

# Study to investigate parent-child relationships and their possible consequences on, among other things, the life satisfaction and health of those affected: Alienated mothers

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Mia Meerbach, Françoise Mahmuti, Marthe-I. Ngongue, Svea Timmermanns, Paula Waffan, Pauline Wirth, Jorge Guerra González (Coordinator)  
October 2024

[Study on Parent-Child Relationships and Their Potential Effects on among others Life Satisfaction and Health of the persons concerned. Group: Alienated Fathers]

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October 2024

## **HUB e.V.**

Association for the acquisition of scientific knowledge  
towards child-oriented sustainability

No. 3

## **Publication series**

Child welfare and social sustainability  
ISSN 2944-8352



Study to investigate parent-child relationships and their possible consequences on, among other things, the life satisfaction and health of those affected: Alienated mothers

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### Summary:

Very little research has been conducted into parent-child estrangement in Germany to date, but a (new?) study from 2023 is investigating the effects of estrangement on children and parents from impacted families. The aim of the study is to visualise the consequences for affected parents, develop preventative measures and develop approaches to remedy the alienation and related impacts. One part of the study focusses on mothers who have experienced alienation from their children and examines their overall life satisfaction as well as their physical and mental health through questionnaires and interviews. Initial results show that these mothers perform worse than comparison groups in the areas mentioned, which is analysed within the detailed cross-group report. The anonymised interviews in the appendix offer insights into the processes of alienation, their causes and the emotional challenges faced by the mothers concerned.

**Keywords:** [child well-being, consequences of alienation, estranged mothers, life satisfaction, mental health]

### Zusammenfassung:

[Eltern-Kind-Entfremdung ist in Deutschland bisher wenig erforscht, doch eine Studie aus 2023 untersucht die Auswirkungen auf Kinder und Elternteile aus Trennungs- und Entfremdungsfamilien. Ziel der Studie ist es, die Folgen für betroffene Eltern sichtbar zu machen, Präventionsmaßnahmen zu entwickeln und Ansätze zur Behebung der Entfremdung zu erarbeiten. Ein Teil der Studie fokussiert sich auf Mütter, die Entfremdung von ihren Kindern erlebt haben, und untersucht deren Lebenszufriedenheit sowie physische und psychische Gesundheit durch Fragebögen und Interviews. Erste Ergebnisse zeigen, dass diese Mütter in den genannten Bereichen schlechter abschneiden als Vergleichsgruppen, was im gruppenübergreifenden Bericht vertieft wird. Die anonymisierten Interviews im Anhang bieten Einblicke in die Prozesse der Entfremdung, deren Ursachen und die emotionalen Herausforderungen der betroffenen Mütter].

**Key Words:** [Kindeswohl, Folgen von Entfremdung, entfremdete Mütter, Lebenszufriedenheit, psychische Gesundheit]

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## 1. Abstract

In Germany, parent-child estrangement is relatively unexplored. In 2023, a study was conducted to analyse the effects and consequences on children from families experiencing separation and estrangement. The aim of this study was to provide more information on estrangement of parents and their children as well as visualise the consequences, including effects on the parents concerned. In addition, the study hoped to provide approaches to remedy parent-child estrangement and generate preventive measures to prevent estrangement at an early stage.

This is one component of six in an overall study. In this part, the focus was placed on mothers who have experienced alienation from their children. This sub-study examined the life satisfaction, physical and mental health of the mothers using three questionnaires and a guided interview. It was hypothesised that the three areas mentioned (life satisfaction, mental and physical health) would be poor. The results were validated with comparison to the other groups (i.e., intact and separated parents). More detailed analysis of these results are in the cross-group report. The appendix contains the transcribed and anonymised interviews of the test subjects, which provide information about the process of alienation, attempts to explain the reasons for it and offers deep, emotional insights into the lives of the alienated mothers.

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### 3. List of acronyms

Acronym	Description
FSS	Family support system
IGE	Intergenerational Effect
MCA	Mother-child alienation
PA	Parent (-child)/Parental alienation (PA)
PAS	Parental Alienation Syndrome

## 4. Introduction and overview: Background to the project

This thesis deals with the topic of mothers who have been estranged from one or more of their children, which is of great importance in today's society but has not yet been sufficiently researched. A current example could be the Block case (NDR, 2024), which has received a great deal of media attention.

It is a phenomenon about which little to nothing is known, even though it has a significant impact on the lives of mothers and their children. The issue of alienation is complex and often misunderstood. This study examines the causes, multiple aspects and consequences of maternal alienation. It also discusses potential solutions.

This sub-study was conducted at Leuphana University in the winter semester 2023/2024. Its main objective is to provide a better understanding of the topic and identify possible support options for affected mothers and the FSS (Family support system) through a comprehensive literature review, the inclusion of personal experiences of mothers, interviews, discussions and expert opinions as well as qualitative and quantitative analyses. This work offers a scientific investigation and a contribution to raising awareness of a topic that often remains unknown and yet affects many people.

Another aim of this work is to make mothers affected by PA (parental alienation) visible. Although there are many studies, reports and similar works on separated parents, separated families or the effects of divorce on children, the topic of PA is rarely addressed. Those affected are often unaware that they are affected by alienation. It is difficult to get targeted help or to exchange ideas with other people affected, especially in the case of divorces without PA. We therefore want to make the situation of alienation visible and analyse the quality of life of alienated mothers.

The following chapters present the results of our project work. After an introduction to the topic and a description of our research approach, we analyse the results of our sub-study. Expert opinions are included. The causes of alienation are discussed, various forms and manifestations are examined and the psychological and emotional effects on the mothers are analysed. In chapter 5, the most important aspects are discussed in more detail and a conclusion is drawn.



## 5. Research interest, theoretical background and current discussion

Parent-child estrangement is a highly complex and sensitive issue that has both legal and psychological impact. Research interests in this area could focus on various aspects of parent-child estrangement including alienation causes and risk factors, impact on the affected children and parents, as well as tools for prevention and coping.

### 5.1 Origin and definition

The topic of "PA" has its origins in psychology and law. The American psychologist Richard A. Gardner researched this topic in the early 1980s and coined the term "Parental Alienation Syndrome" (PAS for short). The exact definition is explained in more detail in the following text.

In 1998, the psychologist Ursula Kodjoe and Dr Peter Koeppel published the first essay on the subject of PAS in Germany. The article entitled "The Parental Alienation Syndrome - PAS in official guardianship" describes both the psychological view and the legal categorisation of PA (Kodjoe & Koeppel, 1998).

The authors come to the conclusion that PA is not just a national phenomenon. It is a significant international issue that should be addressed in Germany, among other countries, in order to offer children good protection.

*PA refers to the process by which a child becomes emotionally distanced from a parent, often as a result of family conflicts, separation or divorce. This alienation can be caused by negative influence from the caring parent, e.g., through manipulation, indoctrination or a lack of support in the relationship between the child and the other parent (Lorandos, Bernet & Sauber, 2013, p. 5).*

### 5.2 Effects and affected parties

This alienation can have a serious impact on the child's relationship with both parents and on the child's emotional development.

Dr Guerra González (2023) has attempted to calculate a meaningful number of affected children. Ultimately, due to a lack of data, he does not arrive at a precise result. However, he makes the following statement: "What is certain is that the annual

incidence of estranged children would be a fraction of the sum of children of divorce and separation" (Guerra González, 2023, p. 16).

According to various sources, between 20,000 and 40,000 children lose contact with a parent every year. It is unclear how many of these children are "estranged" from one parent, as there is not enough meaningful data available. According to a study by the German Youth Institute, 17.5% of separated children in Germany no longer have any contact with the other parent. 25% have only infrequent contact (Noga, 2022).

Specifically, parent-child alienation does not refer to situations in which a parent's rejection has a legitimate cause, such as abuse, violence and/or neglect. Nor does it refer to cases in which a parent breaks off contact with the child of their own accord. Situations in which the child has never had a relationship with a parent or in which one parent interferes with contact but the child continues to have a positive relationship with the other parent are also not cases of parent-child alienation. However, the latter can also be the preliminary stage of this alienation (Lorandos, Bernet & Sauber, 2013).

Although PA is considered a threat to the child's welfare, it still receives too little attention in German case law. The term "child welfare" is not clearly defined in case law.

Dr Guerra González also deals with the best interests of the child and its legal significance. The most important aspects of his study are explained in more detail in the following chapters.

### 5.3 The relevance and topicality of the topic

Maternal alienation as a research topic is topical for several reasons. It is important to note that maternal alienation is a complex issue that encompasses many different factors.

The "Block" case could give the topic topicality and public attention. It could serve as a case study or reference point to explore the dynamics and impact of estranged mothers. It is important to explore the psychological impact of alienation on mothers. The research could help to develop better support systems and intervention strategies to help affected mothers and has so far been a marginal topic with little research and has not been sufficiently highlighted. New findings could help to close existing gaps in our understanding of family relationships and dynamics.

The construct between partnership and parenthood is of particular interest. This research examines the impact of parenthood within the relationship. It includes

questions on role allocation, communication patterns, conflict resolution and other aspects that could influence maternal alienation.

It is important to give visibility to estranged parents and to show that estrangement is real and common. Alienated children should not be used as a tool in the parents' conflict. The experiences of alienated children should encourage people to reflect on their own behaviour and on the alienation process. Society needs to be sensitised to the issue of parental alienation in order to understand the impact on affected families and respond appropriately. In order to make informed judgements and respond appropriately to these situations, professionals in the FSS, such as in family courts or youth welfare offices, should be aware of and educated about the issue of parental alienation.

Overall, this topic offers many opportunities for in-depth and up-to-date research on estranged mothers and the associated social, psychological and interpersonal dynamics.

#### 5.4 Current state of research

Based on scientific findings, separation research offers support and counselling measures for conflicts that arise during a separation process. Processing, reactions and consequences can be categorised and managed, especially for children affected by separation (Unger, 2010).

We carried out an online search to check the relevance of the topic. The results of a Google and Google Scholar search from 19 December 2023 provide interesting insights into the current state of research on PA.

This search shows that the topic PA returns fewer results compared to related topics.

<b>Search topic</b>	<b>Search results on Google.com</b>	<b>Search results on Scholar.google.com</b>
Effects of divorce on children:	543.000	53.500
Effects of PA on children:	313.000	123

Effects of divorce on parents:	8.580.000	48.700
Effects of PA on parents:	353.000	125
Divorce self-help group:	228.000	<i>No applicable articles</i>
PA self-help group:	9.670	<i>No applicable articles</i>

There is a clear difference between the search results for divorce and PA. For each search, there were significantly more search results for divorce than for PA. Although these are only numbers of search results for specific search queries on a specific day, we believe that the results show that people affected by PA are often overlooked and that there are not enough studies or reports (or support groups) on this topic.

Based on the analysis published by Prinz and Gresser (2015), the study examines the serious health effects that the loss of contact with a parent can have on children and whether these impairments persist in the long term . The analysis by the two scholars examines six scientific studies that deal with the trauma suffered by children who have lost contact with a parent. They also analysed whether there are longer-lasting health consequences for those affected. The analysis revealed that the loss of contact with biological parents can lead to significant health impairments in children that can last a lifetime (Prinz & Gresser, 2015).

The Otowa study summarises the results as follows: Loss of contact with birth parents increases the risk of developing severe depression, anxiety disorders, panic disorders, alcohol dependence, substance abuse, drug addiction and phobias. This applies regardless of the age of the child at the start and duration of the loss of contact. Loss of contact with living parents has a stronger influence than loss of contact due to death (Otowa et al., 2014).

Dr Guerra González conducted a study in 2023 with adult children from intact families, separated families and families with an estranged parent. The aim of the study was to compare the physical and mental health and life satisfaction of the test subjects. The study covered various topics, including conflicts, conflict behaviour at home and specific factors that can protect children from the negative effects of parental conflicts.

Attachment and contact with caregivers were also analysed. In addition, the extent to which the family model of the test subjects is influenced by an intergenerational effect was analysed as well as the reasons for this alienation suffered by the children affected. The results of the study show that adults who were estranged as children have significantly lower life satisfaction and poorer health - both mentally and physically - compared to adults from intact or separated homes. They also face greater challenges as adults. Gonzales also addresses the FSS, which had no relevant influence on the results, but was perceived as negative by the test subjects (Guerra González, 2023).

The report about the parents interviews indicated that it is not only children who suffer from alienation, but also the parents concerned who struggle with its effects. In her thesis entitled "Parental Alienation Syndrome: The loss of one's own child through separation and divorce", Katona examines "the course of the loss of contact with one's own child and the resulting effects on the affected parents", as the subtitle of her thesis describes. The results of her research project are diverse and confirm numerous generally accepted theories (Katona, 2007)

In her analysis, Rand found that completed separations or divorces are often characterised by a high level of hostility between the parents and are perceived as highly conflictual (Rand, 1997).

According to Cartwright, prolonged legal disputes, disagreements between ex-partners, suspended contact and irregular contact with the child increase the risk of contact breakdown. She analyses the relationship between the estranged parent and the child before, during and after the termination of contact. Change factors, perceptions and feelings of the respondents are analysed. The results show that alienation leads to serious psychological and health impairments. The affected parents have suffered a trauma that has long-term negative effects, such as post-traumatic stress disorder. Both authors call for doctors and medical professionals to take all possible measures to prevent contact between parents and children from breaking off. (Cartwright, 1993)

Katona emphasises the limitations of previous research on the topic of PA and suggests further studies to take a closer look at the effects and conditions under which it arises. This would help to close gaps in knowledge and provide support for separation processes. Dr. Guerra González emphasises the importance of the best interests of the child and proposes new approaches to dealing with conflicts. Both pieces of research should be seen as an appeal to professionals in the FSS, parents, politicians and researchers to ensure the welfare of a child.

To summarise, it is clear that the topic of PA has been investigated by several researchers. However, the lack of reliable statements from those affected makes it difficult to gain a complete insight into the situation. Nevertheless, it is clearly recognisable that all those involved are exposed to a high level of stress.

## 6. Presentation of the proposal

### 6.1 Research question and objective

The hypotheses for our research project can be derived from the relevance of the topic described in chapter two and the description of the research subject to date. This project report is intended to answer the question of what consequences mothers suffer as a result of estrangement and to what extent these influence their everyday lives. Therefore, the following hypotheses are analysed (in comparison to the mothers of the other two reference groups):

1. Mothers of estranged children have below-average life satisfaction / mental and physical health
2. Estranged mothers suffer more frequently than average from psychosomatic complaints and state this as a consequence of the estrangement process.
3. Mothers of estranged children are impaired in many essential areas of life.
4. An intergenerational effect can also be observed in the alienation process.

In general, the project aims to make estranged mothers visible. There are many studies and reports on separated parents, separated families or the effects of divorce on children. In contrast, PA is a phenomenon that is rarely discussed in society and has not yet been sufficiently investigated in a research context. As a result, parents are often unaware that they are in a classic situation of alienation. This alienation situation can be characterised by a changed bond with the parents and a typical process, which will be discussed in more detail in the course of the evaluation in chapter 5.5. One respondent describes, for example, that "for a very long time you don't know that it's about parent-child estrangement" (PG6-EM09, *Interview*, 15/11/2023, [0:29:53]). There is a lack of information about the effects of PA on parents. This makes it difficult to seek support and make use of professional help. This is because it is often difficult to share experiences with other affected people because, as already described in chapter two, this is a smaller group of affected people compared to parents affected by separation.

The analysis of various criteria in the following report is intended to quantify the drastic consequences of the alienation process in the lives of those affected and at the same time

enable a contextual understanding. The insights gained should serve as an impetus for all stakeholders who deal with the issue of child welfare and contribute to raising awareness. The research results can be used to initiate debates on general custody and contact decisions, the prevention of conflict escalation and contact breakdown in the parent-child context in politics and society. An overarching goal of this research project is to create a scientific basis on the basis of which conclusions can be drawn that can contribute to improving the family law system. The professional support of youth welfare offices, contact facilitators (Umgangspfleger) and mediators is to be further developed and adapted to the needs of estranged parents. Improved awareness of the needs and support of estranged mothers should be created in order to improve their quality of life and minimise psychological stress and physical effects. It would be desirable to modify the systems so that alienation cannot take place and the FSS has the legal basis to intervene early and stop an alienation process.

The research project therefore also aims to promote an emotionally stable society in which the psychological and physical effects of estrangement can be minimised or avoided. The focus of our project is on estranged mothers, but previous studies also show that children can suffer from this parental conflict (Guerra González, 2023). It can also be assumed that even the alienating parent is negatively affected by the impact of this conflict. This is because, as Kantona also explains in her study, the alienation process is a complex family dynamic in which all parties are involved in the process, which conversely can also mean that a different approach to this family conflict can have far-reaching positive consequences for everyone involved. A meta-analysis by Amato and Keith, for example, found that parental separation alone can be associated with negative effects on children's academic performance, psychological adaptability, self-esteem and social relationships (Amato & Keith 1991). It can be surmised that the influences of alienation experiences can have an even greater impact on all of these areas and thus promote an unstable emotional foundation in children.

For these reasons, it is desirable to promote the development of an emotionally stable society. Improved, alternative ways of dealing with alienation from the supportive actors in the FSS and a reformed legal basis can reduce family conflicts and thus minimise the psychological and physical effects on all family members involved.

## 6.2 Procedure & Methodology

The seminar group dealt with the hypotheses described above in the winter semester 2023/24. At the beginning of the semester, the entire seminar was divided into six groups, with two groups each investigating one type of family in relation to mothers and

fathers: Groups one and two related to intact families, groups three and four to parents who live apart and groups five and six to parents affected by alienation. This seminar group, as group six, is therefore part of a large study, with each group focussing individually on a specific group of people.

In order to answer the hypotheses on parent-child alienation, both quantitative and a qualitative studies were conducted. The lecturer provided a list of 23 suitable subjects (i.e., mothers affected by PA) for participation in the study PA. In order to be able to start the research, we began contacting all the test subjects either by email or telephone at the end of October and asked them to take part in our research project. If a mother agreed, an appointment was made for an interview and she was given a consent form and three questionnaires to complete. A total of 16 out of 23 potential test subjects agreed to participate.

### 6.2.1 The questionnaires

Before the interview, the test subjects first completed three different questionnaires, which were made available to them in an Excel spreadsheet.

The first questionnaire "German version of the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)" contains five general statements about life satisfaction. The response scale is broken down as follows: 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (somewhat disagree), 4 (partly/partly agree), 5 (somewhat agree), 6 (agree) and 7 (strongly agree) (Janke, S. & Glöckner-Rist, undated).

The second questionnaire "Psychosomatic complaints in a non-clinical context" contains 20 physical complaints that are to be rated by the respondents on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = never, 2 = every few months, 3 = every few weeks, 4 = every few days, 5 = almost daily). Depending on the extent to which these complaints are perceived, they can become stressors (stress factors) that impair the general quality of life. For the evaluation, the scale points are totalled and divided by the number of questions (20). A high score means that the level of psychosomatic complaints is high (Mohr & Müller, undated).

The last questionnaire, "Weiss Functional Impairment Rating Scale - Self-Report", or "WFIRS" is the most comprehensive. A total of 69 statements are divided into the following seven sub-items: A. Family, B. Work, C. School/ College/ University, D. Life Skills, E. Self-Concept, F. Social and G. Risk Behaviour. The scale has the following structure: 0= Never or not at all, 1= Sometimes or somewhat, 2= Often or frequently, 3= Very often or very frequently and ()= Not applicable. The respondents rate themselves. If



two characteristics in an area are rated 2 or one characteristic within an area is rated 3, this area is considered impaired, which is important later in our analysis (Weiss, 2014).

### 6.2.2 The interview guide

An interview was then conducted with each respondent. A total of three people from the group took on this task due to the increased time required. However, as everyone adhered to the interview guidelines, the interviews had a consistent structure and the same questions were asked, regardless of who was performing the interview. This facilitated the subsequent evaluation and the final comparability of the results. In addition, a scale of one to seven was provided as an answer option for many questions, with the interviewees being asked to decide on a number.

The interview guide begins with questions about the respondents themselves, followed by questions about their family of origin and their own parental home, for example "Did your parents stay together until you were an adult?". With the help of these questions, we primarily wanted to investigate what effects the experiences in the parental home had on their later family life. This was followed by questions about mental and physical health and whether psychological treatment had been sought. This was followed by further questions about the family of origin, for example about the conflict situation at home, and two questions about the respondents' carers. The respondents were also asked the estranged mothers in the study had ever had contact with the FSS, i.e., youth welfare offices, family courts, etc. during their childhood and, if so, whether they would recommend the professionals from the children's perspective.

All of these questions were aimed at finding out whether there is an intergenerational effect in the families and whether the mothers are medically predisposed to problems in their own families or even to alienation. Finally, and this is the largest part of the interview, questions are asked about the affected person's own biological family. It begins with the same questions that were previously asked in relation to the parental home, but now focussed on their own family. This is followed by another question about the FSS, this time from the perspective of a parent, and how satisfied they were with the professional help. Information was then collected on the assessment of the stress experienced by the mothers and their children. Questions were then asked about the actual separation, enquiring about the motives of the other parent, the duration of the process, its influences and consequences, the support received and whether the interviewees felt that reunification with the child was possible. Finally, the interviewees were asked how stressful the alienation was for those affected and whether the alienated

mother also experienced an alienation process with her own child. The length of the interviews varied between 32 minutes and 1.40 hours. A total of 14.45 hours of interview material is available.

### 6.2.3 Analysing the data

First, all interviews were transcribed in order to be able to analyse this amount of material. Furthermore, no one who conducted an interview also transcribed it in order to prevent falsification and to bring all group members up to the same level. The same system was also used for coding, which was carried out with the help of MAXQDA software. However, the code list provided first had to be adapted by the group in a deductive process, as the codes provided related to children from different family models and the situation of the parents could therefore not be analysed appropriately. As a result, important and interesting statements would have been overlooked. Due to the size of the seminar and the six different groups, most of whom worked individually, this process was unfortunately inflexible. It took a lot of consultation between the groups and ultimately a few people to take on board all the requests and adapt the code list accordingly. This task was ultimately taken on by this sub-group.

The code list is therefore structured as follows after the revision. It begins with the top category "Experiences in the parental home", which refers to the experiences in the respondents' parental home. Here there are codes for positive and negative experiences, with the latter also containing sub-codes for possible abuse such as neglect and domestic violence. This is followed by codes relating to conflicts in the parental home, relationships within the biological family and the role of the respondents' grandparents. Further superordinate categories are the intergenerational effect (IGE), cultural aspects, mental disorders, negative abnormalities, couple relationships with the other parent, parent-child relationship, experiences as a parent, PA, the FSS and the consequences of the family situation for the children as assessed by the respective respondents.

Once all the interviews had been coded in January, further analysis could begin. First, the evaluation of the respondents' questionnaires was entered into an Excel spreadsheet provided by the lecturer. This was a quantitative analysis within the group, as all answers to the three questionnaires from all respondents and the answers to the interview questions, which had a scale, were entered. We then began analysing our results for the DATAx seminar. This involved converting the results into diagrams using the Python programming language. This allowed the questionnaires to be evaluated and visualised

directly. A comparison was made between the values of the estranged mothers surveyed and the other participants in the seminar or the German "normal citizen".

The next step was to focus on systematically analysing all the results for our presentation during the conference week. All group members therefore discussed relevant and interesting aspects of the research in order to identify overlaps and prioritise the evaluation of the results. Work now began on two levels. Each group member focussed on one topic and wrote a summary presentation/document? for the conference week and provided detailed information for the project report. At the same time, presentation slides were created with the help of "google presentation", content by others were read for validation and revised if necessary.

The results were presented at another seminar. This once again generated important impressions that were subsequently taken into account in the project report.

## 7. results and reasoning

### 7.1 Introduction

The results of the study are analysed, presented and discussed below. The results are analysed and presented within the individual thematic subsections in order to establish a direct link between our research results and the scientific discourse.

Firstly, the evaluation of the three questionnaires is analysed. In order to analyse the first hypothesis, a statement from the first questionnaire, the German version of the "Satisfaction with life scale", will be compared with a European Commission survey on life satisfaction in Germany in order to show the average deviation of the estranged mothers studied in relation to the population as a whole. In addition, the second questionnaire will provide information on the psychosomatic complaints and mental health of the test subjects in order to be able to subsequently address the impaired areas of life that were determined using the White Rating Scale.

In order to make the abstract, quantitative results of the questionnaires more tangible, it was decided to use quotes from the interviews we conducted to show the extent to which quality of life, psychosomatic complaints and impairments actually manifest themselves in the lives of the estranged mothers and what significance they have. The results are structured thematically and overarching patterns that stand out from the individual interviews with the estranged mothers are discussed. Apart from the discussion of the intergenerational effect, the analysis of the interviews no longer relates to testing the hypotheses put forward. Nevertheless, relevant and interesting aspects that stood out

when analysing the interviews are highlighted. Furthermore, the individual aspects will focus on the group of estranged mothers we analysed and their relationship to another actor involved in the process.

Firstly, the general course of the alienation process is described and the various phases are outlined. In addition, the changing relationship between mother and child/ren and the consequences of this are analysed. Next, the relationship dynamics between the estranged mothers and their (ex-)partners are analysed in more detail. The causes, motives and reasons on the father's side are explained and the role of the mothers in the alienation process is described, as well as cultural aspects such as role allocation and the associated financial consequences. Subsequently, the perception of the FSS from the perspective of the estranged mothers is described and legal problems are listed. The experiences in the parental home of the test subjects are then presented in order to be able to deduce whether an intergenerational effect can be recognised. Finally, the mourning process of the analysed group is discussed and the parallels between the experience of death and alienation are addressed.

## 7.2 Life satisfaction of the test subjects

In this section, the life satisfaction of the estranged mothers surveyed will be analysed in order to determine whether the first hypothesis, that the respondents have below-average life satisfaction, is valid. No adequate definition of life satisfaction has been established in the scientific consensus. However, according to the Dorsch Dictionary of Psychology, it can be said that "life satisfaction is a person's self-assessment of their general life situation. Life satisfaction refers to a longer period of time and includes the evaluation of very different areas such as partnership, career, finances, health and so on" (Asendorpf, 2021). Consequently, the definition of life satisfaction refers to the personal assessment of one's own current living conditions as well as the possible future. Based on this idea, the life satisfaction of estranged mothers was analysed. Reference is made here to the first questionnaire "German version of the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)" and its third statement "I am satisfied with my life". The majority of respondents, 6 respondents, stated that they only partially agreed with the statement, 3 respondents ticked "strongly agree" and none of the respondents ticked the answer option "strongly agree".

In order to finally investigate whether estranged mothers have below-average life satisfaction, we compared a general German average on life satisfaction from autumn 2023 with a study by the European Commission in which a total of 1,572 people were surveyed. The question asked there was: "Overall, how satisfied are you with the life you

lead?" Overall, 65% of respondents said they were very satisfied and only 2% chose "not at all satisfied" as their answer (European Commission, 2023).

The average of the answers of the estranged mothers we surveyed is 3.938, between "rather not" and "partly/somewhat". The comparative average value of 6.1243 is adjusted to the scale of our questionnaire with the answer "applies" and is therefore significantly higher than the value of the estranged mothers surveyed.

Of course, our results cannot be regarded as universally valid, as only 16 of those affected were surveyed. Nevertheless, we are of the opinion that this data shows the below-average life satisfaction of estranged mothers compared to the German "normal citizen". This conclusion can also be substantiated with quotes from the interviews. According to one affected person, "it's not really a life anymore, it's just existing" (PG6-EM19, *interview*, 24/11/2023, [0:07:50]). This shows what a strong impact the alienation of a child can have for the affected mother. However, some of those affected have taken a different path and tried to find their way back to a good life despite the alienation.

*I exchanged ideas with other like-minded sufferers. And I just realised that this way of breaking up is not the right one for me. Because my life is very precious to me and, as I said, I also have a responsibility towards other people. (PG6-EM11, Interview, 01/12/2023, [0:46:12])*

They have therefore actively chosen to lead a fulfilling life despite the challenges. This conclusion shows that, despite alienation, it is possible to find personal growth and happiness by focussing on the positive aspects of life and taking responsibility for one's own well-being. However, it was also noted in the interviews that this path is difficult and that women need a very supportive environment to do so, whether that environment included friends, family, other affected persons or state institutions. In order to provide those affected with the greatest possible support, however, more social attention needs to be paid to MBD. Prejudices such as that a woman must be a bad person if her child no longer wants to see her should no longer exist. This phenomenon can be counteracted through more education, which may encourage those affected to seek support and try to find their way back to a happier life.

### 7.3 Mental health / psychosomatic complaints

The hypothesis "Mothers of estranged children suffer from psychosomatic complaints more frequently than average" is analysed in the second questionnaire. In the course of this, the results from questionnaire two are compared with the results of the group working with mothers from intact families. The 20 questions from the questionnaire deal

with psychosomatic complaints and cover various types of physical pain, fatigue, sleep disorders and other complaints. The response scale ranges from "1" (never) to "2" (every few months), "3" (every few weeks), "4" (every few days) and "5" (almost daily). In the analysis, all of the respondents' answers to each question are summarised in an average value so that this can be compared with the average value of mothers from intact families, which is calculated in the same way. It becomes clear how often test subjects from estrangement contexts exhibit a psychosomatic symptom in comparison to the frequency of the symptom in test subjects from intact families.

It is striking that each symptom occurs more frequently in mothers of estranged children than in mothers from intact families, although the values are sometimes closer together and sometimes far apart. For example, in question 15 ("Do you feel that your whole body is cramped?") - In estranged mothers, this symptom occurs almost every few days, while mothers from intact families experience it less than every few months. A counter-example would be question 19 ("Do you feel nauseous?"): The results are closer together, estranged mothers experience nausea every few weeks to every few months, mothers from intact families only every few months.

