

THE FINAL CALL OUT

RISE

Research does not treat sustained conflict between parents as harmless background noise. Van Eldik and colleagues' 2020 meta-analysis examined 169 studies of children's adjustment and 61 studies of their responses to interparental conflict. Hostility was important, but disengagement and unconstructive conflict also mattered. Many associations persisted over time. These are research associations across families—not findings that one parent, one lawyer, or one court caused a particular child's difficulties. They are enough to make indifference indefensible. [R01]

This is where the book ends: not with another adjective for an attorney, but with what children may carry after the attorneys have closed their files.

I. THE COSTS THAT DO NOT FIT ON THE INVOICE

A case has a caption. A life has consequences outside it. My argument is that institutions responsible for families should account for those consequences before treating delay, financial depletion, and damaged relationships as somebody else's problem.

The research does not prove that private-practice attorneys collectively cause addiction, educational failure, or incarceration. I will not invent that result. It does establish that family relationships, economic conditions, parenting practices, and developing self-regulation matter. When professional conduct unnecessarily worsens those conditions, it deserves examination on that basis—not immunity because the invoice contains recognizable legal work.

The bill comes out of a family, not an abstraction

Conger, Conger, and Martin's 2010 review describes the connections between socioeconomic conditions, family relationships, and development. It evaluates both economic pressure on family functioning and the ways individual and family characteristics influence economic circumstances.

The relationship runs through processes, not a simple equation in which poverty determines character. [R02]

That should change how we discuss legal expense. A necessary protective proceeding may be worth its cost. An unnecessary escalation does not become harmless merely because the time was billable. The question is what the work accomplished, what alternatives were available, and which burdens the process imposed on the family it purported to serve.

The economic evidence is not confined to correlations. Akee and colleagues' 2010 quasi-experiment examined income changes from casino-profit transfers. In the poorest households studied, an additional \$4,000 a year was associated with approximately one additional year of education by age 21 and a 22 percent reduction in the probability of minor offending at ages 16 and 17. The authors used an externally generated income change to investigate causation; their result is not a dollar-for-dollar estimate of harm from legal fees. [R03]

It does make one complacent assumption difficult to defend: that money taken out of a stressed household is merely money, unrelated to a child's prospects.

Consider an illustration, not an allegation about this case. Suppose \$10,000 is spent on avoidable procedural conflict rather than retained by the household. At an assumed annual growth rate of 4 percent for thirty years, \$10,000 would become about \$32,434. That arithmetic is not an investment forecast, a promised return, or a damages calculation; it ignores taxes and assumes the money could remain invested. Often its more immediate alternative use would be rent, transport, childcare, or education.

Either way, the money has an opportunity cost. It cannot simultaneously finance needless conflict and remain available for the family's other needs. When I speak of generational wealth, I am asking about those foregone resources and opportunities—not claiming that a particular retainer can be traced to a descendant's future balance sheet.

An invoice records who was paid. It does not record everything the family went without.

Private practice is not itself predation. A good lawyer can secure protection, clarify obligations, and prevent expensive mistakes. I reserve my condemnation for conduct that exploits avoidable conflict or makes resolution harder without a defensible purpose. That conclusion must be earned from the record, actor by actor. The profession should be capable of asking the same question of itself.

Fatherhood is a relationship, not a ceremonial title

Sarkadi and colleagues' systematic review covered 24 longitudinal publications; 22 reported beneficial associations with father involvement. The evidence particularly supported active engagement rather than one uniquely effective paternal activity. Its observational studies cannot remove every alternative explanation, but the review gives serious weight to sustained, constructive fathering. [R04]

Adamsons and Johnson's 2013 meta-analysis of 52 studies of nonresident fathers found a small overall association between positive involvement and child well-being. Relationship quality and constructive involvement matter; a tally of contact alone is not a complete account of a relationship. [R05]

This is not an argument that every father is safe, every restriction is unjustified, or every child requires the same arrangement. It is an argument against treating a safe, engaged father as replaceable administrative scenery. The word “safe” is substantive. So is “engaged.” Both have to be assessed rather than presumed from either parent's preferred story.

