveness to therapeutic input.
Phase Five	Report to court.	To advise the court whether sustainable change may be achieved through further therapeutic input or whether alternative interventions are indicated.

Please note that this table is for indicative purpose only and interventions may vary at the discretion of the Clinic.

<sup>1</sup> Davaloo, H. (1980). *Short Term Dynamic Psychotherapy* (Ed). New Jersey: Aronson.

Legal advisors should note that, in proposing the ATT for a family, the requirement that children are made available for clinical supervision with the parent they are currently rejecting should be included in the court order. Additionally, there is a requirement for permission for the case to be returned to court should one parent not comply with the order. The ATT programme can produce remarkable results in a short space of time in families where the alienation reaction in a child is mild to moderate. It can also produce significant clinical information about one or both parent's capacity to respond to therapeutic support, thereby triaging those cases which are likely to need a stronger intervention from those capable of healthy responses.

The programme will, for example, indicate where a parent is unlikely to be able to respond to therapeutic intervention due to personality disorder or other problematic behaviours, thereby dramatically reducing the period of time a family has to be in therapy in order to determine the capacity of the family system to respond to change.

### **Costs**

The cost of our Assessment with Therapeutic Trial is £5,000 (plus VAT) plus travel and accommodation costs for cases outside London. Any exceptional costs are agreed on a case-by-case basis.

### **Timescales**

Subject to the availability of the parties (including children) we aim to complete the Assessment with Therapeutic Trial and report to court within 12 weeks from instruction.

### **Legal Requirements**

There are a number of legal requirements attached to our Assessment with Therapeutic Trial service and these should be explicitly included in any court order and instruction:

- instruction must be made under Family Procedure Rules Part 25 - Experts and Assessors;
- the case must remain in court for at least the first twelve weeks of the programme delivery;
- the Clinic must have permission to return the case to court for guidance at any point that it considered necessary;
- the court must give permission for the Clinic to see the children in clinical observation with each parent as required.

**PLEASE NOTE: You should not ask a court to instruct the Family Separation Clinic to carry out an assessment or undertake any other work unless you have the express written permission from us to do so. Please contact the Clinic if you would like to ask the court to instruct the Clinic to carry out an assessment or other court-based intervention.**