To summarise, each individual symptom occurs more frequently in mothers of estranged children, which confirms the initial hypothesis in relation to the questionnaires. This finding becomes even clearer when all the individual average values are summarised into one: The frequency of psychosomatic complaints of estranged mothers on the scale from 1 (never) to 5 (almost daily) is 3.2415 while the average value of mothers from intact families is 2.1242. This means that the psychosomatic complaints analysed occur approximately every few weeks in the former, while the latter are affected by psychosomatic complaints approximately every few months. However, it should be noted that more than a whole unit of the scale lies between the two average values, which shows that estranged mothers experience psychosomatic complaints significantly more frequently.

In general, and also according to the results from the questionnaires, it can be assumed that mothers of estranged children often struggle with psychological complaints, as estrangement can be an extremely stressful situation for all people involved. This can be explained as follows: PA is understood to be a process that involves the child/ren separating themselves from a parent. In concrete terms, this means that the familial relationship between parent and child changes, feelings of alienation arise and this ultimately leads to the connection/relationship being broken off. Alienation can have different causes and does not necessarily have to do with violence, abuse or similar.

Consciously or unconsciously, the caring parent often contributes to the alienation, which often leads to conflict situations. In most cases, the entire process means loss and a great deal of pain for the alienated parent. One respondent expressed it as follows: "So [the] relationship [with my child] itself I don't think is broken. So feelings, but. [...] But on the other hand, the child is gone, as if it had died. You can compare that to grief. [...] Permanently." (PG6-EM06, *Interview*, 17/11/2023, [0:56:53]) It is striking that 10 out of 16 mothers compare this experience with the death of their child. More on this can be read under 5.9 and shows how great the suffering of mothers of estranged children can be.

It emerged from the interviews that the test subjects mostly perceived the alienation as very stressful and many have suffered from mental illness since then. One respondent described the alienation as "inhuman, degrading and absolutely unnatural [...] the most unnatural thing in the world." (PG6-EM17, *Interview*, 13/11/2023, [0:49:43.9]) The majority of the mothers interviewed have received psychological or psychiatric treatment since or after the estrangement. It is also evident that various mental illnesses occur as a result of or under the influence of the estrangement: The test subjects report adjustment disorders, panic attacks, post-traumatic stress disorder and depression, among other things. Katona was able to record similar results in her thesis:

*Parents who lose contact with their child or children for months, years or even completely after a separation or divorce often experience a severe psychological, psychosomatic and often suicidal crisis. The loss of contact, the breakdown of the relationship, can represent an existential trauma for the parents. (Katona, 2017, p.9)*

As the experiences shared in the interviews are individual, the psychological stress and extent of these are also individual - nevertheless, it can be said that the interviews revealed a strikingly high frequency of psychological complaints and thus confirm the hypothesis that mothers of estranged children struggle with psychological problems more frequently than average - whether in comparison with mothers from intact families or the rest of the German population. This can also be explained by the fact that MCA is usually not only associated with the mothers losing their participation in the life of the child/children in the form of a process; there are usually also psychologically stressful conflicts for the mothers in advance, and it is often possible to speak of manipulation - even emotional violence - on the part of the fathers. In some cases, the ultimate aim is not just to maintain contact with the child, but to win against the other parent via the court or the authorities. This situation is highly charged and means enormous psychological pressure for everyone involved. As this project deals with estranged

mothers, only the side of the "losers" of the processes is presented, who therefore not only have to endure the pressure of the conflicts, but also the judgements that are negative for them, including the costs.

From this it can be concluded that the experience of MCA is in most cases psychologically painful for the mother and is often associated with psychosomatic complaints, feelings of grief and feelings of loss. This could mean that mothers who experience estrangement do not receive sufficient support and that awareness of this painful experience should be raised in order to limit pain preventively and to be able to initiate appropriate supportive measures in the event of mental illness. As in the previous chapter, those affected should be encouraged to seek help.

#### 7.4 Life impairments as a probable consequence of alienation

The third questionnaire "Weiss assessment scale for functional impairment - self-report" is analysed below. This questionnaire can be used to determine which of the seven areas of life surveyed are considered to be impaired in a respondent. This is the case if two characteristics are rated as two or one characteristic within an area is rated as three.

Overall, the area of "life satisfaction" is most frequently impaired in 13 out of 16 test subjects. This is followed by the areas of family and self-concept. The areas of social life and work were impaired in six respondents, followed by university and risk factors, where impairments were found in two respondents each. However, it must be mentioned here that the area of "school / college / university" only applies to a quarter of the test subjects. Accordingly, it can be seen that there is a clear impairment in the area of life satisfaction and family among the respondents, which can be linked to the serious loss of a child. Another burden that should not be neglected is the changed financial situation in which those affected have to live. The former spouse may no longer be the main breadwinner, a new home may have to be found and although there is little or no contact with the child, maintenance may still have to be paid. One affected person describes the situation as follows:

And [I] am actually only there to earn the children's living, which is very difficult. Unfortunately, I'm in a very bad financial situation. You can't live self-sufficiently.  
(PG6-EM09, *Interview*, 15/11/2023, [0:33:16])

In addition, even finding a new flat can be a challenge. Especially if you "have a child, are a single parent [...]. Of course, every landlord screams hurray. That was really tough. So



we looked at, I think, 22 flats, 21 of which I had no chance to get " (PG6-EM11, *Interview*, 01.12.2023, [0:32:23]). This quote reflects the structural barriers and prejudices faced by single parents or mothers affected by alienation and emphasises the need to take action to improve their housing situation and offer them fair opportunities.

In addition to a ranking of the impaired areas of life, it is also possible to analyse how many areas of life are impaired for each respondent. It is interesting to note that no generalisation can be made here. Although the average is 2.94 areas of life, the figures vary between zero and six for the individual respondents. This also shows that PA affects each family individually and that those affected, in this case the mothers, therefore experience different consequences. Nevertheless, it can be said that five to six areas of life are affected in around a third of the test subjects surveyed. If one compares the two test subjects with six impaired areas of life (PG6-EM09, PG6-EM11) with the seven test subjects with zero to a maximum of two impaired areas of life, no general factor can be recognised that distinguishes those affected. They all state that they have a similar socio-economic status, there is also no major difference in mental and physical health, and it is also not possible to generalise with regard to a new steady relationship of the test subjects or contact with their caregivers. The only noticeable difference is that respondents 09 and 11 have a rather low level of school qualification. Overall, it can be concluded from this that, to our knowledge, no general external factor is causing the impairment of the areas of life, but that this is most likely due to the PA and its consequences.

To summarise, it is clear that PA can have a very negative impact on the lives of the affected mothers, who feel the consequences of parent-child alienation in their everyday lives and suffer as a result. This is because the loss of parents and child living together and the irregular to non-existent contact lead to a loss of parental identity, self-esteem and self-respect. When a mother loses her child, she also loses the basis of her self-image as a caring and loving parent, which leads to a shattering of her self-concept. This can lead to an identity crisis and have a significant impact on health and psychological well-being. Overall, those affected are exposed to considerable stress due to the loss of their own child, as one respondent also describes. Because "living against my own values in this way, I find that extremely damaging or stressful" (PG6-EM19, *interview*, 24/11/2023, [1:01:58]).

## 7.5 Process of alienation & parent-child relationship

The following section looks at the course of the alienation process by analysing the development of the relationship between the mother and the child/children. Firstly, it is important to emphasise that we are only talking about the mothers' perspectives here and therefore we cannot be sure to what extent the mothers' statements correspond to the objective truth.

The development of the relationship was similar for the majority of mothers, so that an overarching pattern can be identified. This usually began with them taking on the majority of the care work, meaning that they spent more time looking after the children and doing housework. During the process, as the conflicts became increasingly visible, the mother's relationship with the child began to deteriorate. The children began to distance themselves. According to the mothers, this distancing was caused by the fathers. Fathers who tried to get the children on their side as quickly as possible through manipulation and "materialistic bribery" (PG6-EM10, *Interview*, 22/11/2023, [01:20:01]) and thus integrate them into the conflict.

And during the separation, he actually told the children that mum was separating and mum was leaving. So I couldn't discuss anything with my children, he practically beat me to it and clarified what was going to happen. (PG6-EM03, *Interview*, 13.11.23, [00:56:05])

For the clear majority of mothers, the fathers were clearly responsible for the alienation from their children. Be it through manipulation, lies, stronger monitoring or refusal to allow the child to come close to the mothers. They constantly interfered in the relationship with the mother and wanted to indirectly determine how, whether and how much time the mother was allowed to spend with her children.

*He bribed materialistically, he told lies, he staged scenes, all in front of the children. He looked for coalition partners behind my back, from the league of friends and relatives. He lied to the youth welfare office, he didn't keep appointments. He replaced our dog because I took it with me when we moved out. (PG6-EM10, interview, 22/11/2013 [01:20:01])*

After the mother moved out, the environment of the fathers, their support networks and families also favoured the alienation process. This not only makes it more difficult for the mothers to get access to their children, but also to make the decision to move out of the family home with the children. After all, they had a familiar environment here and would receive good support even if the mother was absent.

*But I didn't want to rip a child out of its environment just because the parents were separating. I actually decided in favour of the child. And I also thought that if I did that now, it would probably make the situation much, much worse... (PG6-EM03, Interview, 13/11/2023, [00:56:05])*

However, it was not only the fathers' support networks that had a strong influence on the alienation, but also the new romantic relationships. The new partners tried to take the child/children away from the biological mother, for example by going on outings together, which the mother knew nothing about. Their aim was to have the children completely to themselves. In one interview, one respondent also stated that "... so if this woman didn't exist in his life, the children would probably still be living with me." (PG6-EM04, Interview, 06.12.23 [00:19:51])

Finally, the youth welfare office also played a decisive role in the alienation. They usually did not focus on working through the conflict situations with the child during the separation process in order to provide better support, but rather took the current situation as it was and tried to develop solutions from it. In most cases, they therefore focussed on distancing the child as far as possible from any supposed conflict situations in order to protect their mental health as much as possible. This method ultimately led to the mother, who had already left home, having little or no contact with her children. The fear of alienating the child from the mother was ignored. One mother reported:

*And ... I also said again in a moderated parent-teacher conference, what's the deal with parent-child alienation anyway? And then I was no longer allowed to mention it. So I was also forbidden to use the term. So they simply said it didn't exist and that was that and it didn't matter what happened before or what happened with the children two years ago when they separated. It's now about the here and now and we have to work with the resources that are available to us today and then it wouldn't matter. (PG6-EM19, Interview, 24/11/2023, [00:39:11])*

The method used by the youth welfare office meant that the mothers were no longer able to visit their children, contact was cut off completely for a longer period of time or they were not allowed to attend the child's therapy sessions. This led to great insecurity on the part of the mother and created a distance between the two of them.

*... must be very sensitive, and if the youth welfare office ... after a separation ... says that the child needs to calm down. Or calm must be restored. And because that's when parent-child alienation often begins in our case ... because it's very stressful when you're not allowed to see your children as a mother, you're not supposed to, however you want to, and you're so insecure and manipulated. (PG6-EM09, item 130; interview, 25/11/2013 [00:29:53])*

To summarise, there were various factors that played a role in the MCA processes. One major factor is the role and behaviour of the father, which is characterised by manipulation, defamation and controlling behaviour over the child and its contact with the mother. Another factor is the father's environment, which supports him and thus promotes alienation. In addition, the youth welfare office can also be attributed a significant role in this process, as it attempts to stabilise the child's situation by avoiding conflict and therefore induces reduced contact between mother and child in order to prevent the parents from meeting and the conflict from escalating.

## 7.6 Influence of social gender roles on mother-child alienation

The following section examines the extent to which social role models and the associated expectations of men and women may have influenced the MCA of the test subjects. In particular, questions 25, 33, 35 and 37 of the interview guide are used for this purpose. These questions ask for information about the respondents' own biological family, the relationship with the ex-husband before the separation, the separation process and the ex-husband's reasons for the estrangement. In addition, marginal information from the entire interview is included to gain knowledge. Firstly, this analysis looks at the classic division of roles in the couples' everyday lives and then social expectations of men are linked to the women's experience of separation.

### 7.6.1 Influence of traditional roles on mother-child alienation

Greenglass describes the classic distribution of gender roles as follows:

The prevailing image of the family in the social sciences assumed that the man had an instrumental role - that of breadwinner and protector, while the woman had to remain at home in the role of housewife and emotional foundation. (Greenglass, 1982, p. 151)

The division of roles in the former couples' everyday lives was not explicitly mentioned in the interview guide, but nine women nevertheless spoke of a classic division of roles. Of these, six women expressed dissatisfaction, two of them even cited it as a reason for separation, only one woman expressed satisfaction. Financial aspects are associated with the traditional division of roles. Greenglass explains that as the "breadwinner and protector", the man earns the money for the family and therefore has more financial resources than the woman. In the traditional division of roles, the woman is dependent on her husband and has little to no financial means or even professional experience (ibid.). The dynamics described by Greenglass and their consequences are confirmed in

our interviews. One woman, for example, talks about not being able to protect her children from the father during the separation due to a lack of financial resources.

*And anyone with any common sense would have said: 'For God's sake, take the children with you! The only problem is, I didn't even have my own flat, I didn't know where to go! (PG6-EM10, Interview, 22/11/2023, [0:29:01])*

Two women mentioned that they were already financially independent from their husbands before the separation. Three women, on the other hand, said that they had to start a full-time job after the separation without having worked beforehand. Two women talked about the financial burden of paying maintenance to their husbands and one woman was paying off a failed contact procedure at the time of the interview.

*[I'm actually only there to earn a living for the children, which is very difficult. So I'm doing very badly financially, unfortunately. (PG6-EM09, Interview, 15/11/2023, [0:33:16])*

Three women criticise material bribery by the husband towards the child/children. This led to the child/children being influenced by the father's high financial resources during the loyalty conflict between the mother and father.

To summarise, six women felt a financial burden as a result of the separation without being explicitly asked. A lack of time due to the mother's full-time job could have been negatively received by the child/children. Three men, on the other hand, were able to use material things to further the estrangement. The cause of the problems could lie in the fact that life was lived as a couple according to the traditional division of roles in earlier everyday life. Six women described their everyday life as a couple as unsatisfactory.

### 7.6.2 Influence of social expectations of a man on a woman's experience of separation

In the following, the extent to which the women's experience of separation can be linked to society's expectations of a man is analysed. The analysis revealed the following results regarding the separation: Almost all estranged mothers, 15 women to be exact, initiated the separation. It is not clear from one interview who initiated the separation. 14 women stated that there were serious conflicts with their ex-husband, two women spoke of physical violence and seven women of psychological violence. Six women used the word "liberation" in direct connection with the separation. The separation process, on the other hand, was extremely stressful. Nine women categorised the separation process as the most stressful.

So the separation from my ex-husband was really a liberation for me, I have to say that quite clearly, I was very happy to have got away from him and I realised relatively soon that I was simply much better off. But the absolute catastrophe was what happened to our child. (PG6-EM12, *Interview*, 24/11/2023, [0:21:35])

As a result of the separation process, eight women spoke of an "attempt at mediation" through meditation, family counselling or similar. Six women emphasised the husband's unwillingness to cooperate.

15 men exercised strong power over the child/children through manipulation and thus caused alienation. One woman spoke of strong influence exerted by the ex-husband's new partner. According to the women, the men's motives included revenge (11 times), offence due to separation (6 times), fear of losing the children (3 times), financial benefits (3 times), the goal of getting back together with the woman (2 times). The last motive was that the man would not grant the woman her happy life between separation and estrangement (2 times).

He then very quickly started to fight nastily for the children, demonstrating that he was in charge, that he had the money and that he had the means. Yes. So a lot of psychological violence. (PG6-EM17, *Interview*, 13/11/2023, [0:27:45])

To summarise, almost all women initiated the initially "liberating" separation. The most frequently cited reason was psychological abuse by the ex-husband. Most men were not prepared to attempt mediation during the separation process. The separation process itself was predominantly categorised as highly stressful. The estrangement was perceived by most women as an act of revenge through offence.

Greenglass summarises Kagan's findings on socially masculine roles: "Men ... should be physically and sexually assertive, independent, competent and emotionally robust." (Greenglass, 1982, p. 23)

The way our society lives out these expectations of men can be linked to the behaviour of the abandoned men. The living out of the expectation for men to "physically and sexually assert themselves" (ibid.) could already be recognised in the psychological and physical abuse before the separation, which nine women testified to. Being left by a woman under the expectation of the man's superiority could be interpreted as an "affront to male honour". This perception was confirmed by six women. The men's unwillingness to co-operate in attempts at mediation could confirm the men's offence.

I was the one who broke up, in fact I was already far away from the „relationship mode“. And my ex-partner was in all his pain, in all his pain, just in the other one.

We were, we were as far apart as we could possibly be. (PG6-EM10, *interview*, 22/11/2023, [0:36:44])

Greenglass confirms that certain stereotypical gender roles can be observed in men. These include aggressiveness, manipulation, dominance and leadership. (Greenglass, 1982, pp. 27-30) She also emphasises Machiavellianism - an "attitude that views other people as objects that can be manipulated in the pursuit of one's own goals, depending on the situation." (ibid., p. 30) These findings could explain the behaviour of our test subjects' ex-partners following the separation. The extremely stressful separation process of the women and the alienation of the children go hand in hand with the confirmed stereotypical male behaviour. Machiavellianism in particular applies to the manipulation of the children. They are manipulated like objects by the father in order, as the test subjects perceive it, to take revenge on their ex-wife in order to achieve their goal.

To summarise, classic role models largely support the alienation of our female test subjects. In our cases, concrete actions by the man can be justified by social expectations of the role of the man.

## 7.7 Perception of the family support system

In the interviews we conducted, the majority of all respondents said no to the question (question 32 interview) as to whether they would use the help of professionals again. All 16 respondents who were interviewed felt legally disadvantaged and said that their situation was not adequately taken into account. According to their reports, there is a deeper problem that calls into question the effectiveness of the system, in particular the critical perception of the courts and youth welfare offices and the recommendation not to bring children to court in order to burden them. (PG6-EM 21, *Interview*, 21/11/2023, [0:29:32]) "*The courts and youth welfare offices in particular are really disastrous. So you can't say anything else about it*" (PG6-EM12, *interview*, 24/11/2023, [0:18:27]), "*Courts no, youth welfare office no*" (PG6-EM15, *interview*, 24/11/2023, [0:22:58]). In view of the emotional strain that a legal dispute between the parents can cause the children, the question is often raised as to whether children should be taken to court at all. This view is initially made clear by the respondents' statements. "*No, I would generally advise against children being dragged to court at all, let alone having to choose between their parents.*" (PG6-EM21, *Interview*, 21/11/2023, [0:20:32]) Another respondent expressed the following opinion:

*Well, that was rather counterproductive, I was very stigmatised. The father's narrative was believed and the whole argument was built on that. Without even looking objectively and factually. Exactly, and apart from the last conversation, I never heard anything from the youth welfare office staff again. Yes, I didn't receive any support there (PG6-EM17, interview, 13/11/2023, [0:41:20]).*

The quotes make it clear that all of the test subjects we interviewed consider the FSS to be inadequate and unhelpful; on the contrary, it is even traumatising (PG6-EM06, Interview, 17.11.2023, [0:20:41]). However, the test subjects point out that the implementation of and compliance with the laws are inadequate in practice. According to the respondents, due to the lack of legal consequences: "Yes, that was already a case for the public prosecutor's office, as he didn't comply with his obligations" (PG6-EM06, Interview, 17/11/2023, [0:37:52]). The following quote emphasises the frustration that arises when contact arrangements are repeatedly not adhered to. It shows how non-compliance with agreements by the other parent can lead to tensions and problems. "Yes, because it was always things like we had several contact arrangements and he [the father] didn't honour them all" (PG6-EM06, interview, 17.11.23, [0:22:31]). According to the respondents, the children were manipulated by the other parent (PG6-EM03, Interview, 13/11/2023, [0:34:07]).

To summarise, the respondents' statements illustrate their perception that there are profound problems and deficits in the family support system. According to their reports, there is a need for improvements, both in the legal implementation as well as in the support and care of the families concerned. They suggest that measures to raise awareness, provide training and revise existing processes will help to improve the situation and meet the needs of all those involved. (PG6-EM03, Interview, 13/11/2023, [0:48:04]; PG6-EM02, Interview, 17/11/2023, [0:13:39]; PG6-EM07, Interview, 08/11/2023, [0:19:57])

## 7.8 Intergenerational effect and experiences at home

Children's lives are strongly influenced by their parents. This is why the core statement of the widespread saying 'The apple doesn't fall far from the tree' can often be recognised in family behaviour patterns. The intergenerational effect, also known in scientific discourse as intergenerational transmission, describes the passing on of characteristics and behavioural patterns from parents to their children as the product of a complex interplay between environmental experiences and genetic predisposition (Boehnke & Boehnke, 2023).



Like other psychological traumas, PA can be passed on to the next generation, consciously or unconsciously. This phenomenon was observed during the interviews. In the interviews, six out of sixteen respondents confirmed this statement (PG6-EM03, PG6-EM06, PG6-EM09, PG6-EM10, PG6-EM19, PG6-EM21, PG6-EM10). Three out of sixteen test subjects come from families with separated parents and thirteen out of sixteen test subjects come from intact families. The respondents' assessments of the socio-economic status of their parental home were slightly above average.

On a scale of one to seven, respondents rated the socio-economic status of their parental home at an average of around 4.5, which is slightly above average. It is worth noting that socioeconomic status is slightly above average, however our sample is so small that we cannot draw any further conclusions from this fact. Socioeconomic background could be a potential influencing factor on the variable analysed. Future research could focus on how this aspect influences the behaviour, attitudes and decision-making of individuals. This will allow relevant hypotheses to be developed and social inequalities to be highlighted.

Three of the sixteen test subjects come from separated families, while twelve come from intact families. One respondent's statement is unclear. This suggests that the alienation trauma was passed on by both parents. Even if the interviews as a method do not allow any causal conclusions to be drawn, this assumption can be supported by the statements made by the test subjects in the interviews. Respondent 6 says:

*I also think that he sees me as a bit of a mother figure. My ex-husband was estranged himself, so that's what I lacked before, this knowledge about it. I didn't know it, I didn't know it from my family. And he told me that, and I rather thought that he always assured me that he would never do something like that because he knows how bad it is. He was removed by his mum, yes. And I think he just repeats this pattern. (PG6-EM06, Interview, 17/11/2023, [0:27:22])*

In the interviews, the estranged mothers assume that the alienation trauma was passed on by the fathers. (PG6-EM06, interview, 17/11/2023, [0:27:22]; PG6-EM09, interview, 15/11/2023, [0:36:31]; PG6-EM10, interview, 22/11/2023 [0:36:44])

Among other things, it is not only the alienation trauma that is directly inherited from the parents as an intergenerational effect. Other behavioural patterns, such as the ability to control their emotions, aggressiveness, the ability to cope with conflict situations and parentification. (PG6-EM06, Interview, 17/11/2023, [0:27:22]; PG6-EM21, Interview,

21/11/2023, [0:08:58];mPG6-EM13, *Interview*, 27/11/2023, [0:25:49]). Parentification is when the child takes on the role of a parent (Ellmer, 2020).

These results show that the trauma itself and associated behaviours and experiences can be passed on within the family. The research suggests that the transmission of alienation trauma and other behavioural patterns is a complex process that involves not only direct but also indirect routes of transmission.

## 7.9 Feelings of grief and loss as a result of alienation

When analysing the interviews, it was noticeable that in ten of the sixteen interviews, the mothers compared or associated their experience of estrangement with the death of their child/children. Therefore, the feelings of grief and loss in this context are addressed below and the consequences for the mother's identity are presented.

One mother said the following about her relationship with her child in one of the interviews: *"Well, I don't think the relationship itself is broken. So feelings, but ... But on the other hand, the child is gone, as if it had died. You can compare that to grief. ... Permanently."* (PG6-EM06, *interview*, 17/11/2023, [0:56:53.1]). Another respondent describes how she became aware of this topic in a conversation with a friend:

*So I'm amazed that the mother, a friend of mine, said to me: 'At least we can come to terms with it, but what you're experiencing is even worse'. And this statement, that people who have lost their child say to me that or that they imagine that or that it's worse than losing a child through death. I had to think about that for a week.* (PG6-EM10, *Interview*, 22/11/2023, [0:25:00])

The thesis that an experience of alienation is more stressful than death is also mentioned directly by the test subjects themselves. For example, respondent 19 explained, "[I]I have to say, I really have to say, it's more stressful than death. Because it just doesn't stop. It doesn't stop, it has no end." (PG6-EM19, *interview*, 24/11/2023, [1:01:58]).

The mothers' feelings of grief are caused by experiences that have parallels to the experiences that parents go through when a child dies. For example, one mother explains that

*... Sometimes it feels as if the child has died. So you have a child's room that's covered in dust and clothes in the wardrobe that no longer fit and cuddly toys that are still here and you just try to deal with this situation every day* (PG6-EM11, *Interview*, 01/12/2023, [0:38:23]).

Furthermore, the respondents described that in addition to the loss of their child/children and the resulting feelings of grief, pain and powerlessness, they also had

to come to terms with the loss of their role as a mother: "Well, because it's my only child and from one day to the next I was no longer allowed to be a mum. So everything I did for my child for over 10 years was taken away from me." (PG6-EM11, interview, 01/12/2023, [0:38:23]). Another mother explains that she had problems giving up the deep bond with her child, which she particularly attributes to the biological process of breastfeeding. She herself says the following:

*I love my children and I want to be there for them. And it wasn't my decision to have no contact with them and. Actually, living against my own values every day, I find that extremely damaging or stressful. (PG6-EM19, Interview, 24/11/2023, [1:01:58])*

These statements can be supported by Bowlby's attachment theory, which describes the bond between mother and child as central. Breastfeeding in particular shows how the mother's empathic reaction to fulfil the infant's needs can strengthen the bond (Grossmann & Grossmann, 2003). The strong desire of mothers to care for their children can also be justified from an evolutionary biology perspective (Ahnert, 2022, p.28). Nevertheless, this does not mean that the paternal bond contributes to a lesser extent to the child's development. The feelings of grief similar to death and the loss described by the test subjects can be explained by the sudden loss of the mother's role. Women in particular, characterised by social norms, strongly reduce their identity to their role as a parent. Despite the change in values that is taking place, women, for example, focus more often on their role as carers than men, as can be seen, for example, in the unequal distribution of applications for parental leave. Although there is a slightly positive trend, as more and more men in Germany are applying for parental leave, this is still a long way from an equal distribution. Data from the Federal Statistical Office shows that the proportion of male parental allowance recipients out of all parental allowance recipients was 26.1% in 2022. Furthermore, the difference in the perception of parental roles becomes clearer when comparing the length of parental leave. Women applied for an average of 14.6 months of parental leave in 2022, while men only applied for an average of 3.6 months. (Suhr, F., 2023).

To summarise, the experience of losing one or more children is rated by mothers as more serious than the experience of death. The uncertainty and hope that they might still be able to make contact with the child/children means that they are psychologically unable to come to terms with the estrangement. This is also reinforced by the forced loss of their mother identity.

## 8. conclusion

### 8.1 Conclusion

Throughout this project, the question of how much parents, in this case mothers, are burdened by alienation was investigated. Various areas were analysed. When looking at life satisfaction, it can be seen that estranged mothers have significantly below-average life satisfaction - this was evident in comparison to the rest of the German population (see 5.1). Similar results can be seen with regard to psychosomatic complaints: Compared with mothers from intact families, every symptom occurs more frequently in estranged mothers, which implies that mothers of estranged children suffer from psychosomatic complaints more frequently than average (see 5.2). With regard to the last questionnaire, which deals with impairments, it becomes clear that the respondents have impairments in many important areas of life, such as "life satisfaction" and "family" (see 5.3). To summarise the quantitative data collection, the research question can be answered as follows: PA can have a very strong impact on the lives of the affected mothers and leads to them feeling the consequences of PA in their everyday lives and suffering as a result.

All the hypotheses put forward at the beginning can therefore be confirmed. In addition, the intergenerational effect assumed at the beginning can be observed: Mothers of estranged children often describe a lack of and/or stressful handling of conflicts in their own parental home or that of their partner.

In order to answer the research question conclusively, it can be stated that mothers who experience alienation are significantly burdened by it and usually feel this painfully in several areas of their lives.

To also make a reference to Cartwright, who said that parents affected by alienation would suffer from trauma with long-term negative consequences, including post-traumatic stress disorder (Kantona, 2017, p.34), it should be noted that some respondents speak of having been diagnosed with PTSD and 12 out of 16 are/were in psychological and/or psychiatric treatment.

To summarise, all the research objectives of this project were achieved and it can be confirmed that the estranged mothers are generally worse off than the other participants in the seminar. The question also arises as to how representative the results of the project are: Although only 16 test subjects are presented in the project, the results are consistent with the results of the other groups, as well as with well-supported research, the test subjects come from different socio-economic, family, inner-German geographical

situations, and are of different ages. This meant that many different perspectives could be included in the research. The merging of the qualitative and quantitative analyses is also coherent. Nevertheless, it would be essential to continue research in this area and to use similar methods with more respondents in order to obtain more representative results and to be able to make generalisations, which was not possible in this partial study.

The results of this research can subsequently be useful in various ways: As there are only a few studies on the topic of PA outside the overarching study of this project, it can serve as a basis for future research and help to draw more social attention to the topic and raise awareness in general. The importance of this was demonstrated time and again within our project, for example by the fact that those affected reported that they had not known for a long time that they were affected by PA or by the fact that the existence of PA is being discussed. This project shows that this is a real problem in our society. However, education is not only important for those affected, but should also urgently take place in the FSS, for which this project provides a suitable basis.

This project is therefore not only part of an important addition to the previous overarching study, but also offers the opportunity to generate more social attention through publication and could even be helpful in legal consultations or mediations, for example to categorise the consequences of alienation for the children and parents. In addition, the project could serve as evidence in court and help, for example, to recognise manipulation and legally limit the effects of this to a minimum.