Nor is this a declaration that mothers, grandparents, adoptive parents, or other caregivers cannot provide essential guidance. My insistence that fathers matter does not require pretending that only fathers matter. The point is to protect the particular healthy relationships a child has—not make children prove their loyalty by surrendering one of them.

A father should be able to know the teacher, help with the problem, celebrate the effort, hear the worry, and say something more useful than “see you whenever the adults finish arguing.” The same is true of every safe parent whose relationship is being unnecessarily obstructed.

The stern conversation worth defending

An occasional stern fatherly talking-to can mean something entirely different from frightening a child into submission. The version I defend is clear, proportionate, and grounded in care: identify the behavior, explain the consequence, listen, set the boundary, and help the child take the next responsible step. That is my practical interpretation of responsible parenting, not a claim that one speech has been proved to prevent addiction or crime.

Pinquart's 2017 meta-analysis of 1,435 studies found small beneficial associations for warmth, behavioral structure, autonomy support, and authoritative parenting. Harsh and psychological control showed adverse associations. Some relationships were bidirectional: children also influence

how parents behave. Firm guidance is not interchangeable with authoritarian domination. [R06]

A father can say: “Stop. Think about the consequence. You are capable of making a better decision. Tell me what happened, and then we will work out how you repair it.” He can require an apology, insist on a reasonable responsibility, or refuse an unsafe plan without telling the child that the child is worthless.

The distinction is not cosmetic. In Wang and Kenny's longitudinal study of 976 families, harsh verbal discipline predicted increases in adolescent conduct problems and depressive symptoms; adolescent misconduct also predicted more harsh discipline. Parental warmth did not remove the adverse association. A loving intention is not a blank check for humiliation. [R07]

I cannot condemn an official for substituting intimidation for reasoning and then call the same substitution healthy fatherhood at home. The standard has to survive the trip out of the courthouse.

The lesson is self-restraint. The adult has to demonstrate it too.

Composure does not mean never feeling anger. My standard is that the adult remains responsible for what is done with it. A child should be able to hear “that behavior must change” without hearing “you are beyond love.” A teenager should be able to disagree without being made responsible for an adult's pride.

Self-restraint is not surrender

Self-restraint is only reasonable to a point.

If a bear charged your child, would you exhibit self-restraint until government, again, failed to act?

To anyone who says any parent should:

GO TO HELL.

And it is not immediate danger only. Failing to act has long-term consequences that are repugnant. The obligation to protect also reaches the lessons a child is being taught today and the future those lessons may shape.

If the lessons being taught now are contrary to a child's long-term best interests, a father—or any parent—should absolutely get off their ass and immediately intervene.

“Immediately” describes when to act. It does not limit the concern to immediate physical danger. I am talking about prevention: substance-use risks, damaged educational prospects, manipulation, and lessons that undermine self-restraint, composure, or the belief that “I know I can.”

I will not stake my son's future on government responding in time. Intervention means active, nonviolent parenting: challenge the harmful lesson, set boundaries, stay engaged, work with the school, obtain appropriate help, and pursue accountability.

I will not sit on my ass while lowlives drag my son down in life. No parent should. Not ever.

There are worse fates than death.

Those words express my horror at severe, lasting harm. A child facing addiction or any other hardship is not beyond hope. Intervention should protect that child's life and future—preventing harm and helping repair it.

Self-restraint should govern how a parent intervenes. It must not become a demand that the parent fail to intervene.

“I know I can” must mean more than bravado

Moffitt and colleagues followed roughly 1,000 children to age 32 and also examined 500 sibling pairs. Childhood self-control predicted later health, substance dependence, finances, and offending, beyond measured intelligence and social background. This was longitudinal evidence, not proof that sternness caused self-control or that low self-control determines a child's future. [R08]

The point is to take the skill seriously without turning it into a moral caste system. Struggling is not an identity. It is a reason to provide appropriate support.

Bandura's foundational account of self-efficacy distinguishes believing oneself capable of a task from merely wanting a favorable outcome. It emphasizes mastery experiences, alongside modeling, encouragement, and the interpretation of one's reactions. This is a theoretical and experimental foundation, not a trial of a father's lecture. [R09]

For me, “I know I can” should mean: I have practiced. I have recovered from mistakes. I can ask for help. I can tolerate an ordinary frustration without surrendering my judgment. I can be corrected without collapsing into shame or turning the correction into a fight.

That is confidence I want to cultivate. Not “nobody can tell me anything.” Not “everyone who frustrates me is my enemy.” Not the performance of invulnerability.

Pandey and colleagues' 2018 review of 49 randomized trials found that self-regulation interventions can improve self-regulation in children and adolescents, with some favorable health, educational, and social outcomes also reported. Programs and results varied. The useful conclusion is that skills can be supported through evaluated interventions—not that one parenting slogan guarantees a life outcome. [R10]

Risk reduction is work, not prophecy

Ryan, Jorm, and Lubman's review of 77 longitudinal articles identified parenting practices associated with delayed alcohol initiation or lower subsequent drinking, including appropriate monitoring, relationship quality, communication, support, and limiting access. These are associations concerning alcohol outcomes, not proof that a particular household's rules will prevent every substance problem. [R11]

The contribution I ask institutions to protect is therefore practical: the ordinary opportunities for a responsible caregiver to notice, listen, set a boundary, model restraint, and follow through. None requires a child to idolize an adult. All require more than a symbolic place in an order.

The prospect of substance use, poor education, or criminal-justice involvement must not become a prediction aimed at my son or anybody else's child. A risk factor is not a verdict. Arrest is not conviction, and offending research is not automatically incarceration research. The point is prevention while the future remains open.

Intervention can change the story

Wolchik and colleagues' 15-year follow-up of the New Beginnings randomized trial began with 240 families after divorce. The parenting-focused program reduced later internalizing disorders and produced benefits on several substance-related outcomes for males. The findings were not uniformly favorable: women in the intervention group reported more recent alcohol use on one measure. A serious account keeps that result instead of advertising a miracle. [R12]

Forgatch and colleagues' nine-year Oregon Divorce Study followed 238 single mothers and their sons. Parent management training reduced teacher-reported delinquency and police arrests. These were concrete outcomes, not a study of fathers' superiority or guaranteed protection against imprisonment. [R13]

Those two trials belong in this ending because they offer something more useful than fatalism. Parenting support can be a substantive intervention. Improving an adult's practice can be worth more to a child than winning another argument about which adult already deserves to be called right.

That lesson includes me. It includes mothers. It includes fathers. It leaves room for recovery after separation and after mistakes. The evidence does not say a damaged relationship is easy to repair. It does not say every relationship should be restored without safeguards. It says there are things worth doing beyond allowing conflict to harden into an identity.

What I charge the institution with noticing

The specific responsibility of a lawyer or judge still has to be established from the applicable duties and the record. None of these studies adjudicates Patrick Bedard's conduct, Judge Lucy's findings, or the Committee's response. They supply the developmental and economic context in which those decisions should be evaluated.

My charge is a moral and institutional one: stop discussing families as if the effects of process end at the edge of a case file. Ask what a proposed tactic, delay, or expense does to the capacity to care. Ask what the child is actually experiencing. Require an explanation proportionate to the consequences.

Children do not owe the legal profession a generation in which to discover that prevention matters.

II. THE CALL TO ACTION

RISE

The People. Stand the fuck up.

With words. With evidence. With peaceful public action. Stand as citizens who refuse to confuse public service with permanent permission to avoid public accountability.

Stand up for a system worth having—not a vacuum in which the loudest person becomes the next unanswerable authority.

The judiciary as a self-protective hierarchy, answerable mainly to its own sense of importance, needs to end. The alternative is not the disappearance of fair hearings, protection from abuse, or independent decision-making. The alternative is a rebuilt public institution whose authority is bounded, whose reasoning can be checked, and whose failures can be corrected.

The impunity ends. Justice remains. For Everyone.

If the reform only helps people I like, it is not the reform I am asking for. If the process protects only fathers, only mothers, only represented people, or only people who speak in a pleasing tone, it has failed the test before it begins.

Rise for the child, not for possession of the child

Parents: stop asking a child to carry your case. Do not recruit a teenager as an ally against the other parent. Do not make affection a loyalty test. Do not call your own desire for vindication the child's voice without doing the difficult work of listening to the child independently.