It should be noted at this point that the interviews were conducted exclusively with mothers of estranged children. As a result, only these versions are presented - which sets a clear focus, but should be critically considered when working with the results of the project. It is also important to bear in mind that subjective perceptions were often included in the research process. The question must be asked as to how we can also reach those who are not prepared to talk about their experience of alienation, those who find it too painful to talk about it, those who do not dare to speak and those who do not even know that they are affected by alienation.

Ultimately, concrete demands can be formulated that relate to three areas. Firstly, the demands on the system: FSS PA In order to provide the best possible support for the children and parents involved in the conflict and to be able to recognise manipulation and emotional abuse, the FSS must be reformed in order to prevent PA and to take reactive action against it. In this context, as already indicated, there is also a general call for more education on the topic in the FSS. It should be clarified whether children have to make such decisions in court; how manipulation can be recognised and prevented;

what measures should be taken to effectively counter the PA phenomenon in order to protect children's welfare.

Secondly the FSS would be improved by to introducing feedback from clients.

Thirdly, the FSS should be focussed on cooperation rather than confrontation; an approach on equal footing and mediation skills are required.

Fourthly, greater social awareness of the PA phenomenon is essential, coupled with an end to any tolerance towards it - in the best interest of the child.

To summarise the demands: More awareness of psychological abuse caused by parent-child alienation must be created through scientific studies, media attention and social discourse so that those affected can act early and the environment and professional decision-makers are sensitised to these cases.

But until then, society must look after the welfare of the children and (in this case) mothers impacted by PA. They should be supported. Since their suffering is artificially induced and therefore unnecessary and avoidable, and points to a system failure, it would be best if it did not have to materialise.

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## 10. appendix

### About the interviews:

The interviews were anonymised with regard to the personal data of the test subjects. The years of the events were changed. In addition, the pronouns of the child were neutralised (it/the child/my child) for protection.

#### 10.1 Transcript anonymised Respondent 02 - Estranged mothers

##### Greeting

**Interviewer:** There will be a few questions at the beginning. Generally about yourself and generally there are often questions where there are scales from one to seven. Because of the evaluation and comparability with other test subjects, it would simply be important that you could always commit to a number as often as possible. Exactly, then I would just start straight away and the first question would be how old are you?

**Test person:** under 50.

**Interviewer:** Okay, and you grew up in Germany, but does your family have a migrant background?

**Test person:** No.

**Interviewer:** How would you categorise the socio-economic status of your parental home? One would be very low, four average, seven highest status.

**Test person:** Five.

**Interviewer:** And your own socio-economic status on the same scale.

**Test person:** Also [5].

**Interviewer:** Okay, what is your highest qualification to date?

**Test person:** I did a second state examination. So a university degree.

**Interviewer:** Yes. Do you have siblings or half-siblings? And if so, what age and gender?

**Test person:** I have a sibling who is younger than me.

**Interviewer:** Did your parents stay together until you were of age?

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** Did your parents' parents stay together?

**Test person:** Some yes, others no.

**Interviewer:** Okay. How is or how was your relationship with your mother? One would be very, extremely bad, four would be middle and seven is excellent and why?

**Test person:** Four.

**Interviewer:** And what is or was your relationship with your father like?

**Respondent:** Three.

**Interviewer:** Do you feel emotionally equipped or prepared for adult life because of the experience you had in your parental home? Again, one is extremely poor, four is average, seven is excellent.

**Respondent:** Three.

**Interviewer:** Now we would move on to questions about your health. The first one would be how do you feel mentally? First is extremely poor, four is average, seven is excellent.

**Test person:** It's always the state now, isn't it?

**Interviewer:** Exactly, the current situation.

**Test person:** Four.

**Interviewer:** Four. And how do you feel physically in terms of health?

**Test person:** Five.

**Interviewer:** Are you or were you undergoing psychological or psychiatric treatment? And if so, why and for how long?

**Test person:** I would say three or four years. Because of the alienation from my child.

**Interviewer:** Yes, ok. If you don't mind me asking, was there a diagnosis that was made, that was actually diagnosed?

**Test person:** Yes, an. I think they call it adjustment disorder. But that's always a generic term, you know! So I had, I had panic attacks, I had, yes, physical problems that came from the psychological side, exactly, so psychosomatic problems, yes.

**Interviewer:** Ok. Now the next question would be, do you have any physical or severe physical complaints?

**Test person:** No, not very much. The condition, I think I gave it as four or five. I don't know at all. No, not very much.

**Interviewer:** Okay. Now we would move on to the information about their origin from me. So the families, family with their parents. The first question would be, how would you categorise the conflict situations in your parental home? One is very low, four is average and seven is very high.

#### **Minute 5**

**Test person:** The question again, please.

**Interviewer:** Yes, how would you categorise the conflict situation in your parental home?

**Test person:** Ah, conflict situation. One is low and seven is high?

**Interviewer:** Exactly. And four is average.

**Test person:** Five.

**Interviewer:** Okay. Did your parents also involve you or your siblings in the parental conflict? If so, how much? And here we have another scale, so one would be practically not or rather unconsciously, four medium and seven extreme.

**Test person:** Five.

**Interviewer:** In what form did this perhaps also happen? Do you have a specific example?

**Test person:** Yes, so that you just overheard arguments or that one person said something about the other.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Test person:** That you had the feeling that you had to position yourself, that you had to decide in favour of someone, yes.

**Interviewer:** How much conflict protection would you say you experienced as a child? One is high again. Or this time it's the other way round. So one is the highest level of conflict protection, four is average and seven is very low.

**Test person:** Four.

**Interviewer:** How much affection did you receive as a child? One is again the highest, four average, seven very low.

**Test person:** One is very low or seven is very low?

**Interviewer:** Seven is very low.

**Test person:** Seven is very low: it's always difficult when they're thrown into a pot like that, so I would say four.

**Interviewer:** Can you, if you put it in a pot, so to speak, are there any differences between your father and your mother?

**Test person:** Yes, well, my father wasn't very present and I always had the feeling that he wasn't interested at all, even when he was physically present. And yes, my mum tried to do what she could, no, yes.

**Interviewer:** Okay. How strong is your current bond with your attachment figures? One is again the highest level, four is average, seven is very low.

**Test person:** I just need to change rooms. I can't hear well here.

**Interviewer:** Yes, no problem.

**Test person:** Can you repeat that again?

**Interviewer:** Yes, how strong is your current bond with your carers?

**Test person:** I would (...) so, who is meant by reference person?

**Interviewer:** Your parents, siblings, friends.

**Test person:** My child too? No, nh?

**Interviewer:** If you, what you define as a caregiver, if you still define your child as a caregiver, then yes.

**Test person:** Well, I would say... Yes, I think I would categorise it as medium.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Test person:** I think I would say four.

**Interviewer:** So it's average?

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** Yes. And how much contact do you currently have with your carers?

**Respondent:** Three.

**Interviewer:** Did you or did you have contact with family courts, youth welfare offices or lawyers as a child?

**Test person:** No

**Interviewer:** No, okay. Okay, now we would like to move on to information about your own family, i.e. your biological family with your child, and specifically, how would you categorise the conflict situation with your own biological family? One is very low, four is average again and seven is very high.

**Respondent:** Three.

**Interviewer:** Mhm.

**Test person:** So three means that's low, nh? Five.

**Interviewer:** Five, exactly. Five in this case is slightly above average.

**Test person:** Mhm, yes.

**Interviewer:** Okay, did you, or the other parent, say that it's only about your child, i.e. one child, did I understand that correctly?! Exactly, so their child is involved in the parental conflict and if so, to what extent? And here we have the same scale as before. One is practically none or unconscious, four is medium and seven is extreme.

**Minute 10**

**Respondent:** Seven.

**Interviewer:** Seven. How much conflict protection did your children experience overall? One is highest, four is average, seven is very low.

**Test person:** Five. I'm thinking between five and six.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Test person:** Maybe more like six.

**Interviewer:** Okay. How much attention did your children or your child receive overall? One is the highest level, four is average and seven is very low.

**Test person:** Is it just me and the child or the father as well?

**Interviewer:** You can say both if you can assess both and what differences there might be.

**Test person:** Because, well, then I would want to change the last question again, because just referring to myself, I always tried to keep him out of everything and it's even below average that I always pretended that everything was fine. That's why I'd say a two or something.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Respondent:** And then I would want to separate that, because... Now the question was about the...

**Interviewer:** How much attention did your child receive?

**Test person:** Exactly.

**Interviewer:** Exactly.

**Test person:** Yes, and then I would say a six.

**Interviewer:** But that's here again...

**Test person:** Now only

**Interviewer:** But that's six would be below average...

**Test person:** (interrupts) Oh, no then a two.

**Interviewer:** ... is exactly a two the other way round.

**Test person:** Okay.

**Interviewer:** How strong is your child's current attachment to their carers? One is the highest level of attachment, four is average and seven is very low.

**Test person:** Five.

**Interviewer:** Five, okay. How much contact does your child currently have with his or her carers?

**Test person:** Four.

**Interviewer:** As a mother, do you have or have you had contact with family courts, youth welfare offices, lawyers? If so, in what form and how would you describe this relationship? So rather helpful, not helpful, supportive, stressful, was it friendly or was it rather insensitive?

**Test person:** Well, I had contact with all that. For the first few years, no one was actually able to help me, not the youth welfare office and not the guardians ad litem. Later, there was mediation at the educational counselling service, although that wasn't directly part of the youth welfare office, they made an effort, but in the end I would rate the help I received there as very, very little. So it was more the lawyer who did a lot for me, I was lucky with my lawyer.

**Interviewer:** Mhm. Would you use the professionals again if necessary or would you recommend them to others? If so, why or perhaps not?

**Test person:** No, I wouldn't, because as I said. So nobody really looked at what was really going on and did anything about it, so no, I wouldn't use the help again.

**Interviewer:** Okay. Ah, the last question here is, what worked in the relationship with the child's father, if anything, when you say it did, did anything work at all?

**Test person:** Before the separation or after the separation?

**Interviewer:** Before the separation.

**Test person:** Before the separation.

**Interviewer:** And perhaps also after the separation. You can say both if you wish.

### **Minute 15**

**Test person:** What worked? Yes, the bond between the two of them, nh so playing and that kind of harmless thing that they had with each other. So getting down to the level of the child and making nonsense and stuff like that nh. So this kind of thing. What you just do that's not strenuous. That worked. Exactly. And later it was just that he wasn't really interested in his child any more, he had three new children, so the child has been in his household for six years, but there's not really any attention, so he goes along, he's also somehow learnt that he shouldn't take up so much space there, because dad has such a hard time with all the children, with all the little ones, so our child lives there like a member of a shared flat, so to speak. So there's no support at school or that he drives the child somewhere or hobbies, so it's basically just been there since it was over 10 years old.

**Interviewer:** Okay, how old is your child at the moment?

**Test person:** under 18

**Interviewer:** Okay. Are you currently in a new, stable relationship?

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** Yes, and would you consider this relationship to be supportive and reinforcing for you? If yes, then one would be the highest level, four average and seven very low support.

**Test person:** Two.

**Interviewer:** How stressful is or was the separation for you? One is very low, four is average and seven is the highest level of stress. And that's why.

**Test person:** So the separation itself. It wasn't stressful, I brought it about. Everything that followed was stressful.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Test person:** Everything that followed was stressful.

**Interviewer:** So you would be more likely to be so below average in the separation...

**Test person:** Yes, yes. Exactly, it's never easy and it's never nice, so I would say a two or three, exactly.

**Interviewer:** Okay. How stressful do you think the separation was for your child? One is again very low, four average, seven very high? And why? If you can assess that?

**Test person:** No, the separation itself wasn't the problem. Well, at the beginning it was like a child is at the age of 5 nh, it was all somehow... I always kept it all away from the child, I made it all very palatable. I set up a nice room, told him you were going to Dad's at the we PAnd, so he found it all rather exciting. It's difficult to judge with a child under five, nh. Yes, well, I didn't suffer too much, I was happy, I was relieved, I made everything nice, the child had contact with everyone, I always encouraged contact with the other family, so that was actually the separation itself... I think my child was too small. It didn't, so there wasn't this: Oh no, mum and dad are separating, how awful, but that just came later, it fell into such a hole when the father... When the child then realised how much the father was living out the whole thing, all this grief in front of the child and so, nh. That's why I would say the separation itself was like that.

**Interviewer:** Okay

**Test person:** Just as not that difficult.

**Interviewer:** So you have, that's just a statement here, that in summary, you have the feeling that your bond with your child has been disturbed or perhaps cut off by the other parent? And what do you think are the motives of the other parent?

**Respondent:** Narcissistic personality disorder or traits. Yes, I don't know if you can categorise all of that. So this revenge and power and preventing powerlessness. Yes.

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Proband:** Destruction, destruction of the ex-partner.

**Interviewer:** Yes, in your opinion, how did this current situation come about or what factors influenced it? That your child lives with the father and there is actually no contact? Or hardly at all.

**Test person:** Oh, well, as I said, on the one hand, the child lived out the role of victim for years, so it learnt very quickly that it had to protect dad, that it had to be on dad's side. Secrets were also kept together, so that the child's bond with me became weaker, nh. So he [the father] bound the child to him [the father] with so much power that at some point it was no longer possible to say, is he pushing my child away from me or pulling it towards him [the father]? So this yes, why a serf, why a Stockholm syndrome. So he was the stronger one, supposedly the stronger one, and the child was also afraid or had great respect for him, he [the father] always put the child under psychological pressure. Or when our child, it was still small, if it told something good about me, then after the we PAnd cried, said dad didn't want to hear it, how nice it was on holiday with you, I'm only allowed to tell bad things, so actually this whole machinery that you know so well.

Yes, that is, binding him to me with pressure, but also making me look bad on the other side, that was the kind of thing, these meshes, and I think that simply made the child feel obligated. So they had a secret and the deal was that my child would live with me for eight years and then another seven years with me and then the same amount of time with the father so that it was fair. My child had thought about it that way because he always said in court that he wanted to live with both of them, so it was always like this: he didn't want to hurt anyone in any way. Yes, and I think at the end of third grade, a letter came from the father during the holidays saying that my child wouldn't be coming back. I then managed to persuade the court that he could at least finish primary school with me for another year and then I sort of agreed and said: go to dad, it's OK for me. So

I never had a guilty conscience or anything. But the question was, what effect did it have? I don't think you can answer that with a single point.

### **Minute 21**

**Interviewer:** Yes, but do they still have shared custody or has it been completely transferred to the father?

**Test person:** No, no, we always had shared custody. Yes, yes. I used to have custody and yes, now it's been with the father since the beginning of the fifth year.

**Interviewer:** Okay, and was there still regular contact at the beginning and that became less and less and what is the current situation?

**Test person:** Exactly, I'm one of those who still has contact. Now the child is [age] and I'm keeping it, so I've been fighting for a very long time now so that it can decide for itself when it comes. The father didn't like that because he... Yes, it was quite interesting. So when I started to let go a bit. I had also taken a sabbatical and was travelling a lot and he [the father] didn't like that either. He used to say I had too much contact with the child, now I have too little, so it was always like that and now he's fine with his child deciding for himself if he has a party at the we PAnd or: I always said that I myself, when I was under 18, didn't feel like spending the whole we PAnd with my mum every fortnight and I don't think that's natural and that's why I resisted it. But my child is happy when I come. We go for a walk or I sometimes say, "Don't you fancy coming over for a whole we PAnd again?" or when there's a family party coming up. So it's very, very relaxed now. But before it was always strict. Half of the holidays, half and always the we PAnd every fortnight. It was physically present. Mentally zero. So it was always a shell and that was one of the reasons why I said I don't need it if my child just closes the door and plays on his mobile phone, then let's just see each other less often and have a nice we PAnd together.

We agreed to meet once a month at the beginning of the year, I think it was at the beginning of this year. So now it's a bit like that between us, nh, that we agree and I think that's very relieving for all of us. I find it very relieving. Of course, you really notice the alienation. No, you're not allowed to talk about anything or my child can't make any decisions at all, they can't position themselves. And if I, well, he still keeps me out of everything, I'm not allowed to take an interest in school and. So if I didn't make contact with my child, something would only come up if he wanted something, nh. He needs a signature now because he wants to [visit an institution] ][...] and then he gets in touch, but he would never, so the child can't make contact with me, that's like when it's forbidden, quite extreme. So yes.

**Interviewer:** So you said that your child was under 5 years old when you separated and then went to the father in the fifth grade, right?

**Test person:** Exactly.

**Interviewer:** That we have summarised this once again. What consequences did the process and the separation, the separation process and now the process of the child changing residence have for you? For your child and for the estranged parent, i.e. for the child's father?

### **Minute 25**

**Test person:** What were the consequences of moving in with him?

**Interviewer:** Yes...

**Test person:** Or what consequences?

**Interviewer:** So exactly for her and for the child and for the child's father, so maybe all three parties.

**Test person:** For me, it meant that I was able to start working on my psychological problem because this fear was gone. For years I hardly slept through the night because I was always afraid that he [the father] would take the child away from me at some point. He had also threatened to do that at the beginning and as often as we went to court, i.e. when he went to court with me and tried to get custody, this fear was also present. I knew that this was what he wanted. And the day my child moved away, that fear was gone. So the worst thing I could have ever imagined happened. That relieved me in that I

then started to deal with myself a little and heal a little. And I then consciously used this space to do things for myself.

It was the worse choice for my child because he, the father, promised the child a lot. If he moved in with him, he would get this and that. He got everything materially. So from a PC, tablet, iPhone, a cat, a dog, an aquarium, guinea pigs, birds. So you really can't imagine, the child then had a whole zoo. But beyond these material things, nothing happened. So as I said earlier, why was a flatmate simply added to this household? The relationship with her stepmother wasn't great either. And so it was very early on. I think he told me about it after a year or so. My child was very disappointed. So together, child-son days, once a week, like he [the father] had promised, that they would go swimming together once a week. I think that was the deal.

My child was also in therapy and I know that from the therapist, she had also told him that, so he was very disappointed. And I think that also brought him down a bit from this star, the father. So you always say it's better to leave one of them on the throne, then at least he has something to cling to, but he fell from the throne and that's why I think my child has become quite a loner, who spends a lot of time in his room, but thankfully he's made some really good friends there, who I'm in contact with. So that's how it is, he didn't do any more sport, no hobbies, so that's the negative development, unfortunately, that the child didn't do any more athletics, sports clubs, all that. He became such a, yes, such a room child.

Then for my ex-husband: Yes, well, I really think the main thing that has changed for him is that he has now collected the money. I have to pay relatively high maintenance [...] and he has three children and I think that just meant a lot to him, this money, which makes a difference of over €1000 that he now gets and I don't and that was another demonstration of power, so for him, a demonstration of power. I think he was very happy about it. At the same time, how should I put this, he then found other things to do with me. So what changed for him? Yes, I think his wife was quite annoyed by our child after a short time. She also told [child's name] once that they didn't have a good relationship. I don't know what else has changed. They had to build an extension, they had to build an extension now because there wasn't enough space, but I don't know anything else.

**Interviewer:** Yes, did you receive support during this process and if yes, how, to what extent or if no, what would you have wished for and perhaps from whom?

### **Minute 30**

**Respondent:** The process of the whole alienation or when my child left?

**Interviewer:** Maybe both as well. Were there any, but in principle first of all when it went away and maybe the year after.

**Test person:** Looking back, I think it would be useful to have programmes where mothers or fathers could take part. But I always find it very nice when mothers can be among themselves, so that they can have a way of coping with grief. After all, being separated from your child is not something that nature intended, and it's simply still such a taboo subject in our society, and that's what makes it so difficult, nh. That you simply encounter so much incomprehension and have so few people around you who... Yes, who can understand. And that's why this networking, which I really, really push in our circle, is so important, nh. That you simply have people who have experienced the same thing. And that wasn't the case for me back then. Back then, I didn't even know what it was or what it was called and I didn't have a clue. I always thought, well, I was just unlucky, I had a very vindictive ex-husband and then I got together with my colleague. We've been together for 14 years and I always thought, or a lot of people thought, well, it's only because you're with a woman now and all that. I don't know, but in any case I always thought I was a kind of isolated case and I'm now connected with so many people affected that I simply realise how beneficial it is. And yes, I think that's what it takes, so I didn't have that back then and I would have needed it. Apart from that, my family was very supportive. Yes, and as I said, my wife very much. So yes.

**Interviewer:** Yes. Do you still have contact with your ex-husband? Or is it only through your child that you keep in touch with him?



**Test person:** We have very little contact because I do everything I can via mobile phone or email. I've gradually closed these channels. In the last few years, because there was simply nothing factual at all. I'd managed to get the court to order him to at least write weekly reports, and they were so devoid of content that at some point I had to, basically, the heading was weekly report and it just said there was nothing interesting to report. And then there were demands or accusations against me. And then I said, I don't need that. That's why he can only contact me by landline and by post, but as he's never been communicative at all, he only uses the postal service. So now, for example, it's about the new maintenance calculation. And he sent it to me by post, nh. And I then sent him my list by post. So we had a mediation session a few years ago, which I also made a condition for my child moving into his household, because I said we're still parents, we have to sit down at the same table, that was the umpteenth attempt and it was simply very stressful for me psychologically, because he, yes, because he only ever used this stage to beat me up psychologically. And I realised that I feel better when we don't have any contact. So of course it's stupid that my child is always the one who provides information, if at all. But that was already the case when he was four, my ex told me everything that wasn't meant for these ears and now he's older and he doesn't know any different and I tried for years to keep it away from the child. And then I just gave up at some point. So in that respect, yes, it's in writing or via my child. Exactly.

**Interviewer:** Now there are two final questions, the first being, how stressful is or was the alienation for you? One very low, four average and seven highest level.

**Test person:** Seven.

**Interviewer:** And how stressful do you think the alienation is or was for your child on the same scale?

**Test person:** Seven.

### **Minute 35**

**Interviewer:** That, we have now simply... Oh, but we still have one question. And that would be: As an adult, have you experienced an alienation process with your own or your own child and to what extent perhaps?

**Test person:** As an adult?

**Interviewer:** Towards your child. So, your child was alienated from you. But to what extent do you also feel alienated from your child?

**Respondent:** What is the highest, so seven is the highest?

**Interviewer:** There is actually no scale. But we can, exactly one is very low, and seven is high, if you want to say a number, that's okay too.

**Test person:** Yes, I would say about five. So I still notice that there is a bond, actually. And that always gives me a bit of hope, because it also turns to me from time to time with topics that have nothing to do with the father.

So when he was going through puberty, he talked to me about things that might have been embarrassing for other children. My child tells me when he's been up to some rubbish with his friends and I sometimes say: "You, honestly, I don't really want to know about that because I don't think it's good that you did what I know or something. So it tells me a lot and then sometimes I think, oh gosh, that's kind of nice, I think it knows. My child actually knows that I'm always there for them. So I say that too. I always say what it means to me and everything. Yes, so it's all very, very difficult, as I said, and when I talk about certain things, I don't get away with it at all.

And in the summer there was a situation where he didn't invite me to graduation after tenth grade and I was very sad and said so on the phone and then wrote something in my status, which my child took very badly because of course he felt exposed in front of other people, in the family and so on. And then I apologised, but in any case, the child's first reaction was that he didn't want to come to me during the summer holidays. It doesn't need a mum like that, so the child shut down very quickly and I was really a bit scared and thought, okay, you now know so many women and men whose children no longer want to have anything to do with them. Why did you take it to such extremes? And then I decided for myself pretty quickly: No, I want to be able to say how I feel - I have to be

able to stand it. And if I can't do that, then I can't maintain this relationship because it just feels wrong to me. And in that respect. Yes, I do believe that the bond has been very disturbed. And that there's still something there. That's why I would say a four.

**Interviewer:** Ok, yes, those were all our questions. As I said, thank you in any case for taking part.

**Test person:** Gladly.

## **Farewell**

## **Minute 39**

### 10.2 Transcript anonymised Respondent 03 - Estranged mothers

*Note in advance:*

*The interviewee's new partner was present during the interview; his parts of speech were labelled "partner".*

## **Greeting**

**Interviewer:** Yes, so the recording, yes, I started the audio recording once. I would then simply start with the questions straight away. The first one is questions about you in general. How old are you?

**Test person:** I am over 55.

**Interviewer:** Which gender do you feel you belong to?

**Test person:** Female

**Interviewer:** You grew up in Germany, but do you or does your family have a migrant background?

**Test person:** No.

**Interviewer:** How would you categorise the socio-economic status of your family? One would be very low status, four would be average and seven would be very high

**Test person:** So one is below average and one is very good?

**Interviewer:** Four is average and seven is very good.

**Test person:** Oh, from my own parents' house?

**Interviewer:** Exactly.

**Respondent:** And what all comes under socio-economic financial?

**Interviewer:** That would be the education, the income, exactly the kind of thing that plays a role.

**Test person:** Well, I would say average. My parents had their own house and my dad was self-employed.

**Interviewer:** So you would classify yourself as average? Okay.

**Test person:** I would go to four.

**Interviewer:** And how would you rate your own socio-economic status? That would also be on the same scale.

**Test person:** So now for me alone or with the family I lived with?

**Interviewer:** For the current situation, i.e. how they are currently living.

**Test person:** Me personally. I would rate myself higher. At five, right?

**Life partner:** Yes, it is, financially it's not usually lacking, it's actually secure, there are no, let's say, existential fears. Fears.

**Test person:** Then maybe five or so?

**Interviewer:** Okay

**Test person:** Or six? I don't know. Yes exactly, no idea

[...]

**Interviewer:** What is your highest qualification to date?

**Test person:** Yes, I just have a degree.

**Interviewer:** Okay. Do you have siblings? If so, what age and gender?

**Test person:** Well, I have a sibling who died a long time ago.

**Interviewer:** Okay. Did your parents stay together until you were of age?

**Test person:** Yes, until the age of majority, yes.

**Interviewer:** And did your parents' parents stay together?

**Test person:** Yes, on both sides.

**Interviewer:** Okay. How is or how was your relationship with your mother? One would be extremely bad and seven would be excellent.

**Test person:** Up to what age? Approximately.

**Interviewer:** The (...) You can say it as a child and now the current one, whether something has perhaps changed?

**Test person:** Well, it wasn't so good as a child. Now it's actually better. What is it again? Can you say one more thing, is there any term for it?

**Interviewer:** One would be extremely bad. 4 is again average and seven is excellent.

**Test person:** And the others? Excuse me.

**Interviewer:** All good two would be very bad, three bad, four as I said average, five good, six very good and seven excellent.

**Test person:** Well, I think I would almost go to medium as a child. And now I would, would I go to five? Good.

**Interviewer:** Okay. And how is or was your relationship with your father? That would be exactly on the same scale again?

**Minute 5**

**Test person:** I would also go for medium. And, mhm. I don't know if it's still medium now, is it? So I can't really say good now, can I?

**Life partner:** Yes, there is to the...

**Interviewer:** Perhaps you could say it's...

**Test person:** For and against. Yes, let's say the father lacks a bit of initiative. So, he could be more involved with the daughter in terms of space and time. But he doesn't actually do that.

**Interviewer:** Would you say it has got better or worse since or compared to your childhood? Or has it stayed the same?

**Test person:** I would almost say the same.

**Life partner:** Yes, so I wouldn't go beyond a four. Right.

**Interviewer:** Okay. How do you feel emotionally when you look back on your experiences at home? That would be on the same scale again, how would you rate it?

**Test person:** Me, my parents' house. Now it's getting exciting. I always wanted to go to a children's home. I didn't think it was that great. But as a child, you still perceive things differently. But I thought it was rather bad.

**Interviewer:** Okay. Do you feel emotionally prepared or equipped for adult life because of experiences you had at home?

**Test person:** No, not at all.

**Interviewer:** Okay. We would now move on to information about your health. The first question would be, how are you feeling mentally at the moment? It's on the same scale as the one we just had from one to seven.

**Test person:** So now, at the moment, with the situation I'm in now with my alienation.

**Interviewer:** How are you feeling right now?

**Test person:** At the moment?

**Interviewer:** Exactly, so yes, the current situation.

**Test person:** I'm actually doing well at the moment. I would say five.

**Interviewer:** OK. How are you feeling physically?

**Test person:** So right now?

**Interviewer:** Right now.

**Test person:** But it always varies. So if I say I'm fine, then I lie in bed at night and just can't sleep. So then it's not true. Or how, how do we deal with it now?

**Interviewer:** Perhaps simply. What would your fluctuations be, so in which, if we're just talking about the scale, from one extremely poor to seven excellent? What kind of range would you say you are in?

**Test person:** In relation to what period of time, i.e. also to the moment? That's really difficult. On the one hand, I'm actually doing very well and on the other hand, I'm always feeling bad.

**Interviewer:** Okay that (...)

**Test person:** Yes, but how can we somehow squeeze that into a scale?

**Interviewer:** If that's not possible, then it's not possible.

**Test person:** Well, I have a lot of good things in my life. Yes, I'm doing very well in my job. But I'm just very sad about the loss of my children and about the alienation.

**Interviewer:** Ok.

**Test person:** But how to put that in there somehow... And I've had a lot of difficulties with that. So: physically, psychologically. So I don't know whether that's part of it. I had very, very big problems with this alienation and this separation, but you get used to it and learn to deal with it, but I was really, really down.

**Interviewer:** Yes, maybe.

**Test person:** But still managed to keep working.

**Interviewer:** The next question builds on that a bit. Are you or were you undergoing psychological or psychiatric treatment?

**Test person:** Yes, so I was or I, well, if necessary I just go to a psychologist. I have a psychotherapist who has actually accompanied me throughout my life. But I don't go there regularly. But when I have something to talk about, I go there and of course she also supported me after this terrible break-up. But I was also in such a bad way that I thought I wouldn't be able to cope without medication and saw a psychiatrist. But I didn't take the medication from the psychiatrist because I couldn't tolerate it. Instead, my GP gave me something that I took for almost two years and a half, which helped me and now I've been completely free of medication since August.

#### **Minute 10**

**Interviewer:** Ok, and if I may ask, was there a diagnosis, perhaps directly after the separation, or? Or was that not concretised at all?

**Test person:** So after the separation? My family doctor always writes on it, so a kind of depressive episode, moderate or something and psychologically... With the psychologist, I think it's more of a kind of... Yes, I know, I don't know these diagnosis codes, but I think it's more along the lines of adjustment disorder.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Test person:** Yes, but I can't say exactly what the abbreviation on it is. So you certainly need a diagnosis to be able to do psychotherapy. Yes, so in psychotherapy, let's put it this way, I worked through what I had in my own family because I never wanted to pass on what I had experienced myself and that's why I looked at it all and worked through it to make it better, better. And now I have it much worse (laughs). So now I laugh about the fact that it's actually a drama.

**Interviewer:** OK, we've just talked about this, so you also have severe physical complaints that go hand in hand with this.

**Test person:** Mhm.

**Interviewer:** Okay, but that's not, you would say, not constant, but it's there from time to time. Then it's gone again, or it's a constant thing?

**Test person:** So it's particularly bad at night. I had really bad heart palpitations at night for months, I sometimes tensed up completely in my jaw and then I needed a splint for my teeth. Then I kept tensing up parts of my body so much that they hurt, for example my thumbs and forearm. Then I had panic attacks at the very beginning. So it was really bad when we sat in bed at night breathing together. Sometimes it also felt like

having an amputation, like having something amputated. Yes, so yes, I have bad physical symptoms. Have I forgotten anything else?

**Life partner:** Yes, the cramps, the breathing difficulties and restlessness. It's clear that the insomnia is a kind of restlessness, but it's also accompanied by the fact that you can't stay in bed, but also wander up and down the flat. You can never calm down and fall asleep again straight away, but it takes a really long time or the night is completely ruined. So there is no falling asleep.

**Test person:** Yes, yes, so there are interruptions to my night's sleep that can go on for hours and I get up from time to time to break this circle of thoughts, but with the medication it was actually gone. But since I stopped taking the medication, because it was a medication, I think I put on 15 kilos with it and I didn't want to put on any more and I wanted to manage without the medication.

And since I stopped taking it, I've had the problem again that I don't sleep completely through the night, but that I often wake up and then it can take a very, very long time before I fall asleep again. And sometimes it works. I then listen to something and sometimes I fall asleep again, or I watch Ladykracher (laughs). Yes, everyone develops their own methods.

**Interviewer:** Yes, exactly, you just hinted at it a moment ago, you would now talk about your family of origin. Again, your parental home, how would you categorise the conflict situation there? One would be a scale, one would be very low, four would be the average and seven would be very high.

#### **Minute 15**

**Test person:** Well, I have no comparison with other families, I can only say how I experienced it as a child and over the years I have experienced it as a high level and unfortunately I was also affected by violence as a child. I was also beaten or locked up. But I didn't pass it on to my own children, because that's always the case when you've been a victim, that you pass it on, but that wasn't the case. Yes, I didn't do that, I deliberately worked through it all because I didn't want to, I didn't do that. But I suffered as a child and my parents also argued a lot. And then they split up. So actually after I was 18. They split up after that. And they hardly speak to each other to this day.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Test person:** So resolving conflicts was extremely difficult. The parents couldn't resolve their conflicts either, they went to therapy and couldn't get to grips with it either, yes.

**Interviewer:** Was anything ever recorded by the police, which is super important for us to know? From...

**Test person:** Mhmm.

**Interviewer:** No?! Okay.

**Test person:** No, mhm!

**Interviewer:** And did your parents involve you, or you and your sibling in general, in the parental conflict? And if so, how much? So one would be practically none or it was done rather unconsciously. Four is again medium/average and seven is extreme. And in what form might this have happened?

**Test person:** So the conflicts didn't pass us by. And when my parents had a conflict, it didn't have such an effect that my mum paid me little attention or I felt guilty. Or she wasn't so responsive for days on end. And as a child, you don't understand what's going on.

Yes, and with my dad it was actually like that... He was the one who made us or me, so I can only talk about me now. He also spoke badly about my mum in my presence, which always really affected me and I know what a conflict of loyalty is, or I imagine it to be like that: When you're alone with your dad and you know that he hates the other person, something like that, then you say what he wants to hear. And at the same time, you long for the other parent to look after you or be there for you or show you love. Maybe there's a new reality conflict like that too and my children are in it themselves now and I don't know.

**Interviewer:** How much conflict protection did you experience as a child? One is the highest level of conflict protection, four is average, seven is very low.

**Test person:** Conflict protection? What do I have to imagine by that?

**Interviewer:** Conflict protection, so how much were they perhaps protected from conflicts? How were they, were they even told how to deal with conflicts? That it is not with violence, but with words, is that the direction this question is aiming at?

**Test person:** No, my parents never explained that to me. They weren't violent with each other, but they just shouted at each other or something. Or sometimes something fell on the floor. But they weren't violent with each other. Yes.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Test person:** And I'm not a victim of extreme violence myself, but a slap or just going to the room and being locked up, that was a form of violence, yes. And then, if someone doesn't talk to you, that's also a form of violence, because a child doesn't understand what they've done wrong, even though the other person isn't actually thinking about anything, maybe not about the child, but is simply preoccupied with the conflict between the parents. Okay, I hope that they have a bit of an impression, so I don't want that now, so it's all really bad? But I was also a sensitive child and it wasn't great for me, it wasn't the best conditions.

**Interviewer:** Yes. How much attention did you receive overall as a child? That's also a bit of a factor. One would be the highest level again, seven very low, four average again.

**Test person:** What? One is the highest level of a lot of...

**Minute 20**

**Interviewer:** Exactly, four is average and seven is very low.

**Test person:** But that is now the opposite of how it was before in another...

**Interviewer:** Right, yes.

**Respondent:** ...other question, okay. Still (...) It goes (...) Wait, please. Repeat that again.

**Interviewer:** All good, so the question is, how much attention did you receive as a child? One would be the highest level, four would be average and seven would be very low.

**Test person:** Yes, I would perhaps put it more in the middle range. But I would have liked more closeness. So I remember: with us it was kind of like that, you were only allowed to cuddle up to mum and dad in bed on Sundays and I don't think I would ever have wished for that from my mum.

**Interviewer:** Yes. How strong is your current bond with your carers? Here again, one is the highest, four is the average and seven is very low.

**Test person:** To which reference persons?

**Interviewer:** In principle, you can choose who your closest carers are, how you would define them.

**Test person:** So one is the highest, four is medium and the bond is the lowest.

**Interviewer:** And seven is bad. Exactly.

**Test person:** Well, I have a very, very good bond with my partner and a very close relationship. And with my attachment figures, that's so difficult. Should I also include my own children, who I unfortunately don't see, but...

**Interviewer:** If you define them as a reference person, then yes. Of course, it's difficult for me to define that for you now. Normally it would be children, partners, parents, siblings, but unfortunately they no longer have them. Grandparents, what would be in their lives? Yes, that's the case.

**Test person:** So I don't have any grandparents any more. And you have to categorise all that together on a scale from one to seven?

**Interviewer:** You can also say this for each person individually. That's not a problem either.

**Test person:** Ah yes, okay. So with my parents, I would say level four, medium. I no longer have grandparents. Relatives, i.e. friends or acquaintances - actually even better than my parents. Then maybe around five. And so I have a very, very good bond with my

younger child, or did I imagine I had a very good bond? That's why it was or is so extremely difficult for me to deal with the loss, because it was still so small, under 10 [years old]. And with my older child, he was already eighteen when we separated. And by then you'd already gone through puberty and you're already a bit detached, so it wasn't as intense as with the younger one.

**Interviewer:** Yes, and the second question goes in a similar direction, namely how much contact they currently have with their carers. So perhaps their parents, their friends, acquaintances.

**Minute 25**

**Test person:** So to my parents, to my mum, actually very regularly. To my father maybe once a month. Then I have lots of work colleagues and friends. Yes, regularly, I have to say, well, it happens a lot, even via WhatsApp now, but you just write something nice or ask how things are going. Not so much on the phone or through real meetings, but I'm just always connected. So I feel very connected to a lot of people, I have to say. And should I tell my children?

**Interviewer:** If there is contact.

**Test person:** Well, at least with the smaller child (K2), I write a WhatsApp twice a week, which he reads but doesn't reply to.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Test person:** And that's (...) and so I know, and I regularly put photos in my status, animal photos or something that I do and it always looks at them. No contact at all with my older child (K1).

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Test person:** And yes, not with the children's father either.

**Interviewer:** Do you have or did you have contact as a child with family courts, youth welfare offices, lawyers, experts?

**Test person:** Nothing at all.

**Interviewer:** Now we would like to move on to information about your own biological family, i.e. those with your children, and specifically, how would you categorise the conflict situation in your own biological family? Again, one is very low, four is average and seven is very high.

**Test person:** Well, I would actually say... Conflicts in the family, well, we don't actually have that many conflicts with the family. I would say average at most, because everyone actually made an effort to make it work. We actually made a huge effort to make the family work. Everyone who was part of it. That it was really good for the children. So I have to say that everyone did their best.

**Interviewer:** Okay. Did you...

**Test person:** Excuse me, which one? Now what is the one or so not one, but this is...? Then let's stick with average, shall we?

**Interviewer:** Yes, if you could, exactly, that would be a four.

**Test person:** If it goes into other things, but we had so much potential for conflict in the family. I had conflicts with my father, with the children's father, but as a family it was a maximum of four, so rather less, because I always held back and really wanted the best for the children and held back.

**Interviewer:** Yes, the second question is practically based on the first, namely did you or the other parent involve the children in the parental conflict?

**Test person:** Yes, that certainly happened. Especially now in the context of the separation, but I can also think of a situation before the separation, for example. I wanted to sort something out with my partner and he organised a drama in front of the child, which I couldn't understand at all, and I tried to cover my child's ears so that he wasn't exposed to this crap, because it was just really bad. Yes, it was so unnecessary and so bad. And the child was actually automatically involved in the conflict because the father could have done it differently and could have said, somehow, we'll discuss it later in peace or something, you don't have to do it in front of the child. Or even now, during the separation, the father deliberately provoked conflicts in front of the child, for

example by taking the children with him. And then bad-mouthed me to my dad and asked the child to bad-mouth me too. Or now, for example, when we had a court case, he put the court letter in front of the child and told me off, telling me to explain to the child what it was all about. I think that's extremely bad, so for me it's a threat to the child's welfare to the highest degree.

**Minute 30**

**Interviewer:** Yes, how would you categorise that on a scale? In general, how the children were involved: one would be impractical, not or unconsciously, four would be average again and seven would be extreme.

**Test person:** So one is unconscious?

**Interviewer:** Four is average and seven would be extreme.

**Test person:** So it can also be extremely unconscious? (laughs)

**Interviewer:** Yes, if you say it was an extreme form, but you think it was done unconsciously, then of course it was.

**Test person:** Well, I can, I can do it... I can't believe that someone would do something like that unconsciously, because you have to reflect on your behaviour towards the children. So it was definitely not average, it was more than average. I don't know if it was extreme, I don't know. I don't want to say that I didn't say something to my child, but I always said: I didn't do it in the way that I experienced it myself. I may have said that it bothers me now that it's like this and that, but I didn't stage such a drama in front of a child, but I don't think you can ever completely avoid joking about the other person or something like that: Yes, now it's like this again, yes. But I, I myself have experienced it that way, that I as a person at the table, I'm not answering what I'm supposed to answer, am I? (laughs)

**Cohabiting partner:** So I would say this... The conflict driver was clearly the former partner, not the husband, but a life partner. And I would tend towards a six to seven in the last phase or whatever if I were to continue. He coped extremely badly with the separation and it's still going on.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**life partner:** So he has a very high potential for conflict.

**Test person:** Yes, and above all he involves the children in everything. But is it still a question, because they said unconscious, average, extreme, so I can assume that everything I do somehow reaches the children. And the psychologist in charge said to me that in order to minimise the father's psychological violence on the children, I should completely remove myself as a mother from the children's lives, that was the last thing she said to me, so I don't know, maybe that's a bit of an indication of what it was like at the moment, in the context of this separation.

I've never done anything like that. Especially not towards my young child. Because after the separation, I couldn't really talk to any of my children, because from then on they were cut off, separated from me. I couldn't talk to them any more, they were inaccessible to me. But the father has full, full control and a full hand and he has everything, everything that comes from me, everything that comes from the court, so the children are involved in terms of maintenance and things like that, everything. Is that the answer to the question? What was the question again?

**Interviewer:** Yes, you have already answered that. So the question was how much the children were involved in the conflict. And that was exactly...

**Test person:** Yes, extremely. So they are actually instrumentalised.

**Life partner:** Yes.

**Test person:** So the older child [k1] then also filed charges against me like the father and things like that, so extremely.

**Interviewer:** How much conflict protection would you say your children have experienced?

**Test person:** Right now? Or before?



**Interviewer:** Maybe also before the separation, that is, when they were still (...) living together. And is there perhaps also, is there a difference to now?

**Minute 35**

**Test person:** Because now I'm not even in the family any more... How much conflict protection?

**Life partner:** I would simply say, purely from the profession of [name of respondent], she is actually already in the profession and her character is always conflict-solving. So of course she doesn't want any conflict to arise. And I'm already of the opinion that this leads to a very high level of conflict...

B. But it's about the children. Excuse me, how much conflict protection do the children have? I'm thinking about that, because it was all so long ago and I have to be honest, because of this insane trauma you don't remember a lot of things and maybe psychosomatic things: I also had a lot of problems with my concentration, it's so classic, that's why I'm writing, I have to take notes and keep asking him questions.

So conflict protection... I wouldn't say that the children actually had to deal with so much of the conflict, i.e. we had to deal with so much conflict in front of the children, because I adapted myself so much that I didn't express it at all, or tried to enforce what I wanted.

So I'm more the kind of person who... I actually told the father everything like this - roughly, he's right and we'll do it his way. Yes, so there was a power imbalance, but I also did that because I'm also very reserved to a certain extent, from my own history, and because I didn't hold back for the sake of peace, or rather took something or something. I don't actually believe that the children before that were somehow so incredibly damaged. They're two great kids. Yes, and unfortunately they've now come into conflict because of this separation, yes, but they have the choice, so they were always great. Yes, there was never anything that made them ill, mentally disturbed or anything like that. Yes, they were just really good children that we had. (laughs)

**Interviewer:** I would move on to the next question and that would be how much attention your children have received overall: One again highest level, four average, seven very low.

**Test person:** From both of us parents?

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Test person:** So not only from the parents, but also from the grandmother, for example, I actually think a lot. So not average, but I would say that they were or are extremely keen to look after both children.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Test person:** So one more thing is...?

**Interviewer:** One is the highest level and four is average.

**Test person:** No, more than average, so we really did everything for both children, held them in our arms, held hands. When they were ill, someone was there. Yes, even when K1 was already at an age where I often realised, yes, the child is already home alone, I would never have done that. So you always made sure that someone was there, that they were well looked after. So I would describe that as a very high level of care. Not just emotionally, but they also had everything they needed. Yes, because we both earned very well, they were also able to take part in activities and hobbies, which not everyone has.

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Test person:** Yes.

**Minute 39**

**Interviewer:** How strong is the current bond between your children and their carers? Perhaps also what are the children's current attachment figures?

**Test person:** Yes, unfortunately I don't have much insight into that either. My older child has been in a stable relationship for a long time. [...] He is also involved in the family there and I assume that he has always had a good circle of friends. And I don't know what the current relationship with dad is like. But it lives at home and it's sometimes like a mum substitute for the younger sibling, so with the separation my little child always has herself and the older sibling in her profile picture, so I think the two are

very close. But the fact that they live in a... well... It was an extended family that I was part of, so my... the children's father has a total of three siblings and in the house we lived in for many years there was the mother-in-law and two siblings. And the mother-in-law has died in the meantime, but the children had a close relationship, including with the mother-in-law. I always allowed everything to happen, so I didn't stop anything. And also to the siblings, from the children's father.

And now, with the separation, someone else has come along, which is also quite interesting. Perhaps I can briefly tell you that the children's father has a sister and I actually witnessed it myself, but didn't realise what was going on at the time. I witnessed it myself and actually almost helped a bit with child abduction because I didn't know what it was and that it existed. Yes, but the father of my children fought an insane court battle with his sister over 20 years ago and helped his sister get sole custody and contributed to the alienation of the child from the father. And I was told all kinds of stories and I overheard a lot of conversations but I didn't know that. You believe that when you're told that, you believe that this father did this and that and was bad and the whole family helped to ensure that the children's father's sister went abroad and that the visits didn't take place and things like that. And I've actually always lived in fear that it could happen to me. But it wouldn't have helped if I'd taken my child and disappeared with him. That would have made everything worse. Instead, I left the children behind and have tried to sort it out sensibly to this day, but it's a bit of an estrangement plan and this sister came into the house when I left, he practically pre-informed her, she came into the house and snatched my little child. My child is now with her regularly. I think she's an important caregiver now and all the brothers of the children's father also have children with whom I've often done things during the holidays, with whom we've celebrated and all that. I've given them presents, looked after them and they've all grown up now and have children of their own, but they've all been used as a kind of substitute mum and son, which means they now go shopping with my little child. Or my small child goes there on holiday and I'm not told anything and so on.

So I think she now has new and good caregivers, which is of course good for the child because mum is not so important. Yes, because... Yes, everything seems to be fine on the outside.

**Interviewer:** Yes, do you have or have you had contact as a mother with family courts, youth welfare offices, lawyers? If so, in what form and how would you describe this relationship?

**Test person:** Now with the separation?

**Interviewer:** Yes, exactly. So you had contact with the family courts, youth welfare office and so on as a result of this separation?

#### **Minute 44**

**Test person:** Yes, so I called the police after the separation because the separation was violent towards me, i.e. physical violence against me. Then I immediately looked for a lawyer and went straight to the youth welfare office. And then I sued for my right of access quite quickly, because it was obvious that I could no longer have access to my young child. So contact was immediately reduced, boycotted and he actually turned his back on me within three weeks of the separation. So then the child was no longer accessible. I was no longer allowed to touch it, it no longer wanted to come to me, I was allowed to see the child a few more times after the separation, but the father then completely restricted that, whereas before I had actually been with the child every day. Then I took legal action to enforce my right of access, but in principle that was already too late. When I went to pick up my child for contact in the school playground, he ran away from me. It was a really bad situation, I never understood why my child would run away from me, but the father cycled round the school playground in a controlling manner. Then a contact carer was appointed, who was unsuccessful. And the experience with all these people was actually positive for me, because they showed me that everything was OK with me. And that I'm actually... I'm sure I've made mistakes or something, because you have to learn to deal with alienation. Yes, I may have written or

said something wrong or something like that, but you don't know that. But my experiences with all these people have actually been that they've all turned towards me. And they all say that I shouldn't give up under any circumstances, but they can't, they can't cope with this father, so to speak. So they're all... The contact carer doesn't do anything any more because he doesn't know what he can do. The youth welfare office doesn't actually put anything in writing any more because they're afraid, just like me, that if they put anything in writing it will be exploited by the father, misrepresented and somehow a drama will be made out of it again. The guardian ad litem has also called me now and told me not to give up. They all don't want this father to win the whole thing because they can see how terrible and horrible everything that's going on is.

**Interviewer:** So would you use the professionals again or recommend them to others? And perhaps why? She tells me that it helped them a lot, so...

**Test person:** Well, yes, in theory it helped me, but they also reach their limits because this father works on levels... I don't think I know whether they have any experience that other fathers are also so legally foxed that they practically construct a legal borderline case so that everyone is unable to act. So even the judge is put in checkmate by constant applications for bias, then by taking action against higher - so judges at the higher regional court against psychologists, so that everyone is actually always incapable of acting and the father has maximum control over the whole thing. He has control. So everything is actually centred on this sick man.

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Test person:** And it's positive that the others tell me that. Because in my relationship with this man, I always thought that I was wrong because he always made me feel like I was disturbed, I was wrong, I was ill. And now, after 20 years, I finally realise that I'm actually okay the way I am. Yes, I certainly have weaknesses and faults, but we all have them, nobody is perfect and I'm prepared to work on them. But now I know that there's something extremely wrong with me, I would say.

**Interviewer:** Yes, in conclusion, what worked in your relationship? Or would you say did anything work at all?

**Test person:** What worked in our relationship was that we looked after the children very well. It always worked out well that we coordinated so well that the children were doing perfectly.

### **Minute 50**

**Interviewer:** Yes good, the next question is self-explanatory, that would be, are you currently in a new, stable relationship?

B. Yes, the break-up was because of the new relationship. I just didn't feel comfortable with the other man. I repressed it for many years, but at some point I just didn't see a way out. And then the new old man arrived, so to speak. And then I made a decision, I made a decision years beforehand... As a mum, you think very carefully about whether you actually leave the family. But I found that the relationship with the children's father was no longer sustainable for me. And I also felt exploited and took the step and simply didn't want to be treated like that any more.

**Interviewer:** So you also see the new relationship as support and encouragement these days?

**Test person:** Yes, and I now know what a relationship at eye level can be like, which I never had.

**Interviewer:** How stressful is or was the separation for you and why? And if they can, again on a scale where one is the lowest, four is the average and seven is the highest level of stress.

**Test person:** Yes, so the separation is at the highest load level. So that's seven or more, seven plus. So that's extreme, so out of all proportion to what it could be, so extremely stressful. It's an existential life crisis, it's an emotionally violent crime that has taken place when you no longer have access to your little child from one day to the next. Yes, and that's the cruellest thing that can happen to you. Can you think of anything else?

**Cohabitant:** No, it's...

**Test person:** Well, it's a crime for me, I have to be honest, and that's a, I'm, I was in a state of emergency. So I was also in crisis intervention, unfortunately I only worked by regularly phoning the telephone counselling service day and night, even from abroad, when I was away on business. It was more than seven.

**Interviewer:** Mhm, how stressful do you think the separation was or is for your children?

**Test person:** Yes, I can't say that because the father always says that the children are fine. And I do get upset from time to time... I still have some minimal contact with mums who think they see my youngest child now and then at the children's birthday party or something and they always tell me that everything is fine. And I believe that the youngest child can deal with it, because it still has what it's used to, and it still has all these caregivers, not everything has been taken away, yes. So I don't think it's actually that stressful for the children. But I do think that it might become a problem for them later on if they reflect on it from an adult perspective.

**Interviewer:** From your point of view, what are the other parent's reasons for keeping or cutting off their own child from them?

**Test person:** Well, he denies that he does that. He says it's the children's will. The children don't want any contact with their mother. But because of the things I've heard about alienation and from Amy Baker and so on, all these strategies, the vilification campaign, all the criminal charges, all the alienation strategies have taken place, so I do think that in the case of the younger child, it wasn't his own decision, but that he was forced into deciding in favour of it. And can you please tell me the question again quickly?

**Interviewer:** In your opinion, what are the motives of the other parent?

**Test person:** Yes, so I'm, so I'm disturbed, I'm bad, I'm violent, that's how he still portrays me in court. So I'm a danger to myself and to others. Even though I work with children every day. So I actually do that, I do it well, yes. He doesn't trust me to do it at all and he's always questioned it, or hasn't always portrayed me as a bit incompetent and sick and disturbed. So yes. So his motives are probably that he has to protect the children from me, but the psychologist also told me that the issue of guilt plays a very big role. So I'm to blame for everything. So it's my fault that the family is falling apart. So it's also a guilt issue. Can it be like that, is that the answer?

**Interviewer:** Yes, perhaps to summarise again: How did this current situation come about or what factors have influenced it?

### **Minute 55**

**Test person:** The current one, which one do you mean exactly?

**Interviewer:** That they, that the children live with the father and that they are separated from the children. Perhaps I'll just summarise very briefly.

**Test person:** Well, I can (...) that's actually from our (...) we were never married and I always lived there. I gave everything I earned to the family, but it was never possible to share anything with my father. So I always paid for the health insurance. The flat or the house was, so to speak, the property of his family. I've always been part of it and have fitted in.

And during the separation, he actually told the children that mum was separating and mum was leaving. So I couldn't discuss anything with my children, he practically beat me to it and clarified what was going to happen. And my young child said, for example, I don't want to have to make a decision. But he had to decide very quickly. And I was actually kicked out. So I was actually there under duress, I fled, I actually thought about whether I should take my little child to the women's refuge, but then I was too ashamed to call there because I still believed that I could somehow manage it peacefully, even though I also had this estrangement from 20 years ago... It was totally crazy, yes.

And I didn't want my children either.... Or K1 actually... I spoke to K1, he said he wanted to stay there because he already had three rooms in his father's house, his own bathroom and so on, it was perfect for the child. And with K2? You don't move a child out of the neighbourhood, yes. I then looked for a flat in another town at high pressure and then I

didn't just take my child with me. I thought to myself, how is that supposed to work? How? And I know the father never harmed the children. I didn't want to... I didn't want to take that away from them, I wanted to stay in contact and of course have contact and preferably the alternating model, but I didn't want to rip a child out of its environment just because the parents were separating. I actually decided in favour of the child. And I also thought that if I did the same thing now, it would probably make the situation much, much worse. I would definitely have been charged with child abduction or I don't know what he would have done. Yes, that's why I actually tried to be as calm as possible and the police also offered to go there, but I still said no, because I'm afraid that if the police come, then everything will get much worse, yes. I just tried to de-escalate the situation. I. Yes, you said that your younger child was still under 10 and your older child was already an adult when you separated. How long would you say this whole process took? I think you were talking about five to three weeks?

### **Minute 60**

**Test person:** Well, the older child was somehow instrumentalised. So I had talked to the father about separation, it was actually agreed that everything would be done peacefully, I'd take a flat and we'd work it out. But he used this time to build up his system of helpers and had already instrumentalised my older child, so that they were actually already on his side with the separation and helped to kick me out. And the little one rebelled and said something I'll never forget: "Dad, leave my mum, I like my mum, my mum can be here." And then I also spoke to the child on the phone and he was always so cross. And he always said, "Just listen to dad" and so on, because he always interfered with that, but after, as I said, three weeks at the latest, he immediately took her abroad with him after the separation, that was the summer holidays, and then he immediately took her abroad to his sister. Then I saw it again and within three weeks, as I said, and then there were all these reports against me that I had caused bodily harm to his mother. Really bad things. That I was a danger to myself and others, that I'd caused his mum to have a heart attack, none of which was true. And I think the children did too. Yes, it was after three weeks that the little child said he didn't want to come any more.

**Interviewer:** Did you receive support throughout this time and if so, in what way? In other words, in what way?

**Test person:** Support, as I said, I went to the crisis intervention centre. I went to the youth welfare office, the youth welfare office employee wanted to help me and also wanted to interact with the child in case of need, but that didn't happen, for example, because the father didn't allow the child to stay with me for half an hour longer, so we were really in touch with the youth welfare office right at the beginning and I can also tell you that the youth welfare office also knows the case from 20 years ago, so they know exactly what happened back then and they knew what was going to happen with this father when he came back. And they really made an effort. But it actually failed because we, the judge, didn't realise the situation, the youth welfare office did. But the judge should have taken much tougher measures right from the start, which he didn't do. In other words, a fine or the use of force. Not to this day. It's a very young, inexperienced judge. yes.

I had support, of course from my boyfriend, then from my mum. From my mum's partner. And on the other hand, I was very ashamed. I didn't confide in certain friends at all, that took a very, very long time. And I didn't really realise what was going on either. So this whole tough situation. And that, that's actually... Yes, I was also in shock. I felt really bad, I had some support. But what was going on. It was so extreme and so blatant for a break-up. You only realise that afterwards. And all the connections, and that's what alienation is now, I only realised that around Christmas after the separation, actually only through research on the internet, and then I came across Anna Pelz, maybe that tells you something. And about alienation. And Julia Bleser and so on. And then I realised it all. At the beginning I was still thinking: Well, it could really be that the child doesn't want to see me now, but at the same time I said three weeks after the separation in August that I found it really strange that the child no longer wanted to see me. I...

Some kind of therapeutic intervention is needed immediately, because it's really strange. I had a very good relationship, I didn't understand it. Yes, but exactly. But then the father didn't let any therapists in there. Did I answer that like that? Too verbose, right? (laughs)

**Interviewer:** Yes. Do you still have contact with the children's father these days or is it only judicial contact, i.e. forced contact?

**Minute 65**

**Test person:** Well, we had a contact carer for two years. Or he's actually still responsible, but he regularly spoke to the parents... Actually, you could say that it was a kind of mediation, that he regularly tried to get a grip on the cooperation and communication between the parents, also in the form of Zoom meetings. But we were always, and I was too, and the feeling of everyone who witnessed it was always like this: on one level, the father says this, does Double Binds tell you what? And on the other level, you can sense very clearly that he doesn't actually want it at all. He doesn't want the children to have good contact again. And it was all extremely difficult. And I went through this for a year and a half, these conversations, and then I came across something on the internet again, because it's often called court and that doesn't help at all in such cases, and then I tried mediation. And I cancelled after three mediation sessions because it was just extremely difficult with this father, he said things to me. I don't even have the courage to kill myself and I'm so violent and I'm not a life worth living, that was so bad for me that I cancelled that too and went back to court, because you don't know what the right thing to do is, how do you go about it? You don't know, it's trial and error. And I no longer have any faith in the father that we can work it out with mediation. And then I took it to court again. And what was the question again? Now I've gone back... What was the question again?

**Interviewer:** Do you still have contact with the children's father?

**Test person:** Exactly, yes. And then things got worse again with the mediation and I was really annoyed. Because I always realised that he was taking the child abroad and not telling me. And that's an absolute no-go for me, even with joint custody. That's another criminal offence for me, sorry. And then I went to the police again and made a complaint about Paragraph 235, child abduction and all that. I'd been there several times before. And none of it helped. But it actually intensified the conflict again and it also happened out of this insane fear that he might actually go abroad with the child because two of his siblings live there and that I might not even realise it and that he's working towards it all out of fear, and that's actually making contact with the father worse, so he hasn't been in person at all since August.