Ask for the help that improves the relationship. Accept correction that improves your parenting. Preserve the evidence needed to address a real problem; protect the private information that does not belong in a public fight.

There is no contradiction between insisting that a father be taken seriously and insisting that he behave responsibly. There is no contradiction between

taking a mother's safety concerns seriously and examining whether her specific claims are supported. A neutral process should not require either parent to become an unquestionable symbol.

To the fathers who have been reduced to waiting: make your demand precise. What appropriate contact is proposed? What conditions apply? What has been done to satisfy them? What remains disputed? What prompt, independent decision is needed? Your child's future deserves more than a contest over who can write the angriest email.

To the mothers who have had to fight to make danger visible: this movement must not replace one dismissal of your experience with another. Safety is not negotiable for the sake of a tidy theory about family structure. The work is to establish the facts fairly and act on them competently.

To the children and adults who grew up inside these conflicts: you are not defective fruit. You are not a forecast. You do not owe either side the rest of your life as proof that its account was correct.

You are allowed to become somebody the conflict did not know how to imagine.

Rise inside the profession

Lawyers: do the difficult thing before you ask the Public to admire the easy title. Tell a client when an account is unsupported. Identify a genuine protective need without inflating it. Correct a material omission without requiring the other side to finance the discovery of your conscience.

Do not mistake my criticism of predatory practice for contempt toward every person who represents a client. A profession capable of protecting vulnerable people should be more offended by avoidable harm than by the person describing it.

Attorney Bedard, your April response belongs in the record, including your objections about compliance and your account of encouragement of contact. The call-out is to reconcile the disputed positions with the order, the relevant evidence, and a practical route to resolution. It is not to ask the reader to assume you are wrong because you represent the other side. [S16]

The standard is not whether advocacy was forceful. It is whether a claim survives inspection, whether a correction is made when warranted, and whether the proposed path serves something more defensible than continued conflict.

A billable action is not necessarily a useful action. Explain the difference before the family pays for it.

Glenn Anderson's correction illustrates the conduct I want acknowledged: identify the omitted history, state the limits of the correction, and do not claim more than the source supports. This is praise for that act, not an attempt to make him endorse this book or answer for everybody else's conduct. [S15]

Future lawyers: you do not have to inherit every professional habit you encounter. Learn the rules. Learn their purposes. Then learn to distinguish protecting a client from protecting a tactic that should never have become normal.

Rise above institutional image management

Judges: a finding should be supported by the evidence, a restriction should have an intelligible basis, and a review route should be more than a sequence of instructions nobody owns from beginning to end. Those are the standards I am demanding, not claims that every existing procedure meets them or that every adverse order is illegitimate.

Judge Lucy's order remains an order with findings I contest and conditions I have had to address. This book does not reverse it. My demand is that the exercise of public power be explainable beyond the fact that a person with power exercised it. [S01]

Mr. McArdle and the Committee: a dismissal can be reported accurately and still be examined critically. Legitimate confidentiality limits should be respected; the permissible explanation of scope, standards, and process should be as clear as those limits allow. A rule that prevents a particular disclosure is not an admission, but it is not an answer to every question about institutional design either. [S04; S11]

I want neither a judiciary bullied into favorable rulings nor a judiciary insulated from examination. I want independence from improper pressure joined to accountability for the work. Those are compatible aspirations. A public institution should not make citizens choose between impartiality and intelligibility.

Public confidence should be earned by the quality of the explanation, not extracted as an entrance fee.

Rise where budgets become childhood

Legislators and administrators: ask what the system is purchasing with the money and time it consumes. Do not let the number of processed documents become the only measure of success. Ask whether material

disputes were resolved, necessary protections were provided, and orders became workable arrangements outside the building.

Fund timely, independent assessment when material child-safety or relationship facts are genuinely disputed. Preserve rapid emergency protection where needed, then provide prompt review rather than allowing an interim arrangement to become permanent by inertia. Neither safety nor fairness should be used as an excuse to abandon the other.

Invest in accessible parenting support and clinically appropriate services. Evaluate the programs rather than treating a referral slip as a completed intervention. Ask who can actually attend, what it costs, what barriers prevent participation, and what outcomes are measured.