That was again in writing from me, so requests. Whether accompanied conversations could take place again with the contact carer. It hasn't materialised to date because the father, for example, hasn't responded, but the contact carer hasn't responded either, so he doesn't know what to do. Yes, so at the moment it's like this, and then I still know what the father has now wanted to do in arbitration proceedings against me. Because I've spoken to acquaintances about my situation and the father denies that I'm affected by alienation. And says that I'm bad-mouthing him. And that's why he wanted me to take part in a mediation process. But I didn't go. And since then, there's been complete silence again. Tomorrow is my little one's birthday, by the way. I'm going there later and want to give the present and don't know whether there will be any contact with the father and the child, but it hasn't been announced in advance. I'm not going alone either, I have a witness with me because I always live in fear, the father has already done that when I'm alone, that he then invents afterwards what I've done, that I've done something bad, that I've acted out, I don't know what's not true, yes, it's not true, but he threatens, he constructs things and that's why I only go there with a witness anyway.

**Interviewer:** Now perhaps two final questions. The first would be, how stressful is or was the alienation for you? One: very low, seven: very high.

**Test person:** Yes, very high. So I... Let's put it this way, I've very often thought that I don't want to go on living like this. So I've actually had a lot of suicidal thoughts. I don't

have that anymore, I know there are also phases when people learn to deal with it after two years and things like that when they are resilient. But I did in the early days and even up until what do I know in August, right? I can tell you this quite openly, I don't do it anymore, but I actually often thought that I didn't want to go on living like this because it was so cruel. And so terrible with all of this. The court was still receiving pleadings about how bad and how bad I am and... Yes, it's unbelievable. What's going on?

#### **Minute 70**

**Interviewer:** The last...

**Test person:** It's just a break-up. I think every second or third couple breaks up. And you're allowed to break up as a woman, aren't you? But if you break up with someone like that, it's better not to have broken up if you know what's going to happen next.

**Interviewer:** Yes, the last question now would be how stressful do you think the alienation is or was for your children? We've already talked about it a bit.

**Test person:** I can't judge that. I've experienced it in between, my older child also experienced it briefly, it was, then just shouted at me. And (...) I can't, I can't say.

**Interviewer:** Okay

**Test person:** Me, because, can you say something about that? That's very difficult.

**Cohabiting partner:** Yes, tell me, it's (...) naturally comes about with this conflict of loyalty in such a way that the children are definitely burdened, but can't live it out.

Exactly how burdened they are, because they are still under the roof and in the care of the father, financially dependent as well. And of course they can't express themselves as they might like, so the truth won't be allowed to come out. But it's hidden. So I would say you are perhaps: low, i.e. in the higher low to medium range, but you cannot express it or are not yet allowed to express it.

**Test person:** Well, another thing that occurs to me is that I pay the health insurance for the children and I also pay the doctor's bills, so I can see that my older child has various and regular doctor's appointments. Both of them also go to a naturopath regularly at the request of their father, who also diagnoses tension in the body of my older child and my younger child. And what I also know is that the child and I also know this about myself, I didn't say anything. Yes, you adapt. [...] And I think they're probably also experiencing it now, even though they've had it drummed into them that mum was to blame for everything. Yes, mum's finally gone. Now we don't have any more conflicts because she, I don't think she has the mind, if you understand what I mean, that conflicts can also be fuelled by the other person, consciously or unconsciously. Because there are patterns that play out. Yes, he knows exactly where he has to trigger me somehow so that I explode, that happened to me maybe two or three times and when I thought about it, I thought to myself, no, I don't want that, don't, don't let him trigger me like that anymore and I'll de-escalate and I believe that children ... Yes, I believe that they still need (...) He also studies psychology, by the way. I actually don't think it's yet clear that the father has also contributed to the conflict.

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Test person:** I think so. And that therefore yes... I can't say, I can't say. But I don't think it will pass anyone by without a trace.

**Interviewer:** Sure. Yes, that would actually be it. So that's the end of the questions. I would of course like to thank you very much for taking part in our study and supporting us. Yes, of course I wish you all the best.

**Farewell**

**Minute 75**

## 10.3 Transcript anonymised Respondent 04 - Estranged mothers

**Greeting**

**Interviewer:** I would start with general information and the first question would be, how old are you?

**Test person:** over 40.

**Interviewer:** You grew up in Germany, but do you or does your family have a migrant background?

**Test person:** No, I grew up in Lithuania, I came here when I was 18.

**Interviewer:** Ah Okay. Mhm, how would you categorise the socio-economic status of your parents' home? And we'll start with this scale, so 1 would be very low, 4 average and 7 highest status.

**Test person:** I have to ask again, what is socio-economic?

**Interviewer:** So the socio-economic aspects are education, income, profession, how they see it, where they would categorise their parents' home in society.

**Test person:** (...) Well, I grew up with my grandma. I didn't have a father. (...) Well, my grandma was a student, she worked a lot. My mum was (...) mostly unemployed. So I really don't know how to categorise that now, I would say (...) 3.

**Interviewer:** Ok, and how would you categorise your own socio-economic status? Again on the same scale, i.e. 1 low 4, average 7, very high.

**Test person:** (...) Mine, well, ours now.

**Interviewer:** Exactly the current one.

**Test person:** Average was 4?

**Interviewer:** Exactly.

**Test person:** And the highest was how much?

**Interviewer:** 7.

**Test person:** (...) I would say 5.

**Interviewer:** Okay, what is your highest qualification to date?

**Test person:** My degree? A-levels.

**Interviewer:** Yes, okay do you have siblings or half-siblings and if so, what age or gender?

**Test person:** Because I don't know my father and if he possibly has children, I don't know them. So I grew up as an only child.

**Interviewer:** Okay. And you said you grew up with your grandma, but... Does your mum live in the house too?

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** OK.

**Test person:** Well, she partly moved in with her husband. I also lived with my grandma for several years, but I always had contact with my mum. I saw her often, but for me my grandma is like my mum as a mother. My mum was more like a big sister to me.

**Interviewer:** Ok. Did her parents' parents, her grandparents, stay together or did they say they only grew up with her with her grandmother?

**Test person:** Yes. My grandma got separated or divorced when I wasn't born yet, so.

**Interviewer:** OK.

**Interviewer:** How is or how was the relationship with your mother? 1 is extremely bad, 4 is middle again and 7 is excellent. And why?

**Test person:** Four was the centre yes?

**Interviewer:** mhm. Exactly.

**Respondent:** (...) 2.

**Interviewer:** And why?

**Test person:** Because my mum is an alcoholic. Ever since I can remember, I've realised that she drinks and yes, that really ... (..) ... I don't know how to put it, it always offended me or made me sad and. She still drinks to this day. And that. Ruined my childhood, so to speak. Exactly.

**Minute 5**

**Interviewer:** Hm, through the experience they had at home or with their grandmother. Do you feel emotionally prepared for that or did you feel emotionally equipped or prepared for adult life back then? There would be...



**Test person:** No.

**Interviewer:** Okay, so then 1 would be extremely poor, 4 average, 7 excellent.

**Test person:** (...) 3

**Interviewer:** Mhm. Okay, now we would like to move on to the additional information about your health. And the first question would be, how are you feeling mentally at the moment? 1 ... so that's right back on the scale 1 extremely poor, 4 average, 7 excellent.

**Test person:** 4.

**Interviewer:** Mhm. And how do you feel physically in terms of your health?

**Test person:** I now have a brand new, new, little baby, so when I think about it, I am of course physically, physically not so fit now, but before the birth I was actually as good as fit, so. All in all, I could now say. 4 remedies.

**Interviewer:** Are you or were you undergoing psychological or psychiatric treatment?

**Test person:** I was in psychological treatment and I am currently in psychological treatment.

**Interviewer:** Okay. If you would like to answer that, why? And was there a diagnosis that was made?

**Test person:** Yes, I suffered from depression. For a long time. Because of my family history, previous history. I was in a psychosomatic clinic for 6 or 7 weeks. Also because of that, because of depression. And yes... And now I've been in psychotherapy again for a good year and a half. Precisely because of this older child alienation, because I realised that I needed professional help and since then I've been seeing my old therapists again.

**Interviewer:** Mhm. (...) Apart from the delivery. If we take that out, do you have severe physical complaints?

**Test person:** No. No.

**Interviewer:** Now we would like to move on to information about your family of origin. The first question would be, how would you categorise the conflict situation in your parental home? 1 would be very low, 4 would be average and 7 would be high or very high?

**Test person:** (...) 6 I would say.

**Interviewer:** Mhm, were you involved in the conflicts that took place at home or as a child and if so, to what extent? So 1 would be practically not or rather unconsciously, 4 again moderately and 7 extremely.

**Test person:** Well, I usually noticed everything when my drunk, completely drunk mum came home and she sometimes put the key in the key... so she didn't manage to put the key in the key [hole]. It was difficult for me because I was very angry with her. Angry. And at the same time I was sorry when my grandmother completely lost it and she once [...] [it is described that the grandmother once physically attacked her mother]. So I kind of love my mum, but at the same time, I hated, actually hated her for drinking alcohol. Yes, to answer the question now. Nobody protected me from not realising that, that it just happened. We lived in a small flat, so you quickly realise that. (...) And what was the scale 4 average again or what was the question?

**Interviewer:** Exactly. So did... Were they involved in the parental conflict or in the conflict and 4 would be medium, and 7, 7 extreme?

**Test person:** (...) Yes, I would say medium.

**Interviewer:** Mhm, and then the next question would be, how much conflict protection would you say you experienced as a child? 1 would be the highest level of conflict protection, 4 average and 7 very low.

**Test person:** (...) So very low, that means very low conflict protection.

**Minute 10**

**Interviewer:** Exactly.

**Test person:** Would that mean (...) And 1 was how again?

**Interviewer:** 1 was highest conflict protection.

**Respondent:** (...). 1 highest conflict protection, no. (...) I would say 6.

**Interviewer:** Mhm. The next question would be, how strong is your current attachment to your attachment figures? 1 is the highest level of attachment, 4 is average and 7 is very low.

**Test person:** So with caregivers. What does that mean, the parents, if you have them?

**Interviewer:** Parents, friends, other family members can do that. Yes.

**Test person:** I haven't actually. Well, since I've been living in Germany. Well, I used to have attachment figures, but I don't really have any. My husband is there, but he's a partner, so I don't really have any attachment figures. (...) Or do you? What was the question again?

**Interviewer:** How strong is your current bond with your attachment figures? You can ask your partner, which can of course also be an attachment figure.

**Test person:** Mhm, I would also say medium.

**Interviewer:** Mhm and how much contact do you currently have with your carers?

**Test person:** Medium.

**Interviewer:** Mhm. Do you have or did you have contact as a child with family courts, youth welfare offices, lawyers, etc. and if so, in what form? And how would you describe this relationship? So was it helpful or unhelpful, supportive or harassing or friendly or rather unsympathetic?

**Test person:** Yes, I had contact in the context of yes. With my, with my child (...) They weren't helpful, so what was the scale again?

**Interviewer:** So there's, there's no scale, it would be right there. The question would simply be, how would you describe this relationship?

**Test person:** So negative...

**Interviewer:** Ah, it was. Exactly, it was so helpful or not helpful, supportive or rather harassing, friendly and warm or rather unfeeling and cold, those were examples.

**Test person:** (...) Yes, emotionless.

**Interviewer:** Mhm.

**Test person:** Or was the other one not supportive? Not supportive, yes not supportive.

**Interviewer:** Good, then we would now move on to information about your own biological family, i.e. with your child, and the first question would be, how would you categorise the conflict situation with your own biological family? Again, 1 is very low, 4 is average and 7 is the highest conflict situation.

**Test person:** The question from the beginning again.

**Interviewer:** How would you categorise the conflict situation in your own biological family?

**Test person:** 4 was medium again?

**Interviewer:** Exactly.

**Test person:** Yes 4.

**Interviewer:** Mhm. Did you or the other parent involve the child, i.e. your child, in the parental conflict? If so, how much? And 1 is practically not or unconsciously, 4 again moderately and 7 extremely.

**Proband:** 7th extreme.

**Interviewer:** Mhm. How much conflict protection did your child experience overall?

**Test person:** Is scale now included?

**Interviewer:** Ah yes, yes, sorry exactly, so how much conflict protection did your child experience? There is 1, highest conflict protection, 4 average and 7 very low.

**Test person:** When it lived with me, so from my side, it had a lot of conflict protection, really a lot. But from the other side, no protection at all, so I don't know now when he says it's about the current one. It lives with the father, there's no protection.

#### **Minute 14**

**Interviewer:** Mhm, how much attention would you say your child received overall? 1 is highest again, highest level 4 average 7 very low.

**Test person:** From my side now, right?

**Interviewer:** Yes, or perhaps also if you see differences there as, um, was it at all like that, I can't really understand your situation, that you were still living together at the beginning, or was there a direct separation?

**Test person:** Then what, when we lived together, then.

**Interviewer:** Exactly when you lived together, did you see a difference in terms of affection or was it the same on both sides and only changed after the separation?

**Test person:** It didn't change after the separation. No, not at all. Neither I nor my father's affection has changed.

**Interviewer:** Okay, how strong, if you can assess that at all, of course. How strong is the current bond between your children and their carers? 1 is the highest level, 4 is average, 7 is very low.

**Test person:** I don't actually know that. My child lives with her father and the two of them plan things together. He might tell her, you or him personal things that I don't know. But I can't do anything. I can't judge how strong the bond is.

**Interviewer:** How old is your child at the moment?

**Test person:** Under 16.

**Interviewer:** OK. Good, you've already answered that. If we now come back to the fact that as a mother she has contact with the family courts, youth welfare office and so on, would you use the professionals, the professional institutions again or recommend them to others? If so, why or why not?

**Test person:** I can't choose them [the professionals] myself. So I had them except the lawyers. I would actually change the lawyer. So others, or I have a different one now. I had a consultation with another one, I think she's good. But everything else, judges, legal counsellors, I can't choose and. Yes, I wasn't happy with them.

**Interviewer:** Mhm. Well, then the next question would be, you have already answered that, so you are currently living in a new stable relationship. Exactly, and then the next question would be, would you see this relationship as a support or encouragement for you? 1 Highest level, 4 average, 7 very low.

**Test person:** Average.

**Interviewer:** Mhm. How stressful is or was the separation for you? Again, 1 is very low, 4 average, 7 very high.

**Test person:** You mean the separation?

**Interviewer:** Exactly.

**Test person:** It was actually... not at all stressful. It was rather liberating. (...) Maybe medium, I would say, overall. Medium.

**Interviewer:** Mhm. How stressful do you think the separation is or was for your child?

**Test person:** (...) The children didn't even ask why, where, where is dad, why is dad no longer there. I was surprised for a long time that they didn't even ask. So from the outside, I would say that it wasn't stressful at all, but I, we never talked about it. They, one child (child 1) was under 5 years old, the other (child 2) under 3. We didn't talk about it at that age either. But it's possible that they both suffered inside anyway. That...

**Interviewer:** Mhm.

**Test person:** So the big one in particular [child1]. The little one not so much. But the older one realised more. Yes, it was more aware of small conflicts at home, but.... I guess I... Personally, I'd say it wasn't stressful for either of them, so maybe it was means, right? Before the remedy which is the 3 maybe?

**Interviewer:** The 3 is slightly below average.

**Test person:** (...) Yes, 3 I would say.

**Minute 19**

**Interviewer:** Mhm, how did the current situation come about? A little bit, because what factors have influenced it? So you said you were talking about two children, do they both live with their father?

**Test person:** No, only the older [child1]. The older one lives with the father.

**Interviewer:** And the other child lives with you in the new relationship. And since when or was that the case, that the children stayed with you at first and at some point one child [child 1] switched to the father? Or how can I imagine that?

**Test person:** Well, he went to his father a year and a half ago. So 2 years ago we already had a lot of conflicts with the father. Actually, since the father moved in with his new partner. She's childless and can't have children and since then, really since then, it's been about the child.

**Interviewer:** Mhm.

**Test person:** Really. So if this woman didn't exist in his life, the children, the older child, would probably still be living with me. But she was very committed to... How do you say?

**Interviewer:** Employed?

**Test person:** Exactly. Maybe she had such a strong desire to have children, or I don't know....

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Test person:** Now I don't know. Do I have the question. Or not?

**Interviewer:** Yes, yes.

**Interviewer:** And the next question. You are now... Do you feel that the bond with your child has been disrupted or cut off by the other parent and if so, what do you think the reasons are? The father of the children?

**Test person:** The question again?

**Interviewer:** Do you have the feeling that the bond with your child, i.e. with your older child, has been disrupted or possibly cut off by the other parent? And the second question, which follows on from this, is who, what are the father's motives from your point of view?

**Test person:** You mean the bond between me and the older child? Was that cut off?

**Interviewer:** Exactly, exactly, that [child 1] now lives with the father. Does the partner have anything to do with this and is he perhaps even deliberately trying to disrupt this bond?

**Test person:** Yes, I don't know whether it's conscious or not. But I... The biggest offender is actually this woman and not the father. That's how I can see it, that's how I see it and (...) whether she consciously wanted to destroy it, I don't know. Probably yes. In any case, you wanted to have the child with you, for whatever reason. Have I answered that now?

**Interviewer:** Yes, yes. [...] Mhm okay and how long did the separation process take?

**Test person:** Back then with the separation from the father?

**Interviewer:** Back then. Exactly.

**Test person:** (...) Well, things weren't going well before. It was just the question for me, do I want to be a single parent, can I do it alone? So before that there were already a lot of conflicts and then once I came out of the cure, mother-child cure, and I realised that he had his ex-girlfriend visiting for several days, and then I realised, OK, I don't want to do this any more. That was the end of it and, and I must have spent about 3 months after that, I wasn't feeling well. Yes, I... I felt bad, but after that... That's when I met someone. And I felt better after that. So, the separation process was definitely hard for me for three months and then I felt better.

**Minute 24**

**Interviewer:** Mhm. [...] What consequences would you say the separation process had? Well, you said that for the children, they didn't really notice anything on the outside.

Well, for you they had just described, perhaps, if you can assess it, what consequences did the separation process have for the children's father? Did he move out and the children stayed with them, if I understood correctly?

**Test person:** Right.

**Interviewer:** Did he still see the children regularly or visit them? Or what was the relationship like at that time?

**Test person:** We already had a reasonably friendly relationship. He saw the children regularly when I had appointments myself in the afternoon, like parents' evening. Then he came at the weekend. I tended to take the children to him at the weekend because I wanted to have a few hours off and. Yes, he didn't really look after them then. So he wasn't very interested in the children, but he looked after them, so to speak. And yes, the contact was there.

**Interviewer:** Did you receive any support during the separation and if so, in what way, or if not, what would you have liked and from whom?

**Test person:** I had no support and of course his parents were on his side and not mine. And I had also considered whether I... Well, yes, my ex-partner had taken drugs at the time, not hard drugs, but cannabis, and I had considered once or several times whether to report it to the youth welfare office, but I was too afraid that the children would be taken away from me. I... Exactly, because then I might not be able to prove that I don't take drugs. And exactly, and I had no support. I did have good friends, but they were single parents themselves and had enough problems and difficulties of their own, so I couldn't count on their support. And I was afraid that I wouldn't be able to cope psychologically on my own, all by myself.

I actually went to the youth welfare office at some point and asked for household help. Or what's that called? No, family help exactly, family help. I also said that I actually take care of everything, it's just me... My worry is that I might run out of strength at some point and I want to be there for the children and then I had a great family helper. That's right, I went to the parenting advice centre. I attended courses that were somehow called "Supporting children in separation and divorce situations". That also helped me a lot. Exactly. But I didn't have anyone close to me who could have comforted me or anything like that. I had to somehow manage it on my own.... on my own.

**Interviewer:** Do you still have contact with your older child, who lives with the father, or has there been a complete break in contact?

**Test person:** Now again. I've been in contact again for 2 or 3 months, but of course it's not like before. The... We've somehow become strangers. I can.... When I want to say something or ask something, I think about how and what exactly I'm going to say. I don't ask personal questions. We talk about, yes, nothing personal about the father, not about the past. Everything that's happened here in the last two years. We don't talk about these conflicts. Although I'm often afraid before it comes, before we see each other. I'm worried that it could lead to a situation that triggers me and that I'll say something that I'll regret later. In other words, that it will come out because it hurt me so much in the past, and I have to be very careful, very precise. Always, always think about what I say and how I react or how I behave.

**Interviewer:** mhm.

**Test person:** So it's not an intimate behaviour.

**Interviewer:** Do you still have contact with the children's father?

**Minute 30**

**Respondent:** Only in writing, only via email. Exactly.

**Interviewer:** Mhm.

**Interviewer:** As a summarising question, how stressful is or was the alienation for you?

**Test person:** Very.

**Interviewer:** So 1 would be very low, 4 average and 7 highest stress level.

**Respondent:** For me 7 (...) 7

**Interviewer:** Mhm. And how stressful do you think the alienation is or was for your older child?

**Test person:** Also very, very stressful for the estranged child. I would also give it a 7.

**Interviewer:** Mhm. And is it the case that the two siblings still have contact with each other...

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** Or did you also break off contact?

**Test person:** No, they've always had regular contact.

**Interviewer:** Mhm. Okay. And this is the final question, the last question. As an adult, do you have an alienation process with your own child? And to what extent?

**Test person:** Yes, so she was alienated from me, so to speak. Was that the second question?

**Interviewer:** Exactly, so the question would be. Alienation is, yes, the child is alienated from the parent. And do they also feel a little alienated from their own child, that is, you have already mentioned that the bond has somehow been destroyed and. So your own child has become a bit of a stranger. Do you have that feeling or is it still somehow OK?

**Test person:** It is. I, I feel alienated from my child and... So I'm just saying from my side, I don't know how he sees it, but when I, so after every meeting, I was always sad because I realised or felt how alienated we had become. How alienated we had become from each other. That made me more sad than happy, happy ... I was more sad than happy after the meeting. (...) Yes.

**Interviewer:** Okay. That's it for our interview with our questions.

## **Farewell Minute 32**

### 10.4 Transcript anonymised Respondent 06 - Estranged mothers

#### **Greeting**

**Interviewer:** Okay, as I said, let's start with questions about yourself, the first of which is: How old are you?

**Test person:** Under 40.

**Interviewer:** Yes, and you grew up in Germany. But does your family have a migrant background?

**Test person:** No, I came to Germany when I was 24.

**Interviewer:** Okay. Well, how would you categorise the socio-economic status of your parents' home? 1. here we come to our scale. 1 is very low status 4 is average and 7 is very high or highest.

**Test person:** 3

**Interviewer:** What is your own socio-economic status on the same scale?

**Test person:** I would say 4.

**Interviewer:** Okay, what is your highest qualification to date?

**Test person:** University degree, university.

**Interviewer:** Yes, do you have siblings or half-siblings? If yes, what age and gender?

**Test person:** Yes, a sibling.

**Interviewer:** Mhm, OK. Did your parents stay together until you were of age?

**Test person:** Yes

**Interviewer:** And did your parents' parents stay together?

**Test person:** Yes

**Interviewer:** How is or how was your relationship with your mother? 1 would be extremely bad. 4 average, 7 excellent and perhaps why.

**Test person:** (...) Difficult to say. I think I would say 3 overall, because it has changed over the course of my life. (...) It was difficult. Just me, from about the age of 10. Where I was once 10 years old. I go now when I look back. I think my mum is such a narcissist.

**Interviewer:** Mhm.

**Test person:** For example, she controlled me a lot. She controlled me, then. (...) She actually controlled us all a bit. Overprotected on the one hand. She didn't let us try things out on the other hand, so she had a lot of fears, she was neurotic herself. On the other hand, she left us alone emotionally and often took her own tensions out on us. What else? Well, I think that if she had separated from my father, she would have become estranged, I think, as I see it now, because even then she kept not letting him do things

and then she was angry that he wasn't taking responsibility, so I always felt like we weren't his children. So in my case that was confirmed, actually, you kind of feel that, so I was already an adult, I found out by chance that he wasn't my biological father, but I never got to know my biological father, so that's the only one I know. No, but yes, it was always a feeling and there was a lot of emotional coldness, so I think she couldn't help it and I think she blamed us for a lot of things in her life.

**Interviewer:** How is or how was the relationship with your father? 1 is extremely bad, again 4 average and 7 excellent.

**Test person:** (...) 1

**Interviewer:** Okay that yes. From the experience you had in your parents' home, as a child or as a teenager, do you feel emotionally or did you feel emotionally equipped or prepared for adult life? 1 is extremely poor again 4 is average and 7 is excellent.

**Minute 5**

**Test person:** 2

**Interviewer:** 2 Okay. We would now move on to information about your health and the first question would be how you feel mentally at the moment, i.e. the current status, the first is extremely poor, 4 would be average again and 7 excellent.

**Test person:** (...) 4

**Interviewer:** 4 OK. How are you feeling physically, health-wise at the moment?

**Test person:** At the moment I've broken my foot. So (laughs)

**Interviewer:** Oh okay, if we could leave that out now.

**Test person:** Okay. (laughs) So just what...

**Interviewer:** Yes, so the normal state, that is better not the normal state.

**Test person:** 5.

**Interviewer:** OK, are you or were you undergoing psychological or psychiatric treatment? If so, how long, perhaps also why and whether there was a diagnosis, an official one?

**Test person:** I got the first Ah, are you oh, I didn't understand the first verb, are you called...?

**Interviewer:** Yes?

**Test person:** Not exactly at the moment, but I had depression, so exactly dystymia. Um, yes, after my, after my marriage, so after the separation, that was diagnosed. I also had a lot of psychosomatic, very strong psychosomatic symptoms, so yes, symptoms in my body. Which had no organic cause. So everything was examined, I think it was in connection with these things, a psychiatrist confirmed that for me. Yes, it also took a long time.

**Interviewer:** Mhm yes. Do you have any severe ones? You just said you had psychosomatic complaints, what were some examples of complaints, so what physical complaints did you have?

**Test person:** So very serious digestive problems. I had diarrhoea all the time, really all the time. I couldn't do anything, I couldn't go out, I could hardly work.

**Interviewer:** Yes, okay. We would now move on to the information about your family of origin and the first question would be, how would you categorise the conflict situations in your parental home? 1. very low, 4 average and 7 highest level of conflict.

**Test person:** 5.

**Interviewer:** 5. OK, that would be slightly above average.

**Test person:** Oh well, no, then it's difficult to say, it was very much like that, there was also this silence and this, this tension, which is not necessarily conflict, I don't know now 5 or 6.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Test person:** Maybe 6, maybe 6, yes.

**Interviewer:** Yes, ok. Did your parents involve you or your siblings in the parental conflict? If so, to what extent and perhaps in what form? And here we have another scale. 1 is practically none or rather unconscious. 4 is medium again and 7 is extreme.

**Test person:** 1, yes 1

**Interviewer:** 1, okay. How much conflict protection would you say you experienced as a child? 1 is highest conflict protection, 4 is average and 7 is very low conflict protection.

**Respondent:** Conflict protection in the sense? How is that meant?

**Interviewer:** That means that you were involved in conflicts, perhaps you were also taught how to deal with conflicts, that it is, if possible, with language and not with violence, that it is in that direction that the question is aimed a little bit.

**Test person:** Yes, yes, that was already given, I think. Yes. 5.

**Interviewer:** 5. That's the one, though, that would be slightly below average for me now.

**Test person:** Oh, that's different now.

**Interviewer:** Now it's the other way round. Exactly, so that would be

**Test person:** Then 3. No, yes, you are. 4 is average. 3.

**Interviewer:** Exactly 3 was slightly above average. How much attention did you receive overall as a child, again so that 1 is the highest level, 4 is average and 7 is very low.

**Test person:** Mhm is general from everyone, yes?

**Minute 10**

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Test person:** (...)

**Interviewer:** Or if that's not possible. You can also separate it, you can also say: There was a big difference between 2 people.

**Test person:** Yes, there was a difference between my mum and me. In any case, that was now, I don't know. 2 Yes, so this one. Is that the right scale?

**Interviewer:** Yes, you know that would be above average.

**Test person:** That's positive now, yes okay.

**Interviewer:** That's positive. Exactly.

**Test person:** Then, no, that would be 6, let's say. That wasn't much?

**Interviewer:** 6 That's the one under... exactly.

**Test person:** Mhm. And then, fortunately, there were also other people and now, all in all, grandma and grandad. My father, although he was always a bit on the sidelines. I have the feeling, and it wasn't regular. But all of them together provided a bit of a balance. I would say I got a lot from them. (...) Yes, 2 I think you could say that.

**Interviewer:** How strong would you say your current attachment to your attachment figures is? 1 is again the highest level and 7 is again very low.

**Test person:** And you mean caregivers? My parents now, right?

**Interviewer:** Are their parents, siblings, friends? Who they would define as a reference person.

**Test person:** That's very different again, because with my parents and my sibling, that's rather below average. Yes, and above average with friends. But I, well, I had an above-average bond with my children, definitely yes.

**Interviewer:** Okay. How much contact do you currently have with your attachment figures? 1 is again the highest level, 7 is very low, you can separate it again.

**Test person:** That's exactly what we have to separate, i.e. from my family, from my parents. That's rare. That's now (...) So the contact is there. We also visit each other. It's not so much because of the physical distance, but. Now, 3, that would be below average, yes.

**Interviewer:** 3 would be slightly above average.

**Test person:** Because the other way round, then 5 I say.

**Interviewer:** 5. Exactly 5 would be slightly below average.

**Test person:** Mhm and to other people, yes to a friend almost daily or actually daily to others too. Yes, that would actually be quite good. Yes, because sometimes you don't have that much time. But then we say 2 for example yes?

**Interviewer:** Okay, yes. Do you have or did you have contact as a child with family courts, youth welfare offices, lawyers? If so, in what form and how would you describe this relationship?



**Test person:** No.

**Interviewer:** Now we would like to move on to information about your own biological family, i.e. the family with your children. The first question is how would you categorise the conflict situation in your own biological family? 1 is very low this time and 7 is highest.

**Test person:** (...) That's difficult again because, for example, that's what is meant now, yes, at the moment or earlier, before I separated, when I separated.

**Interviewer:** Before they separated, that is, when they were still living together.

**Test person:** Yes, there were a lot of conflicts, not regularly, but there was a lot of tension. (...) Definitely above average.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Test person:** That would be.

**Interviewer:** So that would be, that would be a 6 above average.

**Test person:** Ne 6 in any case, yes. I think so.

**Interviewer:** Have you or the other parent, the children or the child been involved in the parental conflict? If so, to what extent? Again, 1 is practically not or unconsciously. 4 medium and 7 extreme.

**Test person:** (...) 4 I could say.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Test person:** That was different, but. Yes and rather yes. It was more the case that my ex-husband didn't really pay attention to whether the children noticed or not. All the arguments and sometimes he punished them, me so to speak, by waking them up, or, no, things like that, or that they got into trouble, no, with him so to speak, so without them knowing exactly that there was a conflict between us, I think.

#### **Minute 15**

**Interviewer:** How much conflict protection would you say your children have experienced? 1 is the highest level of conflict protection and 7 is very low.

**Test person:** (...) Difficult to say. I would say 4 on average, because I've always tried to balance it out somehow and of course, these are in the family directly, do you mean now?

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Test person:** Yes, ok. Yes, I think 4.

**Interviewer:** How much attention did your children receive in total now 1 again very high and 7 very low.

**Test person:** 1. very much.

**Interviewer:** 1. and when you say that it came from both sides equally, from the mother and the father, do you see that?

**Test person:** I think more of myself. The father was quite ambivalent, but he was also able to do that. He also gave that, because sometimes he could and sometimes he couldn't, but I was there more with the children and I was just always there, so to speak. So I think you've already received that, you've always demanded it, so you never had this fear or were shy, so a lot on your lap and so on.

**Interviewer:** How strong is your children's current bond with their carer? 1 is the highest level and 7 is very low again.

**Test person:** The relationship is actually good. Well, I have 3 children, 2 live with me, my older child [child 1 and lives with the father. I think, well, my older child has... I don't see it. I don't meet him. Complete loss of contact. But (...) this year there was still a situation where the father said, well, I always try to talk and it's a situation where he knows that he's allowed to, then, for example, the older child hugs me and that works, so I think that, well, with the children who are with me, I can say that the bond is good. Well, at the moment it's gradually getting worse with the father because he doesn't see them. So he doesn't just take them. Yes, there was a time when he picked them up, but not any more. And my big one. It's disturbed contact, but I don't think it's coming from the child and I hope it's not all broken because there are moments when it works out when he knows he's allowed to. Overall on a scale. (...) It's a bit dysfunctional, in any case. So if we say overall contact with both parents. (...) Now I don't know how to assess

that... Is it even possible in one or did you have to separate it because...? (...) I don't know.

**Interviewer:** Perhaps there are other people in your children's lives other than their parents? And how is the contact with them when we perhaps simply move away from the parents? Can you assess that better?

**Test person:** It's difficult with my older child because all contact has been cut, actually with my whole family. (...) And the little ones? They have a good bond, actually with everyone. (...) My big one too. (...) Yes, although it's critical. For example, contact with me is disturbed, I can't assess that now, I don't think contact with dad is as it should be because he doesn't trust himself, yes. The child [Child1] tends to adapt. That means it's already disturbed, it's a disturbed bond. Then you would have to say that it is difficult with [child1], that the bond is not good. It's better with the little ones, but of course that also leaves its mark and I think that they have no contact with dad, that it's not so good either, below average, then I think it's definitely below average. Maybe slightly below average.

**Interviewer:** Yes, ok. How old are your children at the moment?

**Minute 20**

**Test person:** My older child is under 18.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Test person:** Then [child2] is over 12 and [child3] is under 10.

**Interviewer:** OK. As a mother, do you have or have you had contact with family courts, youth welfare offices, lawyers, experts? If so, in what form and how would you describe this relationship?

**Test person:** Yes, unfortunately. In the course of custody and contact proceedings, many proceedings. (...) Yes, including divorce proceedings. I've had 3 lawyers so far. Er, how should I describe it? Traumatizing. I wouldn't wish it on anyone.

**Interviewer:** Okay, we have a few here, so there are a few aids for this question, namely is it helpful or not helpful, supportive or stressful, was it friendly and warm or rather emotionless and cold.

**Test person:** Everything negative, I have to name it straight away, so not supportive, really stressful, yes, so it's such a burden for me that at the moment, even now that I've had the accident, I was completely exhausted. Because I actually had a conversation with my lawyer. Yes, actually someone who should be supporting me, no, that's very stressful and exactly, not very helpful. No, the whole thing, when I look back now, I hope that this is the last trial and that we never do this again, yes, because. No, it was of little use.

**Interviewer:** Okay. Are you currently in a new, stable relationship?

**Test person:** No

**Interviewer:** No, okay. How stressful is or was the separation for you? 1 is very low and 7 is the highest stress level. And why?

**Respondent:** 7 Because my ex-husband didn't want to admit it and stalked me. He also started with the children, so at first he didn't pick them up as an excuse. He was always standing outside the door. And then he told me that he only wanted to see the children, yes, but he didn't want to agree to any arrangements, that we could plan anything. He wanted to have the children individually. That was difficult from the start, so at some point I went to court about it. In fact, to arrange contact, because the children were living with me for the time being. And then my ex-husband immediately declared war on me. He said you wanted war, then you'd get war, and that same week my older child moved to him, so to speak, so he didn't come back, yes, from a visit, yes. That was the stressful thing, that he used children, so to speak. So he was so hurt that he wanted revenge or had to do something, I think, and used the children. It was his revenge, or yes. But it wasn't consistent either. Yes, because it was always things like, we had several contact arrangements and none of them were honoured on his part, yes. Also the problem that he's still doing it to some extent. Yes, it's been 5 years and it's not going to be easy, not even the time, because it's so easy that it breaks you, you want.... (sigh) Just have peace and quiet.

And immediately after the separation it was very, very stressful. It was very often just that he was standing outside the door and didn't want to leave, I don't know, I got 100 messages a day and, and they were all kinds of messages and not much about the children. He was offended by the separation and that was very, very difficult. But then I couldn't rely on him either, because there was no arrangement, he didn't stick to the rules. If we tried to agree something because of the children, then he always cancelled it and, for example, didn't pick up [child 3], who was over 3 at the time, from kindergarten. (...) Yes, that was actually the most difficult thing...

**Minute 25**

**Interviewer:** Yes, what is the current status? Do you have shared custody of all the children or has that been finalised now?

**Respondent:** We have shared custody of all the children. I have sole right of residence for the 2 older ones. I have also applied for sole right of residence for [child 3] and I hope that I will get it, although the court is clearly avoiding the decision. On the grounds that my ex-husband has sometimes tried to alienate the child during visits. For example, he didn't bring the child home twice, only days later, and once he even travelled abroad with him and of course I didn't know whether he was coming. Yes, I know that the authorities should actually react and provide support, but I was left on my own there too and it's only to protect my child that I'm now insisting on this sole right of residence, because I can guarantee that my child will keep both parents. Yes, and it won't work the other way round. And I was simply told at the time by the police and the youth welfare office that I absolutely had to have this sole right of residence. I know that's rubbish, but. Unfortunately, that's the way it is. It doesn't work like the law, yes, that's why.

**Interviewer:** Hm, yes, how stressful do you think it was? Or was the separation stressful for your children? 1 is again a very low stress level and 7 is the highest.

**Test person:** 7

**Interviewer:** Which, which se... or what do you think are the motives of the other parent? To try to alienate the children from them or it worked with the older one.

**Test person:** I actually believe that he... There are several reasons. I actually believe that he (...) that it's the next level of violence. I experienced various forms of violence after the separation, during the separation and after the separation. These are his attempts to put me under pressure and to control me, because he keeps trying to come back to me after these 5 years, although I've never reciprocated in any way. It's actually, you could say, crazy yes, but I think he thinks he's trying to get me to do something or punish me. I always don't know. I think sometimes it's like this, sometimes like that, because his moods change very quickly sometimes. Yes, that is, I think no, in some moments he might have hope and make attempts. Because sometimes he invites me somewhere and suggests something and so on. And I think at that moment he means it in a positive way. Yes, sometimes he has actually said that if I came back to him, everything would be fine and we would manage with the children, I also believe that he would then stop alienating me, but on the other hand, I think he's starting to believe that he doesn't believe that any more and he wants to punish me for leaving.

I also think that he sees me as a bit of a mother figure. My ex-husband was alienated himself, so that's what I lacked before, this knowledge about it, I didn't know it, I didn't know it from my family. And he told me that and I thought it was something that always reassured him that he would never do something like that because he knows how bad it is. He was removed by his mum, yes. And I think he just repeats these patterns. But after a while I also thought that he would somehow stop. Yes, because at some point he had to go down there and then you see what, what, what's going on. But I suspect that. I don't know. He hurt so badly inside. Maybe he doesn't know that himself, but I don't think it's unconscious. I do believe that it's conscious on his part, because there were many moments where he was able to reflect on it or where I, where we spoke again and again. I have tried to do that. Yes, I don't blame him directly in the contact, so I also show him that all the structures didn't work and if someone had set him boundaries, that might have helped everyone directly. He may have simply followed these patterns, but I think

the strongest thing is, the strongest thing is punishment over me and this control over me, punishment, control, revenge, perhaps also because I left.

**Minute 30**

**Interviewer:** Yes, so the next question would be, how did the current situation come about or what factors influenced it? So you said that you separated and then your child, your eldest child, didn't come back and the two younger children?

**Test person:** One year later.

**Interviewer:** And the two younger children stayed with you?

**Test person:** Yes

**Interviewer:** Okay. (...) And what do you say? Are there certain factors that may have influenced this, especially the fact that the siblings are now separated, i.e. that one child has left and of course the others are younger, that can of course also be a factor. But do you see any reasons for this?

**Test person:** Yes, it's now possible that my older child isn't there. So first of all. They were here, simply because my ex-husband, well he was often, he couldn't take on the responsibility that I wanted to bear. He always said that three children were too much, even later, because he took them to visit. At first, he wasn't interested in taking the children to see me. There was never any question of that, so we never did. I also offered the alternating model at first, he wasn't interested at all, for example, yes. (...) Then he took [child 1] because, I think, it was just easy for him. (laughs) Yes, he made up his mind at that moment, he was already over 12, yes, and then it was, what I didn't know before, this with the will of the child. It was quickly played out in such a way that the child wanted it and I had nothing to say, yes, so in the sense, yes, he probably knew, maybe someone told him that, yes. But exactly.

And then he took the little ones, depending on the situation, so more often the very little one, less often the middle one, but he always took them individually where it suited him. He also made sure, for example, that the big one came to me during the first contact arrangement. So he was worried that I might start my new life. Yes, I'm not allowed to do that yet. He has a problem with that. (laughs) I think that was also supposed to be an element of control, yes, that he didn't want me to be completely alone without children. I should feel that I'm a single parent and that it's difficult. I think that's what he was thinking. And as I said, he didn't want them all at once. And there was also a moment when he also thought financially, because. (...) Yes, because 3 children is a lot of maintenance, although he's only just started paying, he hadn't paid for 2 months before that. And I think he wanted to balance things out a bit. He told me before the separation that he'd got tips from others at work, he knows what to do to avoid paying maintenance. (laughs) How to do that and (...) Yes, exactly. I think maybe financially too, so that it's balanced and then, when he tried to alienate the small child [child3] a year ago, a lot of people and I also thought along the lines that the big one would soon be 18. And then he needs another one, so that he doesn't have to pay maintenance for two, so that he gets maintenance and not to forget the tax class. Then he had it single parent tax class II. So I think that's important to him, things like that too.

[...]

**Interviewer:** Okay, and how long did the separation process take in total?

**Minute 35**

**Test person:** (...) It had already been several months. It was like that again and again, we had conversations. There were actually a few break-ups, because then he came back. We tried, almost a year before that. So I, it just wasn't nice, lots of conflict and sometimes violence, but my ex-husband didn't want to leave, yes. In the end, it was a few months. He didn't want to either, but at some point. (...) That's what happened and I didn't get involved again. It didn't lead to anything.

**Interviewer:** What consequences did this whole process have for you, for the children and for the children's father?

**Test person:** (...) Very great stress in any case. A lot of uncertainty. Very high stress. Psychological stress. (...) But also more (...) so shelter at home, for example, where we were alone to some extent, so there was still this stalking and so on, and sometimes it wasn't nice. And sometimes the children also witnessed it. That was bad, but in normal everyday life there was no longer that tension. So that was good for me. Financially, too, I somehow... I got back on my feet. It was difficult at first because I ... the father, so in the first year, and couldn't change, my ex-husband didn't want to deregister here either. It was very difficult and of course nobody believed me. Nobody believed me. If he didn't deregister and there was an advance and so on, none of them believed me, because supposedly you can deregister someone, but that's not true. Yes, so if someone says that it's only a temporary separation, then you can't deregister him either, that's how I experienced it, unfortunately, my ex-husband was able to speak quite well and has been able to do so up to now. (...) And got away with virtually everything. For example, he had all the money just like that, just because he said something without presenting anything. After child 1 moved, simply for re-registration, also in re-registration, child benefit and care allowance, because my child is [suffering from a developmental disorder].

**Interviewer:** Mhm. Yes, did you receive support during this process? If so, in what way? So you said yes, youth welfare offices and so on, not really, but was there any other support or if no, what would you have liked and perhaps from whom?

**Test person:** (...) Well, not really from the state structures. I got help from friends, yes, but that was also a bit too little because we couldn't be here locally, and the difficult thing was always when my ex-husband was at the door or something like that, so I think if someone here had stopped him, in time or later, I would have liked more consistency from all sides. More concrete attempts to start some kind of solution and then to consistently see what has already happened. Yes, and not just keep suggesting the same thing or not suggesting anything at all, just saying that we need to communicate and this, which nobody needs. I would also like to see that in a situation like this, you simply. (...) I don't know, maybe something like systemic therapy for everyone. Or very quick counselling, but really for everyone, and counselling that isn't afraid of a screaming man, yes. That's rare, I think. I've been to a lot of places, yes.

We went to mediation twice, for example. But the mediation, for example, I did the first 7 times on my own. With the mediator, because that's how it is. Yes, then at some point my ex-husband wanted to go and the mediator [...] so we worked something out and the next time my ex-husband revoked it and the mediator no longer responded. He did... well then, yes then we'll keep running. So before that I was there 7 times and this talking without end, without a solution, without trying and looking okay here it doesn't work. Then maybe we'll change, but we'll start something practical, the children are suffering now, not at some point. How long can we talk? I think I've had enough of this talking.

Also counselling sessions where my ex-husband freaked out and wanted to forbid me to go on holiday with the children. To the family, yes. (...) There were no consequences there either and such sessions were practically impossible. I even had perpetrator-victim balancing at the scales, if you know that, don't you? In [a town in Lower Saxony] there's definitely this centre that does victim-offender mediation because he stalked me for so long. And my conditions were practically only related to the children, that he would comply with the conditions, I had 3, I wanted him to stop stopping me, I wanted him to finally agree to a settlement, that we would have something without court. (cries) And then I wanted something else. I don't know about 3 conditions, after an hour of talking I just had a headache, the counsellor gave up and then said, no, because my ex-husband only wanted to agree to one condition, that he wouldn't stalk me any more. He said okay and I said, that's, that's easy, why do I even need that? Then we signed something like that. Yes, that was for the public prosecutor's office and he didn't honour it (laughs) yes, so yes, yes. So I mean counsellors as a whole. The, the, they don't have this strength, or very often somehow the one who is prepared to act violently, somehow or aggressively, yes, you can also observe that, that's not good for the children either, children are left to that, yes and? The other parent, the other parent, out of consideration for their children,

can't do anything, so to speak, because they would have to tug at the child, which they don't want to do, yes (...)

So I would want this protection, this protection for my children or support in protecting my children. Yes, because I can't do anything if, if, if my ex-husband can turn up at the door at any time and the police come and say I have to talk to him because he said he wants to see the children, yes. But the case is currently in court. Yes, and he gets away with everything, so this consistency and the way the structures work. Me, personally, I actually blame the structures for what's going on, because I think my parents themselves, yes, maybe we make mistakes, I realise that. I don't want to defend my ex-husband either. I know what he does and has done and I also make mistakes, so that's not the case. But I believe that. I see it that way. Parents are more or less entitled to make mistakes. They're only human, everyone has the right to make mistakes. But I think more parents have a right to the children. Yes, they are involved. Yes, I don't know why, the picture has just become small. Ah yes. I can't make it big, but they can see me, yes?

### **Minute 43**

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Test person:** Then it's, it's, it doesn't matter. (...) And the others are the outsiders and I sometimes have the feeling that they see it all very critically and they take a lot of rights and stuff. If my ex-husband is estranged, then of course that's wrong, but those are his, his mistakes as a father. He has, he is the father of these children. He's not an outsider, yes. And the others should intervene, intervene sensibly, I think that's important. But not in the sense that they are more important and know everything better than the parents. Because it's not like that, but that's how I often felt. I also had this (...) feeling that we parents were somehow.... In court, for example, we are depersonalised, even parents are always called the petitioner and the respondent. And not, (...) not by their names, for example yes or the child's mother, the child's father, yes, this impersonalisation and children are always called by their names. Yes, so that's it. (...) Exactly, but I wanted to say something important and (...) What was the question again?

**Interviewer:** The question was, what consequences did the trial have for them, for the children and for the children's father?

**Test person:** What successes are evident?

**Interviewer:** Yes, so what were the consequences of this process?

**Test person:** Oh, consequences, what consequences, what consequences, yes. (...) So that was, it was very stressful and through all these processes, all these, all these agencies involved. I think it was only then that the estrangement really came about, my ex-husband also told me that in part, he said: You wanted war, you'll get war. And that week, my older child went to him and didn't come back. My ex-husband was still standing there that week, ringing the doorbell for four hours and the police came because there was another child with us who couldn't come home. The mum didn't dare pick it up. And then the police looked at everything, even though applications had been made for contact arrangements and so on, but they took my older child out of bed. It was always the case that he was the worst person to deal with the argument and then crawled into bed. They wanted to talk to the child. I was naive at first and said, yes, no problem. [...] I wasn't present during the conversation because I always thought it was a bit private. Not that I was influencing the child. Then, I leave it, because behind the door, I don't know what was said there, in any case after the conversation with the father, the police officers say, oh, they have to talk to him [the father], they have children together (...). No, he only wants to see the children and they weren't interested in talking to the witnesses, for example. They [the police officers] weren't interested in seeing that the child was actually constantly with the father and with him yesterday and, and I also spoke to him on the phone, I was able to show them everything, they didn't want to see that. And I see this as a direct consequence of the fact that my older child went to his father again that week. So I think he believed, he also told me, Mum, maybe it's easier for you, the child [Child1] watched the whole thing. Yes, and it was big enough to understand what was going on and how difficult it was, but it was still too young (...) to

go to the father. To distance himself from his father. And then it was just there. So the police were here on Monday. A few days before that I made the application. So the court was involved and the lawyers, then the police were there and he said it was war, my ex-husband and then the child, who thought it was about him. In fact, because they only talked about this child and I think it thought that if it went to dad now there would be peace. And it actually became quiet because my ex-husband got what he wanted. That was, those were the consequences for all of us, the alienation really wasn't, yes.

#### **Minute 48**

**Interviewer:** Do you still have contact with the children's father or not at all or only enforced contact through the courts?

**Respondent:** I have contact with him, again only he (...) via Whatsapp. He rarely writes about the children. So it's not regular, or over the phone, phone also in the email, allegedly he blocked me because I always wanted to write emails if possible, sometimes he doesn't pick up letters, so that's unreliable if something important is going on. But by WhatsApp, yes. That's what he wanted from the start, because he blocked his old phone number a bit. I wanted to contact him by email because he insulted me and it was a lot of impulsive things. I didn't like it, but he insisted at every counselling session that I unblock him again and contact him via WhatsApp. That's why we have this contact, because that's what he wants.

**Interviewer:** Mhm and how is it? Do you still have any contact with your eldest child or not at all, or...?

**Test person:** I haven't had any contact for several years. I am allowed to write letters according to (laughs desperately) our agreement. I'm allowed to write 2 letters, 2 languages. I always write to him in German and in my mother tongue they said I have to write the same in my mother tongue, which I do. They tried to take that away from me, too. In other words, to forbid me to use this language, actually in the course of this agreement. But it exists, and that's what I do.

Nevertheless, I always try to negotiate with the father or talk to him where I can and this year at the beginning of the year the father actually had the idea, because it always has to come from him. He sees everything I suggest as if I don't know what to do and that's not allowed, so I wait, so I talk to him, but wait for his suggestion. It actually came about that he suggested to me in winter that I see my older child, because he said, yes, I realised that. It's important that the child sees you. And so I've been here five times. My child has visited us here five times. As if on cue, yes, and it was good, it wasn't completely like before, but almost like before. The child felt good the last time. He spent the night here twice, even three times, three times with an overnight stay, twice without. They said it was a regular thing because the father realised that. And that was the will at that point. So much for the will of the child, yes. (...) And it was regular, but five times. The last time was an overnight stay from Friday to Saturday and the next time [child 1] was supposed to come on Tuesday, after school for three hours. And when he left, he gave me a hug and thanked me. It was very nice and very nice, actually, and told me, Mum, I'll be back in 3 days, so I'll be back on Tuesday. But the next day, my ex-husband cancelled it. And when I, but it was for I don't know how many times, this time I wanted to say goodbye to my big man and give him the keys to the flat as a symbolic gesture, yes, because gifts had already come back shortly before, so I always left them here on the doorstep. Yes, what I sent by post.

Then I went to school and when he saw me, the child, he said, Mum, I'll be back in three days. I was actually there on Wednesday because I was, er, afraid that my ex-husband might suspect it or something and would be waiting outside the school or whatever, I went there on Wednesday, so four days later than it was here, so to speak. The child saw me and just ran away in a panic. All her friends were surprised and shouted. [Name of child 1], your mum is here and so on. Just ran away, I could only speak to the friends who didn't know anything about it and give them the key, just and say that they'll tell

them that I love [name of child 1] and so on, yes, but that was all at the push of a button. That's what it looks like.

And the other day, I can tell you, a relative was here two days ago. And we were just before school, otherwise I don't really go there. I wouldn't do that on my own now either, so that the child doesn't think I'm trying to harass him or whatever. And my child's birthday is coming up soon. I won't be able to go there with my foot. Er, the child got the €50 from Grandma, my relative gave it to the child, they accepted the money, thanked me, spoke to the relative and came to me. We were able to talk well. My child showed me photos on her mobile phone. We said goodbye, he gave me a kiss, which was also very nice. And I was able to give him another €50 from me quickly. I thought, well, at least I'll try. The child took that too, but I had it today, that was two days ago. Today I had this in the letterbox with a letter (...) short letter that the child had to write again. It was all pretty unpleasant. That's what it looks like. I keep trying so that the child has a reminder and so that I can give him a present, so that he has something (voice breaks) from us here, because he doesn't see his siblings either.

#### **Minute 55**

**Interviewer:** Yes, we now have 2 more rather summarising questions. The first would be how stressful is or was the alienation for them 1 very low and 7 highest stress level.

**Test person:** (...) Very high. I would say the highest.

**Interviewer:** And how stressful do you think the alienation is or was for your children?

**Test person:** (...) For all of them together. So I almost think...

**Interviewer:** But perhaps also if there is a difference between your eldest child and the two younger ones, because they have each experienced it differently.

**Test person:** It's very stressful for everyone and I can't even estimate it for my big one. I just see the child too rarely. He seems to have come to terms with it somehow, but that can't be right. So many relationships have been cut, including the one he had such a good relationship with, his relatives, grandma and grandad. I think that's very stressful for the child. So I would say the highest level.

**Interviewer:** That brings us to the last question and that is, did you experience a process of alienation with him, with your own child, as an adult and to what extent?

**Test person:** Alienation process with my child?

**Interviewer:** So, your child was alienated from you, but do you also feel alienated from your child? So practically the other way round exactly.

**Test person:** Oh, that I am. (...) No, I'm not estranged. No, I don't think the relationship can break down, I don't think that's what I feel towards my child, but of course it's weakened. So it's there, you're there, you're constantly tormented, so you miss them a lot more. So (...) and of course, something falls, because I don't know anything about the child now. I don't know what it likes now and what it does and what it wants for its birthday, for example. I don't know his friends, so there's a lot missing. So I don't think the relationship itself is broken. So feelings, but. (...) But on the other hand, the child is gone, as if it had died. You can compare that to grief. (...) Permanently.

#### **Farewell**

#### **Minute 58**

### 10.5 Transcript anonymised Respondent 07 - Estranged mothers

#### **Greeting**

**Interviewer:** I would just start with the questions straight away, if that's OK.

**Test person:** That's OK, yes (laughs).



**Interviewer:** The first question is: How old are you?  
**Test person:** I am over 40.  
**Interviewer:** You grew up in Germany, but do you have a migrant background?  
**Test person:** No.  
**Interviewer:** No, how would you categorise the socio-economic status of your parental home, i.e. from 1 very low 4 average and 7 very high?  
**Test person:** (...) 6  
**Interviewer:** OK. And your own socio-economic status?  
**Test person:** That's from 1 to 7 again?  
**Interviewer:** Exactly the same scale.  
**Test person:** (...) 5  
**Interviewer:** Okay, what is the highest qualification you have achieved so far?  
**Test person:** University connection, state examination  
**Interviewer:** Exactly, it's actually relatively basic questions. Do you have siblings? If so, what age or gender?  
**Test person:** I have 2 siblings who are older than me.  
**Interviewer:** Okay, did your parents stay together until you were of age?  
**Test person:** Mhm. [Agreement]  
**Interviewer:** Yes, OK. Do your parents' parents stay together?  
**Test person:** Yes.  
**Interviewer:** How is or how was the relationship with your mother from 1 is extremely bad, 4 is so average and 7 is excellent and why was that so?  
**Test person:** (...) I would say about 5 (...) no, let's go for 4 (laughs). So if... question was in the past tense, now it's really good as an adult. And when (...) I don't know if I'm allowed to say it so bluntly, I found my mum. I kind of thought Mum, do something. I thought it was a shame that she was just a housewife like I used to think. Now, as a mum of 3 children, I just think it was pretty outrageous what I thought. But I wished I had a mum who also had other hobbies and, and, and interests other than keeping the cutlery in the cutlery drawer.  
**Interviewer:** Okay yes, and how is or was the relationship with your father. Again on the same scale from 1 to 7?  
**Test person:** (...) That was more I don't know, I said four with my mum there. Then I think I would rather say 3. (...) Because I found him very, very rarely at home, very busy and as an independent person, very absent. And when he was there, he was very, very judgemental. Controlling, judgemental like that. And I found that totally unpleasant.  
**Interviewer:** OK, yes, and would you say that the experience at home made you feel very emotional, also in terms of how you grew up, again from a scale of 1 to 7.  
**Test person:** I need that question again. I didn't understand it. (laughs)  
**Interviewer:** So the exact wording would be based on the experience at home: Do they feel emotional? So they are, they are like that, yes.  
**Test person:** (...) That I think emotionally, react emotionally and so on?  
**Interviewer:** Exactly, react emotionally to the experience you had there as a child or adolescent.  
**Test person:** Now I have to answer on the scale again?  
**Interviewer:** Exactly.  
**Test person:** (...) 6  
**Interviewer:** It's so that we can compare it with everyone. Exactly, now we would move on to information on health. The first question would be how they feel about their mental health. In the current status quo and there would also be a scale from 1 to 7 (...).  
**Test person:** The rays alone could make me cry. (...) 2  
**Interviewer:** 2. OK. So why, if you don't want to answer something, that's completely OK. You can just say you don't want to. (...) Are you or were you undergoing psychological or psychiatric treatment?  
**Minute 5**  
**Test person:** Exactly, in psychotherapy, both. Always, currently yes.

**Interviewer:** Okay and how long was that? And if I may ask, how, why and is there a diagnosis?

**Test person:** (...) That was somehow from [year] to [year]. It was kind of like that to cope with the separation, so to speak, and now again since my child left a few years ago. And the therapist is finding it really difficult to make a proper diagnosis. In terms of billing, she described it as an adjustment disorder. And now she had to somehow get an extension, an authorisation extension, and then she also wrote something like depressive phases or mood disorders or something like that.

**Interviewer:** OK. (...) Do you also have severe physical complaints or is it just psychological?

**Test person:** (...) But I do, I feel stressed a lot and that has a physical effect.

**Interviewer:** Mhm. Yes. Right now it's information about your family of origin. The first question would be, how would you categorise the conflict situation in your own parental home? From 1 very low to 4 average and 7 again highest conflict situation.

**Respondent:** (...) 4.

**Interviewer:** If there were parental conflicts, did your parents involve you or the children in them or did they just resolve them among themselves, and if so, to what extent were you involved?

**Test person:** It was through, it was mixed. (...) And sometimes involved, because I (laughs) also have a very temperamental mother, who was somehow really (...) loud. So (...) How should I put it? Just to hear, because she thinks something is stupid. So to speak.

**Interviewer:** Yes, so would you say it was more unconscious that they did that?

**Test person:** Yes, yes, well. It wasn't one of those, no, it wasn't. I want to tell you how daft I think your father is or how daft I am. So if something like that was meant consciously. No, then it wasn't.

**Interviewer:** OK. How much conflict protection did you experience as a child? Just now when you say it was unconscious? (...) So it's again on a scale from 1 to 7.

**Test person:** (...) I think I would say something like that again, like a four normal thing, because I don't know about other conflicts that (...) were adult conflicts, where it was about economic things or something like that. I was just saying to my parents the other day how much I appreciate the fact that we kept the children out of it or never let them feel that they might have been in unpleasant situations or something, yes.