Require an intelligible path for checking compliance conditions and resolving implementation disagreements. A parent should not have to guess who is authorized to decide whether a condition has been satisfied while everybody else points toward somebody else's inbox.

Make hearing records realistically accessible, with appropriate privacy controls. Make digital intake recoverable when it fails. Require plain-language explanations of filing defects and clear status information. Review the contracts by whether people can successfully use the service—not merely by whether automated notices were generated.

Publish system-level information that can properly be disclosed: waiting periods, returned submissions, correction times, access failures, and the resources devoted to addressing them. Protect personal case information. Measure the institution without making children the exhibit.

I am describing a reform program, not pretending these pages are enacted law. The details deserve public testing, meaningful participation, and revision when evidence shows a better design.

Another committee is not progress unless something changes outside the committee room.

Rise with evidence, not a replacement mythology

Technologists: make records easier to preserve, compare, and inspect without exposing people who did not volunteer for publicity. Keep original material distinct from extracted text and machine-generated summaries. Make uncertainty visible. Give a reader a route back to the source.

Do not replace “trust the institution” with “trust my software.” An AI-generated allegation is still an allegation. A search result is not a finding. An impressive interface does not excuse an inaccurate quotation.

Journalists and readers: do not accept my interpretation merely because the story is compelling. Check the document. Read the adverse answer. Distinguish an unanswered question from a proven falsehood. Correct an error even when it weakens the passage you liked most.

And do not confuse thousands of visits with thousands of endorsements. Reach creates an opportunity for examination. It does not certify the conclusion. I want more people able to check the work, not a larger crowd instructed to believe it. [S10; S14]

The public record should become a place where an institution can answer accurately and a citizen can be wrong without being erased. Anything less merely changes who controls the microphone.

Turn anger into something that survives the evening

Begin with one issue you can explain and support. Preserve the relevant source. Write down the practical change being sought. Keep the request separate from the accusation. An organized demand gives other people something they can evaluate, improve, and carry forward.

Bring it to an open meeting, a newsroom, a professional association, or a legislative office through appropriate public channels. Organize a peaceful forum. Ask a clear question. Record a response only where recording is permitted. Do not turn a refusal to participate into proof of guilt, and do not turn advocacy into repeated unwanted personal contact.

Help somebody else navigate a form. Support a parent who needs transport to an appointment. Make a source directory readable. Pay attention to whether the proposed reform helps the next family rather than merely allowing the present dispute to grow louder.

Choose a demand small enough to measure and important enough to matter. A functioning support route. A published review standard. An accessible record. A documented response time. An independent audit of a recurring failure. A funded service people can actually use.

Then follow the public work. Was the change adopted? Does it work? Who remains excluded? What needs to change next? This is how refusal becomes responsibility instead of performance.

There is room here for anger. There is no requirement to keep it permanently at boiling point. A movement that exists only while everybody is furious will not be a reliable place for exhausted families to seek help.

Build something useful enough to remain when the adrenaline is gone.

The generation that refuses to pass it on

I want children to inherit more than an archive of what adults failed to prevent. I want them to inherit resources, opportunities, and relationships that were protected because adults were willing to examine themselves before defending themselves.

I want a teenager to hear a father say, “You can do this,” and understand that it includes preparation, support, a reasonable boundary, and the opportunity to try again. I want the adult saying it to be able to hear, “You got that wrong,” without treating correction as betrayal.

That is the confidence worth defending: not certainty without evidence, but the capacity to act, learn, repair, and continue. The same aspiration belongs in public service.

I am not asking the next generation to hate the people I criticize. I am asking it to demand better work, including better work from me. I am asking the present generation to stop protecting habits merely because we survived them.

The institution does not need our worship. It needs standards it can be held to. The legal profession does not need another excuse to confuse its own inconvenience with the public interest. It needs to make its claimed commitments visible in practice.

The judiciary as an unanswerable hierarchy must end—not the public's access to justice, but the presumption that power can decline to explain itself.

Replace what fails. Preserve what protects. Make the work answerable to the people whose lives it changes.

Not through violence. Not through collective humiliation. Not by making somebody else's child pay for an adult's conduct.