**Interviewer:** Yes, how much attention did you receive overall as a child? That we are again from 1 to 7?

**Test person:** (...) already 5, yes

**Interviewer:** And how strong is your current bond with your carers? So is it parents or siblings?

**Test person:** 1

**Interviewer:** Mhm and how much contact do you currently have with your carers?

**Test person:** They don't all live here and we're in touch a lot, sometimes on a daily basis, sometimes in more detail and sometimes just via WhatsApp. We're connected with a quick photo in between or phone calls and often visit each other or go on holiday together once a year. Or we meet up at one of my siblings' houses, they live in the middle, so to speak. Sometimes for a we PAnd.

**Interviewer:** Did you or did you have...

**Test person:** Should I always answer in such detail or is there enough time? I don't know right now. You'll have to slow me down (laughs).

**Interviewer:** No, everything is fine, as you wish. [...] Background information always helps us too.

**Test person:** Okay, good.

**Minute 10**

**Interviewer:** Do you have or did you have contact as a child with family courts, youth welfare offices, lawyers, experts? Anything like that?

**Test person:** No.

**Interviewer:** No, okay. Would you have the (...) okay, if you didn't have that, then the question doesn't apply. Then we would now move on to information about your own family, i.e. with your children. There is again the question of how you would categorise the conflict situation with your own biological family, from 1 very low to 7 very high.

**Test person:** 7

**Interviewer:** Did you or the other parent of the children involve the children in the parental conflict?

**Test person:** Yes, the other parent.

**Interviewer:** Okay, what would you say? 1 is practically not or unconsciously and 7 is extreme. How would you categorise this and in what form did it happen?

**Respondent:** 7 and in the form of conversations about things that are not suitable for children's ears. In the form of conversations about me. (...) So content that is not suitable for children, but also word choices that put the children in conflict. Actions that somehow let the children know that "mummy is nothing". (...) Or conversations with others. And. So with dad living in the flat share, so to speak, they [father and child] got together. Talking to the flatmates, so to speak, knowing that the child is sitting on the sofa and just kind of watching a programme but has ears.

**Interviewer:** Half-listening, yes. How much conflict protection did your children experience overall? Again from 1, the highest level of conflict protection would be very low at 7.

**Test person:** Is that all right with me?

**Interviewer:** Maybe from them, if they can just say it from both sides, from you and maybe from the father.

**Test person:** (...) So if I were to categorise the father as having very low conflict protection, then that would be a 7 and then I would have to somehow average myself out. I wouldn't consider myself to be a 1, because I think that with unconsciously and by breathing here or somehow hesitating there, I'm sure I'd also somehow escape the mood. These are. 2. something between 2 and 7 then.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Probandin:** Do you have to be in the picture then what? Because that then 3.5 yes.

**Interviewer:** Yes, that would be in the middle, so 4 would be an average of 3, so slightly above average and 5 slightly below average.

**Test person:** Yes, then he is still towards 5.

**Interviewer:** Okay, how much attention did your children receive overall? And perhaps there is also a difference that you see between the two parties.

**Respondent:** I think we express affection in a completely different way, whereas I express it in terms of time, interest, activities, activities, reading aloud, cuddling (sobs). It's somehow more like that on dad's side. So more like measurable things. A lot of freedom in terms of media use, extravagant toys or something and also a (...) very willing fulfilment of all wishes, like that. Now they're making numbers out of it. (laughs)

**Interviewer:** [...] How strong is the current bond between your children and their carers? Perhaps What would you say the attachment figures are at the moment?

**Test person:** Yes, exactly. I have 3 children and the eldest has already moved out. So he's studying abroad and has a different dad to the two younger ones. And he has a very strong bond with me as his mum and also with his dad. And we also have a very relaxed exchange and that (...) between me and his father or between me and his paternal family, so to speak. So that I can also deal with that. Bonus mum and the siblings he has there, so we do a lot together. What was the question? (laughs)

**Minute 15**

**Interviewer:** How strong the current bond between your children and their carers is.

**Test person:** Yes, so he has a strong and I think healthy bond with both his parents and the two younger ones, who are over 10 years old. And I haven't seen [child 1] for a long time now. I think he has a very strong, very strong, but not at the same time healthy bond with his dad and with me (...) from the outside, none at all. But I can't imagine that

you can completely cut someone off like that. And I think that somehow, it's still something that I can't measure. Somehow like that.

**Interviewer:** OK.

**Test person:** Ah yes, exactly, and then I have another child [child 3], I think it lives on with me and (...) I think it's just looking for it. So it always gives me something different (...) I think the child feels well connected to me and we are well connected. And that's quite sustainable and with her dad she sometimes doesn't know, he's sometimes there, sometimes present, sometimes not and sometimes wild. He also tries to grab her and pull her over to his side. And then she reacts very indignantly or tries to tip over. And says Ey, so my dad, now go with mummy again, you're my parents, you have to work it out. And then again it just wants him to love it. And now I think it stays. He stifles some comments or bites his tongue.

**Interviewer:** As a mother, do you have or have you had contact with family courts, youth welfare offices, lawyers? And if so, in what form? And how would you describe your relationship with each of these institutions?

**Test person:** (...) I have, we had once over 5 years ago, the second one didn't bring the children back after a contact and wanted to keep them with her and had clarification from the youth welfare office. And they were very helpful and open and mediating. And then a few years later he took the same steps again and didn't bring my one child back. In the meantime, another youth welfare office was responsible due to a move and there was a member of staff who saw a lot and also formulated and addressed a lot. And provided us with help in the form of family therapy. (...) And I thought the youth welfare officer was great, but at some point he threw in the towel because he was overworked at the office and left. (...) At the same time, looking back, he always said that the most important thing for him was to avoid court proceedings, so to speak, and looking back and talking to other parents, I think I should perhaps have done that much earlier (...). Yes, exactly. And he was replaced by a colleague who just wanted to get rid of us. Who always said it was a parenting thing. Go to educational counselling, bye-bye. That's exactly what I didn't want to admit to the second employee as a (...) form of helplessness. Maybe that's how I understood it, and also with little regard for the children. When I was there, it was also important to me that the children, the siblings, who are only 18 months apart, that they were supported, and that was the case. So yes, there. (...) No, I didn't find much help there. Exactly.

And then this year my still-husband somehow started court proceedings of his own accord after I always didn't want that and had the way for me. It's my way of showing love by not involving the children in the court proceedings, but then the father started court proceedings to take custody of our child away from me. And we got a very young, very insecure (...) judge. (...) Who probably has the feeling that she doesn't really know what I should do and is going down this relevant path. The child has to calm down, the mother has to get out of the game.

(...) When did I do that? Right there. But a guardian ad litem was involved who didn't even want to talk to me.... After the conversation with my child, he said he'd heard enough. And I had to fight hard to get him to talk to me. That's exactly what lawyers were?

**Interviewer:** Exactly. Lawyers, family courts, experts, youth welfare offices.

**Minute 19**

**Test person:** I got a lawyer through this call for fathers for children, a recommendation, and I'm quite happy with it. But I always had that feeling when other parents say that it's somehow a real money-making machine, these cases. Of course, I'm also a bit impressed now. And of course these hours are an incredible drain on my wallet. (...) But I still feel that I'm in really good hands with her and on the other side I'm experiencing a family lawyer who takes a maximally destructive approach and somehow gets everything out in terms of tips. Obviously, if you can block something, prevent something or somehow bring about maximum family destruction. Exactly. And on top of

that, you're somehow also a lawyer yourself. Simply that. Litigation is his big thing. And it's about winning. And yes.

Yes, the expert report has just started. The expert my lawyer suggested has been appointed. A very experienced older gentleman. And because of the way he summarised things in the interview, from me or by asking me questions, I had the impression that a lot would come out of it and I don't have high hopes, but I would like it to be documented so that I can always show my child, look, Mr so-and-so has also attested that mum is completely normal.

**Interviewer:** Yes, so legally speaking, do you currently still share custody of all 3 children or have there already been decisions?

**Test person:** No, it didn't exist yet. We share it on paper, so to speak, and I can only do it for one child [child3]. The older one is over 18, the (...) is out anyway and I can exercise it for my child [child3] and for the other child [child1], who is no longer there, I have it, but it's no use to me. So, there are areas of concern that worry me a lot. And I don't get any information about how things are going with medical matters alone or anything like that. Now it's parent-teacher conference day and I have the feeling. I'm not getting any answers. In the meantime, the child is at boarding school because Dad could no longer afford to look after him. Suddenly I'm no longer getting any answers. Then I think to myself, ok. (...) So I've reached the point where I simply can no longer fulfil my care and duties as a mother.

**Interviewer:** Mhm. Are you currently in a new committed relationship or have you done so? In the last, I don't know, one to three years.

**Test person:** No, not exactly in that period.

**Interviewer:** OK. (...) How stressful is or was the separation for you? 1 again very low, 4 average, 7 highest stress.

**Test person:** It's been a while, but recently you thought (...) so 7, because it was quite a ruckus. And it's such a drama queen, so everything went off with as big a bang as possible and insecurity on all levels too. So we can stay in the flat, is it (...) Is everything going to go on like this? Yes, no? That was stressful and also yes and he disappeared straight away, the father. So he was no longer available to me and therefore the children and it was like he was gone. So I had to do a lot, not just look after myself, but also the children and.

**Interviewer:** And how would you say it was stressful or how would you rate it? How stressful was the separation for your children? On the scale...

**Test person:** So from the outside it was more stressful for my child, who is now gone. (...) It was a big 6. My child [Child3] seemed robust, but I can't guarantee what was really inside, of course. All in all (...) Yes, a 6 for both of them. Yes, OK.

**Interviewer:** So do you have the feeling that your bond with one of your children, in the case of [child 1], has been disrupted or cut off by the other parent? And what are your reasons for the other parent doing this?

**Test person:** So yes, we were stopped or the bond was cut. And I think. I suspect that it's offence. (...) Sometimes I think whether I'm also afraid... the father lost a child with another woman many years ago on the day of the birth. Sometimes I also think it's a case of "I want to keep it" and I'm actually worried. Maybe losing that too and therefore becoming extra attached. Sometimes I feel like I'm taking revenge because I'm not dancing along to the divorce according to the rules he sets. Or would have liked to. Yes, that's what they are. Grievances and revenge are what dominate for me.

### **Minute 25**

**Interviewer:** How did this current situation come about? Especially that the children are now living separately with one parent and what factors may have influenced this?

**Test person:** In retrospect, the application to withdraw custody said something to the effect that the child had always realised since he was over 5 that he wanted to live with dad one day. So I have the impression that it was never communicated to me. (...) So I believe that the child has been worked on for a very long time. When you get to class so

and so and the fifth, then you live with me and then we make it nice, something like that. The question was how it came about, right?

**Interviewer:** Exactly. So how did the situation come about?

**Test person:** I think by persistently influencing (...) my children. Whereby with my one child this was found on different ground and my other child [child3] was simply more stable. And in the end (...) there was one evening where I had an argument with my child [Child1]. An argument about mobile phone usage times and then he got up and had his dad pick him up on the next street and resolved the conflict for himself. (...) But I think the child had been in conflict for a long time. I found lots of notes and messages here on the kitchen shelf (laughs), like this, like this, again and again, and I thought it read in a different light now. So quite often, "I love you so much", so I think he already knew that it was somehow weird and not okay what the child sometimes believes or hears about me. And somehow had to show me that again sometimes. So "I love you" or a note like that still hangs here. "Mum, sometimes I feel really sorry for you." Oh, so that's something that was working on the inside and really tore it up. (...) And the situation was exacerbated by the fact that the father completely restricted communication with me. When I pushed ahead with the divorce proceedings because I just wanted to sort it out. It became very, very, very difficult. So he stopped communicating with me at all. Was there anything else in the question?

**Interviewer:** No, that was it. How old were your children when the decision was filed? And perhaps there had already been a separation before that or the divorce was the official step where you or someone else moved out.

**Respondent:** So the separation was (...) over 5 years ago, and then [child1] was over 6 and [child3] under 5. And when (...) the one who left now was over 10 and [child3] (...) under 10, is that right? Yes, (...) Yes. My divorce isn't over yet, so I always thought that if I was really nice and kind, he'd pull the rope again afterwards and pay for the children, but leave me alone at that point. My tactics didn't work. That's why we're still in it.

**Interviewer:** Yes, what consequences did this whole process have for you, for the children? For the family itself. Perhaps also for your husband, yes.

**Test person:** (...) I can't tell you anything about the consequences for my still-husband. I think it was also a kind of stress somehow. The new concept of life that he tried to live afterwards with 2 residences, 2 children with me and another with another woman, all of that somehow in addition to our independence in 3 locations here again, and somehow getting it all under one roof. I imagine that's incredibly exhausting. (...) And then to finance everything that he thought he had to do. For the children. (...)

I notice that my child [child 3] has a great fear of loss, so much so that he thinks it's totally awful if any FSJ students or similar leave school after a year, then he feels personally abandoned. It's connected to the separation or the divorce. And also the way it happened. And my child [child1]. (...) was (...) not able to adjust well, he started school straight away in 2, 3, 4 months after his dad left and was unable to find a good start at school or get involved in anything and was always thinking more about his separated parents or his dad, whom he missed so much. And when he knew that his dad was at work nearby on such and such a day, he would get a stomach ache trying to get his dad to pick him up at school. In other words, to gain dad time. (...) Exactly, it was also quite angry. Or he also withdrew so, so much and often wished he could be with his grandmother on his father's side, who also lives nearby, and once said to me, I like being there so much because I don't always have the issue of separated parents in front of me.

### **Minute 31**

**Interviewer:** Have you received support throughout this process, whether from friends, other family members, other institutions, therapists, whatever?

**Test person:** Yes, I grabbed whatever I could or we had a great neighbourhood network. Do I have to say a number?

**Interviewer:** No, you can, you could tell me to what extent if you want to, but you don't have to.

**Test person:** No, it was there, there was a lot of help and a lot of willingness to help. And at the same time, a friend of mine had just broken up with me and said that she didn't have any... So she wanted to apologise again for perhaps not being there as much as she should have been. Because she didn't realise what that meant at the time. (...) But there was a big, good, stable network.

**Interviewer:** Are you still in contact with your husband? Yes, good, contact with you, that's what you said. And do you think a reunion with the child, in this case your younger child [child 1], is possible from your point of view?

**Test person:** Sometimes I just think that. Then again I think, no, I don't think it's possible to pick it up again and yes, of course I think that, because otherwise what else? I don't think it's necessarily easy and not in the way I sometimes dreamed it would be. And I've ruled out it moving back in here or something. But it would be a reapproach for me. I have no idea that I'd meet up every three months on a walk or something like that, or to talk on the phone once in a while, so even lower-threshold, that would be accepted again for me.

**Interviewer:** Yes, how stressful is or was this separation from your child [child1] for you again from 1 to 7? Why and perhaps [child3] also helped that there was another child living at home?

**Test person:** I found it extremely stressful. 7! (sighs). Was the question what helped?

**Interviewer:** Whether [child3] perhaps had an effect, because one child had just left. One child was still at home.

**Test person:** Well, on the one hand, it fuelled my pain to see how it was suffering. And on the other hand, it was also nice that someone familiar was still there. (...) And I was very, well, I absolutely didn't want him to think that the child had to compensate for something or be particularly harmonious or something. Or please me or something. Or something. (...) What did I want to say? And I was really pleased when we somehow, I don't know, had a different opinion about something or other. But the fact that it was there, that the child kept coming back, although I'm still afraid to this day, well not afraid. But I was worried that it would turn up again after the we PAnds, that the child would be brought back. But that helped me immensely in any case and also something like ne. (...) giving me a sense of purpose and structure. (cries)

**Interviewer:** How stressful do you think it was for your other child [child 1], if you can assess it at all? Maybe, if you just want to say a number, that would be enough.

### **Minute 35**

**Test person:** Then I can only do it. So I also think it's an extreme experience. He was also 7 and (...) his child and adolescent psychiatrist at the time told me that he had more or less lost his way. And that he was stuck in a dead end but couldn't get out of it without losing face. I thought at the time that he needed help. From the father's help, that [child3] could get out of it again without losing face. So I imagine that was extremely stressful for the child and I also believe that he had or perhaps still has immense feelings of guilt. I imagine that's exhausting.

To be allied with someone by hating someone else's guts. Or thinks they're stupid. (...) I think that, well, I'm sure that the child suffers a lot from having to give up all contact with my family, that the child has several cousins and misses them completely. (...) When I'm travelling with my child [Child3], where my family lives. Then [child1] probably says hello to [the sibling] again and again or gives me a kiss. And I believe that. It has similar hair to mine and then I always think that you can't avoid the mum issue. When you [look] in the mirror, mum is always there.

**Interviewer:** Yes, now, if I may ask, do you still have contact, i.e. contact so that you see your child [Child1] regularly, or is that really only when [Child3] is there? That there was no personal contact at all, but only occasional messages.

**Test person:** (blows her nose) No, there's no more contact at all, not even in the form of. A photo or something. So that's what I wanted from the father, but the answer was no, [name of child1] didn't want that.(...) So that's why I draw from them. So I don't ask my child [child3] about that, but if he tells me something like that, then I'm happy about

things like the other day he said [child1] had a size 43 shoe and then I think. When I think of him, I don't know what it looks like at the moment, it's like that. There's a figure, but all of a sudden it had feet, so from that point of view, I knew that detail, somehow I was able to imagine it and I'm happy about everything I notice in terms of pieces of the puzzle, but that's very little.

Because of the boarding school, it's also totally isolated from me now. And yes (...) no, there's no more contact at all. And the last time he sent me a voicemail was over a year ago, when the child moved to boarding school, asking if I could send a toy there so that he could have it.

**Interviewer:** Yes, and with [child 3] it is the case that he lives with them, but also sees his father at regular intervals.

**Test person:** Yes, exactly

**Interviewer:** If I've understood all that, OK. That would actually be it. So we were through that relatively quickly. I don't know if there's anything else you'd like to address. But those were the biggest questions.

**Test person:** Okay.

## **Farewell**

### **Minute 40**

## 10.6 Transcript anonymised Respondent 09 - Estranged mothers

### **Greeting**

**Interviewer:** OK, perfect, wonderful, so the first question is, how old are you?

**Test person:** I am under 45.

**Interviewer:** Wonderful and which gender do you feel you belong to?

**Test person:** Female

**Interviewer:** 1, OK. Did you grow up in Germany and or do you have a migration background?

**Test person:** No.

**Interviewer:** OK, that would be number 1 in Germany. So. How would you categorise the socio-economic status of your parents' home. From 1 to 7, so 1 would be very low and 7 would be highest status. It's about education, income and occupation.

**Proband:** 1 is the lowest, right?

**Interviewer:** Exactly.

**Test person:** And 10 is the highest?

**Interviewer:** Highest, number 7.

**Test person:** Between 4 and 5.

**Interviewer:** Between 4 and 5 OK, wonderful. So what is your own socio-economic status from 1 to 7?

**Test person:** Unfortunately, rather lower. That has to do with my traumatic childhood.

**Interviewer:** Yes, so what?

**Test person:** So (...) I'm trained far, far below my capabilities. Definitely.

**Interviewer:** So what is your highest qualification to date from 1, i.e. from 0 to 6? 0 would be no school-leaving qualification and 6 would be a doctorate.

**Test person:** Then I'm probably at 2 to 3 (laughs).

**Interviewer:** So 2 would be Realschulabschluss and 3 would be Abitur.

**Test person:** Oh OK, no, then I have a secondary school leaving certificate after year 10 at the Realschule and one and a half years of training, but with state recognition, so with exams from the state and yes.

**Interviewer:** OK, that's between 2 and 3 now. And do you have siblings or half-siblings?



**Test person:** Yes, I have 2 half-siblings on my mother's side with whom I grew up. (...) Then I have a half-sibling on my father's side, who unfortunately I didn't grow up with, but who I got to know later in my adult life. And then I have a younger sibling.

[...]

**Interviewer:** And did you stay together until you were of age? In one parental home?

**Test person:** No, so I...

**Minute 5**

**Interviewer:** Excuse me, your parents stayed together until you came of age.

**Test person:** I see. They were often yes (...) On-off relationship is still like that today, but yes, so on paper in any case, yes.

**Interviewer:** OK and how old were you when you, when your parents separated?

**Test person:** So they never officially separated. So you have such a passive relationship because my mum is also highly narcissistic about it. I think you were only really separated once. That was for 7 months and that was, oh God, that was a few years or something. (...) So that's why, I'm sorry, it's not so clear to answer that, but in any case.

**Interviewer:** Yes, I can understand that. Okay. (...) And how was or is your relationship with your mum? From 1 to 7, so 1 would be extremely bad and 7 would be excellent.

**Test person: 1**

**Interviewer:** Extremely bad. And why?

**Test person:** My mother severely abused me psychologically as a child. And also alienated me from my biological father. But I've only realised this since I've been dealing with the issue and I know that as a mother, I've also been affected by this with my children.

**Interviewer:** And what is or was your relationship with your father like?

**Test person:** Also disturbed. He is also bad. Also bad because he wasn't allowed to love me because your narcissistic personality wouldn't allow it. (laughs)

**Interviewer:** OK, so that would be 3, because 1 would be extremely poor and 7 would be excellent and 3 would be poor.

**Test person:** Yes, well. So it changes when he is highly aggressive. He has also been physically aggressive, beating and so on, and through what my mother has always initiated, often threatening and so on, so it changes. When he's, let's just say, calm and in control of himself, which doesn't happen often, then it can even be a really good connection or a good conversation. But if she has manipulated him a lot again et cetera, then it can also be at 1. So, and then yes. So that's not so easy to answer. So it varies.

**Interviewer:** Yes, yes, definitely. I can understand that too, these are difficult topics, but because of the experiences you had at home, how do you feel emotionally? Well, that is. Again and again with the questions from 1 to 7. From extremely bad, that would be 1 to 7 excellent.

**Test person:** I did some therapy, but what? Oh God, it's difficult (laughs) to pinpoint that between 1 and 7, no. Yes, that's really difficult. I would say 1. It's very, very, very stressful, even at my advanced age.

**Interviewer:** Okay. And how do you feel psychologically and health-wise from 1 to 7? Well, at the moment, it's about the present time.

**Test person:** The current time is really shitty and I sometimes feel in between. Oh God, it's difficult. (laughs) It's really difficult. Sometimes I feel really bad. So already 1 like that. I'm able to work and all that, but sometimes I feel really bad. (...) I would say between 2 and 3.

**Interviewer:** Between very bad and bad. Yes, and are you or have you received psychological or psychiatric treatment? So 0 would be no and 1

**Test person:** Yes

**Interviewer:** OK 1 And why and for how long?

**Test person:** Well, I was in psychiatric treatment several times and no one recognised that it was more or less a case of abuse by my mother, so I felt bad about it. I was misdiagnosed numerous times and nobody was able to uncover the abuse because it was

all part of the abuse. (...) Exactly, and those were relatively short stays because. Yes, because it wasn't good for me and of course it didn't help me. (laughs)

#### **Minute 10**

**Interviewer:** So there was no diagnosis?

**Test person:** But there were misdiagnoses, so there were misdiagnoses because the abuse was not recognised.

**Interviewer:** Okay, because, for example, with the diagnoses that are presented to us here, the alternatives. There is depression, other affective disorders, anxiety disorders, adjustment disorders, ADHD or post-traumatic stress disorder.

**Test person:** So ADHD is the confirmed diagnosis that I only got a few years ago, so a high one, I'd say in the adult range. But the diagnoses and I can also identify with them, no. And I can definitely identify with the fact that I have post-traumatic stress disorder, because of my parents, my mother and my father. And because of what happened to me with the father of my children. But too. For example, there was a histrionic personality disorder that was suspected, but it wasn't confirmed, but because it was entered somewhere, it's also in this what do you call it? In this patient file? And that was of course my reaction to this abuse. And that's why it's a diagnosis, yes, that doesn't belong to me because it doesn't fit, for example. But I have, for example, recurrent? Oh, what's that called, depression, recurrent depression. And also name and panic disorders, but those too, again. So ADHD is simply my main diagnosis and the severe traumatisation or post-traumatic stress disorder, that's what I've actually had confirmed by my doctors, I'd say. And that also corresponds to the truth.

**Interviewer:** And what does that look like physically? Do you have any severe physical complaints?

**Test person:** (...) (laughs) Yes, well. Yes, I often have, I also stated that in this questionnaire, so I often have the feeling that I have a racing heart, well, that I sometimes have a racing heart, because the stress is just so huge. I think I often have less energy than others. Because I simply have more psychosomatic complaints. I also often have stomach and bowel problems. So that always affects my stomach and intestines and of course I'm also affected by that.

**Interviewer:** So the next question is more information about your family of origin. How would you categorise the conflict situation in your parental home? From 1 to 7, so 1 would be a very low conflict situation and 7 would be the highest conflict situation.

**Test person:** Definitely 7.

**Interviewer:** 7, okay. And did you, did your parents, you or the other children get involved in the parental conflict?

**Test person:** Yes, definitely.

**Interviewer:** Yes, and if so, how much from 1 to 7?

**Test person:** Very, 7, definitely.

**Interviewer:** So 7 is extremely okay and in what way would you describe it?

**Test person:** (...) So OK, how do I describe it? My mum is definitely an alcoholic. (...) She has a mental personality disorder and she has her previous divorce and all that in. So everything, all the problems that weren't resolved, were transferred to us children and when she was drunk, we found out things we didn't want to know. She didn't look after herself. She didn't take responsibility for her mistakes. She didn't take any responsibility for us at all. She wasn't and isn't actually in a position to bring up children, so. Everything was put on our shoulders, our responsibility.

#### **Minute 15**

**Interviewer:** And how much conflict protection did you experience overall as a child? So from 1 would be highest and 7 would be lowest.

**Test person:** So low there, because as I said, we grew up in a dysfunctional family. We all had no protection, everyone always had to keep up appearances. And I was, I would say, one of the most burdened, because I was hated the most and (...) and the others also suffered from the situation, of course, but...

**Interviewer:** And the next question would be, how much attention did you receive overall as a child? So it's always from 1 to 7. 1 would be the highest level of affection and 7 would be the lowest.

**Test person:** You mean from the parents now, don't you?

**Interviewer:** Exactly. Exactly.

**Test person:** Yes, then definitely the lowest.

**Interviewer:** And how strong is your current bond with your carers?

**Test person:** Very close to my siblings. I have a very close bond and relationship with my siblings. And I haven't had any contact with my parents for (...) a few years because it's not possible. For my own protection.

**Interviewer:** And did you have to deal with family courts, youth welfare offices or lawyers etc. as a child?

**Test person:** Yes, actually. Yes, yes, well, I was born out of wedlock back then, and the youth welfare office was already (...) involved somehow, but simply because that's how it was back then. (...) Down there with the children. But then the whole thing happened when I was 14/15 and I was in a very bad way. And that's when my mother admitted me to a psychiatric institution for the first time and that's when the youth welfare office got involved for the first time. And I wasn't allowed to go home again, so to speak. And then the youth welfare office didn't follow up on it afterwards either. So I didn't get any protection from them or anything. But that was definitely the case, the youth welfare office was involved. That was kept from me. I only found out about it much later, so to speak.

**Interviewer:** OK, so was that helpful or not helpful for you? Supportive or harassing or friendly? How was your relationship with the authorities?

**Test person:** Not helpful in any case. (...) So they wanted to help, but the bottom line was that it wasn't helpful, no.

**Interviewer:** And would you use the professionals again? So would you use them again or recommend them to others? So these...

**Test person:** No.

**Interviewer:** And why?

**Test person:** (...) Wow, is that a difficult question? No, because I find the question difficult because I have my own experience with my own children today. But also back then. (...) No, I don't have the heart for it. But I don't know how to describe it, because they didn't help me in the sense that I needed help. Let's put it this way.

**Interviewer:** [...] Of course I understand, I understand from your situation that you can't describe that properly either because you didn't get any help. So, now (...) we would need a bit more information about your own biological family? How would you categorise the conflict situation with your own biological family? From 1 to 7 (...) Can you still hear me?

**Minute 20**

**Test person:** I would also say yes. Oh God, that's a difficult question. It's difficult to always put a number on it. So I would say between 6 and 7, definitely.

**Interviewer:** So the highest conflict situation?

**Test person:** Yes, because. Is so, how should I explain that now? It's because. Yes, we have here. (...) Oh, excuse me, I'm getting emotional. So we have a serious case, [...] unfortunately we have a serious case of parent-child alienation, which is being carried out by the father. And unfortunately I've only known how hard it is for about a year now. And I haven't got one yet. So I have. Yes, too late. So I haven't taken the right steps, I haven't taken the right steps and nobody has helped me yet, quite the opposite, that's why.

**Interviewer:** Did you or the other parent involve the children in the parental conflict?

**Test person:** The father definitely yes. And very yes. And still is.

**Interviewer:** And how would you describe that? So?

**Test person:** So he lies, he initiates lies. He scares the children about me, about my person. So he makes up lies and scares them. Everything I do is dragged through the

mud. He constantly changes his mind. And yes. (...) Yes and (...) If... I tried mediation and therapy sessions for many years. I also believed at the time that the youth welfare office could help us, but the youth welfare office has never helped us. (...) And I tried to have lots of conversations together. To find solutions together, but the problem is that he's just not interested in solutions. And I have wasted a lot of time on that, I have to say. So he doesn't want to, so the only constant is his lying, his lying and his highly manipulative behaviour and he goes so far that he doesn't care. This mainly affects my young child. He doesn't care that it's bad for him. The main thing is that I'm hated, so to speak, or I'm rejected, that's his main goal.

**Interviewer:** Yes, and how much conflict protection did your children experience overall? So from 1 highest conflict protection to 7 very low conflict protection.