Through records, public scrutiny, peaceful organizing, tested reforms, and the stubborn insistence that another generation does not have to inherit the same avoidable harm.

I wanted to be a father.

I still do.

The public work is not a substitute for that relationship. It is a refusal to accept that the only thing left to give the next family is advice on how to endure the same machinery.

Let the inheritance be different.

Not a thicker file. A fair hearing.

Not a better-worded excuse. A childhood protected.

Not another generation taught to survive what adults could have had the courage to change.

Stand the fuck up.

For the child who needs protection. For the parent who needs a fair hearing. For the family whose savings should build a future. For the professional willing to correct the record. For the stranger whose dignity matters just as much as your own.

Not only for mine.

Not only for yours.

For Everyone.

When my son was born, I had earned a GED and taken a few college courses earlier in my twenties.

But the last full grade I had completed was the eighth.

I did not enter fatherhood with an impressive academic history. I entered it with a son.

I did not need a degree to love him. And my ability to protect that relationship should not have depended on learning an entire profession's language.

I have since come to understand that so much of what compels us is more complicated than we realize. We cannot always explain it to another person. Sometimes we cannot even explain it to ourselves.

For much of my life, I could not.

That is not an excuse for every word I have spoken or every decision I have made. It is an acknowledgment that understanding ourselves is work—and that becoming a parent does not mean we have finished it.

It means someone else now depends on our willingness to keep doing it.

Our children should not have to pay for what we refuse to learn.

There is a difference between struggling to express yourself and refusing to examine yourself. Between not yet having the words and deciding that nobody else deserves an explanation. Between making a mistake and recruiting everyone around you to defend it.

I know something about the first of those struggles.

My anger is directed at the refusal.

The refusal to listen. The refusal to learn. The refusal to acknowledge that a child's needs extend beyond an adult's preferred account of the conflict.

I have seen first-hand the harm I am describing: legal conflict prolonged, parental relationships damaged, and ordinary responsibilities displaced by arguments over who possesses the authority to decide.

I have seen why selfish parenting and predatory legal practice belong in the same examination.

A child can become the instrument of one adult's control and the source of another adult's income. Neither arrangement becomes respectable because the adults have explanations for it.

That is the primary call-out.

The parent who manipulates a child's love to settle an adult grievance. The grandparent who reinforces the division instead of helping the child remain free to love. The lawyer who recognizes an opportunity to prolong profitable conflict where the family needs a workable resolution.

Mother, father, grandparent, attorney—the title does not cleanse the conduct.

There is depravity in asking a child to carry your resentment. There is depravity in recognizing that burden and looking for another way to bill around it.

And there is nothing honorable about an institution that becomes more concerned with how respectfully the harm is described than with examining whether it is happening.

Children are not compensation for an adult's wounded pride. They are not proof that one household won. They are not a renewable source of leverage, loyalty, or legal fees.

They are people becoming themselves.

They deserve room to do that without being taught that loving one person requires betraying another.

They deserve adults who can say, "I was wrong," without immediately adding an accusation.

They deserve firm guidance without humiliation, responsibility without shame, and the confidence that comes from being expected to grow—not being told whom to hate.

None of that requires a perfect parent.

It requires an adult willing to learn.

I cannot change the education I had completed when my son was born. I cannot recover a year by explaining it more clearly now. I cannot put missed time back into his childhood by producing another document.

But I can refuse to make resignation the only thing this experience leaves behind.

I can keep learning. I can make my account answerable to its sources. I can insist that the same scrutiny applied to a parent also reach the professionals and institutions exercising power over that parent's family.

And I can ask that what we build next be easier for the next frightened, exhausted parent to understand.

Not because that parent will always be right.

Because being heard should not be a prize for already knowing how to survive the system.

The next parent may not have the words yet. That does not mean there is nothing worth hearing.

I wanted to be a father.

I still do.

Let that remain visible beneath every argument, every chapter, and every page of this record.

And let the next generation inherit something better than our ability to describe what hurt us.

Let them inherit adults who learned.

Institutions that corrected themselves.

Relationships protected before another year disappeared.

Stand the fuck up—not to make someone else small, but to stop asking children to carry what belongs to us.

For our children.

For their children.

For generations yet to come.

For Everyone.

RISE.