**Test person:** 7 was the lowest now, wasn't it?

**Interviewer:** Exactly, the lowest.

**Test person:** Oh God, how can you summarise that?

**Interviewer:** So 1 would be highest, 2 would be above average.

**Test person:** Yes, but the main problem? Exactly, my problem is that there are different phases. So when the ex-partner was there, she offered them a lot of protection. And since she left, almost two years ago, there's no longer any protection for the little one, you know. And that's why, how can you get a total number? So then we'll meet somewhere in the lower range, because in the end there was never any protection from the father. So then rather the highest, so no protection at all. To be honest, yes.

**Interviewer:** So very low and how much attention have your children received overall? Well, we're taking the whole time now, not just the difficult times, but in total up to now. (...) So 1 would be the highest level of affection and 7 would be a very low level of affection. That would be from both parents.

#### **Minute 25**

**Test person:** Yes, if anything, I would meet somewhere in the middle, how little I am allowed to love my children and how I have hardly seen them at all for over 5 years and so on. Then we'd meet somewhere in the middle I guess. Because there were a few years where I still got them, where they still got attention and so on and then from the ex... I would then say.

**Interviewer:** Average attention.

**Test person:** 4 to 5, more or less. (...) So not enough in any case. So let's say 4. Is that relatively low then, or? All in all.

**Interviewer:** And how strong is your children's current attachment to their carers? From 1 would be the highest attachment level and 7 would be the lowest attachment level.

**Test person:** And what do you mean by your attachment figures? Father and mother, or what is the attachment figure now?

**Interviewer:** Exactly, the carers. Father, mother, siblings.

**Test person:** Hm (...) Well, I would also say in the middle, so. It's difficult to pin that down. It's very difficult, for God's sake.

**Interviewer:** And how strong is the contact, i.e. the current contact between your children and their carers, i.e. you and your ex-partner?

**Test person:** Since (...) the father takes everything for himself, very much for the father and almost nothing for me, I would now take a general view.

**Interviewer:** So (...) would also be 3.4?

**Test person:** Yes

**Interviewer:** OK (...) So as a mother you had contact with family courts, youth welfare offices or lawyers, experts, etc.

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** And in what form? How would you describe this relationship?

**Test person:** Hm (...) I just tried to fight for (...) our children to be allowed to have a biological mother in their lives. (...) And that's how the (...) relationships, if you want to

call them that, came about. That's how the contact with family courts, lawyers, etc. came about.

**Interviewer:** And was this relationship with the authorities helpful or supportive for you?

**Test person:** No, not at all.

**Interviewer:** So not at all, not at all. And would you want to make use of this professional support again or recommend it to others?

**Test person:** (cries) Excuse me.

**Interviewer:** No problem. Everything is fine.

**Test person:** (...) No, I don't think so, no. I don't think so and yet we are dependent on it because we have nothing else, right?

**Interviewer:** Yes, I can understand that. And so what has worked for him so far... other than what hasn't worked, but what has worked in your relationship? So would you have any advice?

**Test person:** What worked? (...) So my advice is, at the first suspicion of parent-child alienation, that you are allergic to it or that you (...) very much, how shall we say. Now I don't know the word

### **Minute 29**

**Interviewer:** direct?

**Respondent:** You have to listen carefully, and if the youth welfare office (...) says after a separation (...) that the child has to calm down. Or peace must be restored. And that's when parent-child alienation often begins. In our case, it's really important to have, let's say, a lawyer that you trust and who you feel strong with. Someone who is clear and structured and who is also, let's say, supportive in difficult phases, because it's very stressful when you as a mother are not allowed to see your children, are not supposed to, and are so insecure and manipulated that you. (...) Yes, that you have to, how should I put it, well, as I said, you have to listen carefully when it's said that there has to be peace and quiet and there has to be peace and quiet when it's justified or justified not to see the child, that's point 1.

And as I said, point 2, that you (...) have to have good people by your side to make sure that you can see your child and that you have to get on somehow, yes. And that I think... and the third piece of advice would be. For many of us affected, you don't realise for a long time that it's about PA, yes. That's why I find the advice a bit difficult. But if you then know that something is going wrong. (...) Yes, that you, how should I put it? That you approach the issue somehow and that you get all the help you can. The main thing is that you see your children and there isn't a gap of several years, because that's just really bad for the children.

**Interviewer:** Yes, understandable.

**Test person:** And that's what it's like to be alienated, because the stress is so massive and so complex. God, I think only those affected can say that well. It's also so unsettling and we estranged parents are very different. We don't have that self-assurance, we always have to prepare ourselves for the next attack. We can never be sure whether something is true or not. We have completely different (...) Yes, I don't know, completely different. (...) Oh, I can't find the right words, it's so emotional, but we don't have the (...) the handling, like when I watch my siblings with their children now, who are sure that it's going this way and that, my child will go to bed then and then, the bond is there. If I say I'll be there at 1.00 pm and I'm going to be late, there's no immediate breast crisis, she knows I'm coming. So it's all different for us, for those of us affected, I would say.

**Interviewer:** And what is the situation like now? Are you currently in a new, stable relationship?

**Test person:** No, I've been alone for over 5 years. (...)

I've been working in [a social profession] again since spring 2020 (...) and I'm actually only there to support the children, which is very difficult. So I'm doing very badly financially. Unfortunately, you can't live self-sufficiently. So I have minimal support, private support from my siblings. (...) Yes, and the current situation is that last year the

court hearing revealed that (...) I see my child every fortnight from Friday to Sunday. And in the afternoon, during the week (...) and now my lawyer hasn't contacted me for almost 6 weeks. An application should finally be made for the right to determine the order, but now it's just... and swallowed up (...). And in our case, it's just that there's a serious risk to our child's welfare because I have a reliable source and know what's really happening.

**Minute 35**

**Interviewer:** How stressful was the separation for you from 1 to 7? The separation from your partner. (...) From 1 to 7, 1 would be very low and 7 would be the most stressful.

**Test person:** Highest level, because he had me before. Yes, exactly, how can you explain that so briefly? So it was all initiated and deliberate what happened. And he severely (...) psychologically abused me, even during the whole marriage, the whole relationship, and I just didn't know or realise it. And the last time before the separation was one of the worst things I experienced, because he (...) psychologically abused me completely. (...) So he beat me up so badly, we're really talking about domestic violence and it was all initiated so that he could take the children to himself and (...) yes, so he could take them away from me and that was just a deal and he went through with it.

**Interviewer:** And how was that for the children? How stressful was the separation for them (...)?

**Test person:** 7 too. So then the highest level, because he immediately had a new partner and she was immediately pregnant again.

**Interviewer:** The new partner. (...) From your point of view, what are the motives of the other parent?

**Test person:** Well, I think his clinical picture plays a very big role. His own history. (...) He himself grew up abusively in his parental home and (...) he has very low self-esteem. As I said, he's very narcissistic, so he always needs admiration from outside. (...) Today I'm convinced that he's not capable of it. He has no access to his feelings. No, so I could say now, I'm doing this interview, I'm a bit upset, I'm emotional, I could describe my feelings.

**Interviewer:** Exactly.

**Test person:** But with him, he has no access to his feelings.

**Interviewer:** And he doesn't show any feelings.

**Test person:** He's always acting, on the one hand very intelligently, more to achieve his goals, if he wants something, he acts and lies, but he gets everywhere most of the time, so most people fall for him, yes.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Test person:** Oh, I see, you asked me about the motives. Sorry, I'll say that again. (...) That's why I have to explain it a bit and I think that he believes himself. (...) So he partly believes his own lies, that sounds really sick, and it is. (...) It makes him feel incredibly secure and he has to cling to the lie that (...) I can't be a good mum, even though I've always been a good mum and very loving. That has always characterised me. And (...) he just managed to talk me down and, what can I say, he remembers what he did to me, that I became a victim, so to speak, and was weak and had depressive phases or suffered from the way he treated me. And that's what he has preserved and that's his truth, that that's what I am and that's why I'm bad. And he just has a total hatred and desire for revenge and he bites at it.

And he has quite. (...) Yes, he has very big fears that he has to cover up, right. He's afraid of illness, for example. You must never be ill. He can't have a cold. He's not allowed to have any signs of illness, he's not allowed to go to the paediatrician and so on, because his father is terrified of it and (...) what did I want to say? And he just has the big (...) financial thing. So he's totally panicked about ruining himself financially and that's why he wants the child to have so little with me and for him to get the maintenance so that he has the money.

**Interviewer:** OK, and these are the motives of the...

**Test person:** Yes

**Interviewer:** OK. (...) Mhm. And in your opinion, how did this situation come about or what factors influenced this situation? Well, it got worse.

#### **Minute 40**

**Test person:** Well, I realised (...) early on that something was wrong with my ex-husband. I brought a child into the relationship at the time, she was 7 years old. I realised early on that something wasn't quite right. And I tried to distance myself and even then he started to manipulate me emotionally. And to keep me, to keep me insane, because he didn't want me to break up under any circumstances and so on, and then there were several break-up situations. Where I had the strength to separate et cetera.(...) And (...) Yes, and that was always his. So that tipped it all over. Turning his back once or saying that something wasn't right, that made him highly aggressive on the inside, in other words the most. That created an enemy image for him. But of course he made me believe otherwise.

**Interviewer:** Okay, and what was it like? How old were the children again? And how long did the process take? So, I mean from the beginning of the conflict, for example, until now, like this.

**Test person:** Back then, that was 2005 or 2004, 2005, when we met and I would say with today's experience with today's complexity, with what I know about the story, with all the characters. With the personalities, with the characters, with their history and so on, so the knowledge that has been completed today, so to speak, yes or rounded off, I would say from today's experience and with all the knowledge that the manipulation or what has developed there, what has arisen there, yes in terms of context potential and conflict and so on, has actually started from day 1, so from the beginning.

**Interviewer:** You mean from the beginning of your relationship, right?

**Test person:** Yes, definitely, definitely. From today's perspective, definitely, because. (...) He can't have a relationship of any kind at eye level. He only ever has a benefit and a goal for himself. But he never has a relationship at eye level or (...) just for example. Out of friendship. He only ever has relationships because he wants something, so he has a goal and he wants something. And the other person has to fulfil a really big position for him. But he can't. Yes, so he doesn't have a relationship at eye level. He's never had one. And not until now.

**Interviewer:** OK. That means? This conflict lasted about 7, 8 years? As you described it, right?

**Test person:** 10 years. It took 10 years.

**Interviewer:** And, and the children? OK, before the children were there, yes.

**Test person:** One child was already there and my other child was (...) born after 2010. and (...) yes

**Interviewer:** And what consequences did it have for you, for the children and for your ex-partner? In other words, the conflict for the whole family, so to speak.

**Test person:** Yes, I would say instability, no.

**Interviewer:** Instability, yes.

**Test person:** So definitely.

**Interviewer:** And did you...

**Test person:** Well, he always did. He always (...) fought against me. He always did everything. (...) So he shadowed me. He controlled me. He locked me up. He, I don't even know, yes. And he couldn't stand the fact that I loved the children so much, that I was a good mother to them. He couldn't stand that, not until today. Yes (...) Sorry, let's move on.

**Interviewer:** Nope, all good, all good, it's no problem at all. I understand. So, what I, what you mean. (...) But from this whole conflict? Everything that happened. What were the consequences for you, what were the consequences for you personally and for the children and for the ex-partner? I mean, that's what came out of it, after the conflict. (...) Apart from the instability, of course. What?

#### **Minute 45**

**Test person:** So let's say I have to sort this out a bit for myself so that I can answer you more clearly. So if we say now. Say after the separation, yes, the separation was after 2015 or do you mean during?

**Interviewer:** No, no, I mean afterwards. Afterwards.

**Test person:** OK afterwards. (...) So the consequences for my children, definitely the traumatic experience that they were no longer allowed to have a mum, yes. And that everything that made up our bond was wiped out and that they had to endure (...) this hatred towards me. Day in, day out, because it was totally engrained in them. Because we were married, a lot of things had to be sorted out and so on, and everything was played out in front of the children. Everything. And everything they believed in, where the connection existed over all those years, was simply erased. (...) And I can't even say today how big the consequences will be. But the direct consequences were certainly traumatic. Because what they believed in was simply wiped out. So their own intuition, so to speak (...) was destabilised. Because what they used to think: I now feel this and that, was wiped out, so that's why. And the consequences for the father? (...) Even more power, I would say. (...) That he gets away with everything and that he always gets his way with the personality disorder and that he can deceive all the authorities. That he can also deceive the teachers, that he can deceive his friends, that he can deceive his family. And for me (laughs). What can I say?

**Interviewer:** So you think that your ex-partner (...). So in your opinion, he's doing much better now because he's won the game, so to speak, he's fooled everyone.

**Test person:** Yes, definitely. So you have to imagine that (...) I can only say how much money we invested. How many coaches we paid. How many experts and nobody could get through to this person and all the authorities have been fooled by him to this day. This means that (...) you have already asked earlier how we could improve the institutions and so on and the authorities and so on. In my opinion, that is the case, they are perhaps well trained, yes. But not so well trained that something like this should be uncovered and have consequences, so to speak. Because our legal situation is not sufficient for something to happen.

[...]

**Interviewer:** So after the whole process, after the separation and after all the consequences, did you receive any support in this regard?

**Minute 50**

**Test person:** (...) Yes, but it was a long process. So it was really (...) (laughs) It took a while, I'd say, until I found the right support, so to speak. But yes, I did. (...) So I found a neurologist back then, who I still have today. A neurological doctor, a psychiatrist, but one who is very down-to-earth and who saw me. In other words, as a person. (...) And she's still at my side today and I'm very grateful to her. And (...) Yes, and at the time I had someone at my side through my sibling. This person is based in Switzerland. She's a coach, also a psychologist, and supports people all over the world (...) so she also gives seminars [...]

And that really helped me a lot. I really have to say, and that was the case for me. (...) Yes, how can you put it? What helped me was a technique of putting on blinkers, so to speak. Yes, and first of all to free myself from the hole and to achieve new goals again and again in order to get to a point where I was on a small mountain and could overlook everything that was there. I don't know if I've described it that well. But that's what really, really helped me in the end. To this day. This work has helped me to this day, yes.

**Interviewer:** So you mean to get an overview of the whole...

**Test person:** Yes, no, this kind of therapy, so to speak, that I was able to experience from her. Or this way of working (...) has helped me to this day. For example, this has never included. (...) For example, falling into this unappreciative communication of the alienator, so to speak. But we didn't realise at the time that it was alienation and we didn't know how bad our case was. But I haven't written one nasty email to my father in all these years, and I've been called a lot of names. I haven't said a bad word about the



father to the children. At least not (...) which always has something to do with manipulation. (...) And I'm very proud of that. I have to say, really. Example of that, yes.

**Interviewer:** And would you have liked more help? If so, from whom? Well, I mean more support after the situation. (...) So what would you have wished for?

**Test person:** I would have wished... So when it was clear at the time, well, I just have to expand a little, so when it was clear at the time (...) that my ex-husband was going crazy every day and was always on the verge of killing me, so to speak. I would have wished for my family or my siblings - "Come to us with the children." In this case, I would have liked them to intervene and for there to be laws to help me and the children.(...) Nobody did that, no more than I do today. Yes, so I'm no better and I would have wished that and (...) and also afterwards I would have wished that (...). Exactly. Help from whom? That's a good question. I would have wished. (...) That I could talk about what was happening to me. (...) And that I would be integrated by my fellow human beings, so to speak, and not segregated. Because my experience was that it was so difficult for my family. For my siblings too, probably because they were reminded of our own childhood et cetera. (...) That I was even more segregated, they know roughly what I mean. So it would have helped me if they had said, [name of respondent], "Come on." I don't know, let's eat together, let's cook together, let's make a fire together or no, let's sit in front of the fire together, let's do normal things together, let's go shopping together. Take part in our family life, but that's not what happened and that's what I'd like to see today. So integration, just like that. And they get... and as I said back then, I never said it like that. I wish someone had intervened and I can actually say that about my own childhood. I would have liked (...) someone to have had the courage to save us, yes.

#### **Minute 55**

**Interviewer:** So by someone you mean family members or do you mean?

**Test person:** Also among others yes.

**Interviewer:** Offices or courts?

**Test person:** Yes, for example a close relative. (...) She already knew back then how bad things were for us in this household. And, for example, it would have been great if there had been a way for her to help us, but she was facing exactly the same helplessness back then as I am now. Do you know? So what do you do then, what do you do then how, how, how, what do you do then, how do you do that? No, so yes. (...) So I realise that there are possibilities. But what does it really look like in reality? Did my close relative want to be responsible for us being placed in an out-of-home care facility, to give you an example. I'm also faced with this problem. Yes, when a child's welfare is at risk, it's clear that you don't know what's going to happen to the child and whether it will necessarily happen.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Test person:** Well, I know that this is sometimes better. But I can say from my own experience that I shy away from it, because I probably well, I can also explain it, because I have so little trust in the institutions, so it's actually quite well justified, yes.

**Interviewer:** And what about the estranged parent now? Do they have contact with your children?

**Test person:** Yes, I just told you that. So I see my child every fortnight. But since he's 12, it's just become even more difficult now. The child recently had a birthday. And everything has been torpedoed, which is very difficult, very hard. And my child is also doing very badly. And I see my older child very rarely, every few weeks. And she still has contact with my parents and is manipulated by my mum herself, so it's very difficult.

**Interviewer:** How stressful would you describe the...

**Test person:** Very, so 7 is the highest, no, so already 7 yes. (...) Yes, definitely, because none of this has anything to do with normality, so to speak. So it's very difficult to achieve any kind of normality in your life, no, because (...) that is. (...) motherhood is genetic. And what if you're not allowed to be a mother? That. Yes, very stressful.

**Interviewer:** And your children, how, what do you think, how, how stressful would you say that is, the alienation?

**Test person:** They don't want to admit it. So I look at my older child, who already knows that, I think, but he doesn't want to admit it either. So, the child wants to sugarcoat it, that is, doesn't have the strength to face reality. (...) So how difficult is that for my older child? (...) 7 is the worst? Well, I don't know 5 or anything.

**Interviewer:** So you mean. OK, you have it easier with your older child. So it's less stressful than with your small child?

#### **Minute 59**

**Test person:** Oh no, I don't know, that's really hard to answer, really. So yes, because the thing is that (...) Phew. (...) My youngest child is totally at my mercy, yes? And my older child already lives alone, is in education, has a steady relationship and so on. So I think it's also difficult, but it still had its own thing. (...) Yes, and is self-effective. My youngest child is completely at the mercy of this creature. So I find it difficult. What would that, what would that description fit? Well, I find it difficult, yes.

[...]

So I think they are both very burdened by it and sometimes it comes through more and sometimes not. Let's put it that way.

**Interviewer:** Slightly above average stress level, that would be 5. So what?

**Test person:** Yes, definitely. So yes, medium to high I would say, because even if they don't know. (...) One hundred per cent that it's about alienation, it's very stressful that they can't have me as a support in their lives. So it's like that, it has nothing to do with self-importance, but I see it quite soberly. (...) No, this loving, this loving support, standing by them and so on. They always have to do that themselves somehow and I think that's very stressful for my children, yes.

**Interviewer:** And (...) What do you think? Do you think that this is now an alienation process with your own children. If you know the process. This alienation from the parents, do you think that's happening now with you and your children?

**Test person:** Yes, they are estranged from their father and from my mother, or what do you mean? Yes, yes. Yes, (...) and I think that's doubly cruel. (...) Because of course I would never have wished something like that for my children. I wanted the opposite, of course.

**Interviewer:** And to what extent would this alienation be enough? So how? How serious is it? How would you assess it?

**Test person:** The alienation now, for me, which is happening or for my children?

**Interviewer:** Exactly for you.

**Respondent:** Yes, so very high at 7 of course, Mhm.

#### **Farewell**

#### **Minute 66**

### 10.7 Transcript anonymised Respondent 10 - Estranged mothers

**Please note: The time information ends at minute 36, the interview is longer than 36 minutes**

#### **Greeting**

**Interviewer:** Perfect, how old are you?

**Test person:** I am over 40.

**Interviewer:** 43 And which gender do you feel you belong to? 0. who would be man 1 would be woman, 2 would be diverse.

**Respondent:** Definitely mum, mother.

**Interviewer:** Did you grow up in Germany or do you have a migrant background?

**Test person:** No, I will soon. I grew up in Germany and don't have a migration background.

**Interviewer:** Okay, exactly. How would you categorise the socio-economic status of your parents' home, such as education, income, occupation? From 1 to 7, if 1 is very low status and 7 is highest status.

**Test person:** Craftsman, both masters independently of her. So my parents each had their own profession with the title of master craftsman. I would say a good mid-range, between 4 and 5, if you're realistic. If 7 was a net income of 10,000 euros a month, then 4 to 5. Somewhere in between.

**Interviewer:** OK, so 4 to 5, so most of the questions are from 1 to 7, but I'll explain them in between because they often alternate between 1 being the highest and the lowest level.

**Test person:** Yes, all right.

**Interviewer:** And what is your own socio-economic status from 1 to 7?

**Test person:** Well, I feel good right now. Tendency 5: Completed studies, fixed income, fixed employment contract. Yes, I would say around midfield 5.

**Interviewer:** Wonderful. That would actually be the next question. What is your highest qualification to date?

**Test person:** Yes, that's the degree programme.

**Interviewer:** Mhm. Is your degree programme a Bachelor's, University of Applied Sciences or Master's?

**Test person:** Yes, Bachelor. Yes, no, no, Bachelor's will have to do. I'm old enough.

**Interviewer:** That would be 4. So you have siblings or half-siblings.

**Test person:** No.

**Interviewer:** Then let's skip a few questions about your siblings. So your parents stayed together until you were of age?

**Test person:** No.

**Interviewer:** And how old were you when you separated?

**Test person:** If I could remember that exactly. I think around 9 to 10, something in between. I can't say exactly.

**Interviewer:** OK. It's average enough. So roughly yes. And did your parents' parents stay together?

**Test person:** On the father's side yes, on the mother's side no.

**Interviewer:** OK. And how was or how is your relationship with your mother? From 1 to 7, if 1 is extremely bad and 7 is excellent.

**Test person:** I would say at least a 6. So it's possible that there's something between us that perhaps hasn't been addressed. But I am, I am loved unconditionally and I also love my mum and we don't argue. So you could actually say a 7.

**Interviewer:** So 7, excellent, OK.

**Test person:** Yes, I think so. Mhm.

**Interviewer:** And why 7? Why Excellent so how, how can you explain that a bit more?

**Test person:** I can explain that. Yes, I've just said it, so as far as I can remember, I don't think we've ever had a moment in my entire career where we've argued. Perhaps? No, she's never told me that I was particularly stubborn or that we argued. I can still remember when I was 14 or 15 years old. I gave her a hard time once. But also at a level that was respectful, but at the same time that she also knew my boundaries and that I briefly mirrored her own behaviour and then that was it. So that's the only thing I can remember.

**Interviewer:** Wonderful. And the relationship with your father. How was that?

**Test person:** Always very cordial, as far as I know. My father once told me that I had actually called him an "arsehole" at some point. But that must have been after the separation and he just said: "Yes, you're right.". And I can never remember ever saying that. But there was probably something there that I might have suppressed, I have to be honest. I've thought about it a lot since I found out, but I can't remember it at all. But to

put it in a nutshell, it was very, very warm. Unfortunately, we see each other far too rarely because he lives a bit further away. But otherwise there too. I can't remember any other conflicts. Not that I know of, no.

#### **Minute 5**

**Interviewer:** So was also at 7, Excellent with your father?

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** And through the experiences you had at home. How emotionally prepared do you feel for adult life? From 1 to 7, if 1 is extremely poor, or 7 is excellent.

**Test person:** Ne 5 to 6. Yes, so that's the overall biography, that's what I got at home. Really 5 to 6, otherwise I wouldn't be where I am now.

**Interviewer:** Very nice. And how do you feel in terms of your mental health from 1 to 7?

**Respondent:** Fluctuating, fluctuating. I actually had a low point last week of, I'll say 2. And today I'd say it's back up to 5, except for this black grey spot in my life.

**Interviewer:** Between very bad and good, OK.

**Test person:** Exactly.

**Interviewer:** And how do you feel in terms of your physical health?

**Interviewer:** I've been better in the past. But I haven't had a cold since before, toi toi toi. Since I started the new job, I regularly caught it from the children and really thought I would never really get back on my feet. But since this summer, everything has been fine, both physically and mentally. I've often had back problems, but that's due to the structures, working with the small chairs and so on. What else I had, this action with heartburn on a regular basis, I seem to be able to get a bit of a grip on that now with a change in diet. So there is at least a tendency towards feeling better.

**Interviewer:** Very nice, very nice, I'm glad.

**Test person:** Thank you.

**Interviewer:** Are you or have you ever been in psychological or psychiatric treatment?

**Test person:** No, I did have a referral once. But I didn't get a place or the right place. So even if I had gone there, they probably wouldn't have been able to help me. They had already told me that on the phone. In my case, where it was clear that I needed help, they couldn't do that and so I let it pass. That was a few years ago now. Last week I had another break where I said I couldn't do anything right now, but I knew I'd feel better again this week. I already knew that last week, the first time I really took it for professional reasons, that I was really going to take two days off sick because of my history.

**Interviewer:** I understand. But physically? For example, do you have any physical complaints other than stomach problems, which you mentioned earlier, and a cold? Because normally very often, when you've been through difficult situations, you have physical stress and back pain...

**Test person:** I had them regularly for a long time, i.e. flare-ups, acute flare-ups, who knows where they came from. So it was never lumbago, it was never a slipped disc. I had it checked by a doctor every time. It was just definitely acute tension, sometimes it felt like I'd been beaten up on my back. So all these inter-back muscles were corresponding or up here in the neck-shoulder area. Or yes, and predominantly on the right side. So everything that is right-sided. Yes, that was noticeable and some of the feet, so the gait pattern was painful. But regardless of that, in the acute phases either the back or sometimes acutely the feet or just acutely in this area.

**Interviewer:** Yes, that is pain caused by stress. So we also have explanations for this in the questions, which is why we ask.

#### **Minute 10**

**Test person:** Yes, that's right. So I, I also recognise a connection when you look back and focus on the last week. OK, there was this and that, you had this and that emotional confrontation or what do I know somehow due to stress, because your head is not in it and then that's the result. I noticed that too, but well, I can't prove it as a person, I'm not a doctor.

**Interviewer:** Yes, that's right. But you can say what you feel and what you sense. And then you can find a connection and at some point... Right, now we need some information about your family of origin. How would you categorise the conflict situation in your parental home? From 1 to 7, i.e. if 1 is a low conflict situation and 7 is a high conflict situation?

**Test person:** So you're referring to my parents' house from back then?

**Interviewer:** Yes, exactly. Your parents have separated. There was probably a conflict and how intense was it?

**Test person:** It was just a moment that I witnessed. That was when I was about 9 or 10 years old. The first time my parents really got into a fight in front of me and I remember my father leaving the house. And then my mum shouted after him, please take all your stuff with you and I don't know when he actually moved out. Was it at that moment? But I never realised that he had left our family, so to speak. I don't know when that was. I only know that he took a really tiny, two-room flat in the city and that a certain time later, my mum took me there. So that's the, the moment, what I remember, everything else, I don't know. I really don't know.

**Interviewer:** And how would you categorise that? So as a conflict, for you, how do you feel about it?

**Test person:** Well, I maintain, I almost maintain that I wasn't even aware of it at the time and that it didn't bother me, because I can still remember that for me, as a very young child at the time, or just barely, I don't know when I had the thought, as a very young teenager. I said to myself, I can't blame my parents, I have to do better myself first. So that's what I remember. And I said that to myself. No one on the right or left ever told me that, it was something I realised for myself. And I was even the first person in my circle of friends to have separate parents, so to speak. And gradually a few more joined in and then it was completely normal for me. But I never talked about it with the others either, so I didn't really feel the need, I didn't need an outlet. At least I don't think so. I don't know. I can laugh about it today, so it must have been okay somehow.

**Interviewer:** Shall we say 1? So the conflict level, what did you feel?

**Test person:** Exactly, yes, that would have been a 1. Or at most a 2, because it was very loud at the time. I wasn't used to that, but I didn't feel any pain at the time. Because I just got him, he went out without any bags. I couldn't connect the dots.

**Interviewer:** That comes up in the other questions, for example...

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** For example, did your parents involve you or the children in the conflict?

**Test person:** Yes, it happened at some point. It was at some point when my father had a new partner. She also had a child, I think he was older than me. And I was always visiting him on alternate weekends or during the holidays. And that actually went really well for quite a while, but something was going on behind my back and at some point I saw my mum again at the family court. And a judge, and I don't know, there was one or two other people there, actually questioned me about where my life... Well, back then there was still this centre of life thing. Because these people, it was also my father's wife in the meantime, she wanted me to spend most of my time with them and whether I actually wanted that. Then the judge asked me, but I remember very clearly that my mum didn't say anything about it, she only said to me very late, after many years, after things had gone so wrong with my children. "I was actually just praying that you would come out of it and say what I thought you would. But I never told you to say anything." I said, "I don't remember you saying anything like that either," but I was also able to explain why I wanted to stay. I have my school there, my circle of friends and my father doesn't live far away, so why should I do anything else? And I put that across so confidently that it was settled, but it didn't turn into a major conflict after that. I still don't know why it ended up in the family court. Who was the driving force and my parents also talk to each other. So that's also the "big thing", so that's a big question mark for me.

**Minute 15**

**Interviewer:** OK, back to this involvement. How involved were you in the conflict between your parents? From 1 to 7, because we try to weight it from 1 to 7 so that we can make a distinction. So if 1 is practically unconscious, i.e. as involvement, or if 7 is extreme, that the parents say they're egging you on and so on, that's what we mean.

**Test person:** Yes, so then it really tended to be a 1 at the family court. On that day I thought, OK, there's something, that's a 2, but I've never had a reason until today as to how it came about. So my mother had only once explicitly said, [name of father's girlfriend], that was my father's second wife, she had a need for you to be there regularly, but she didn't judge it, so she didn't drag me into it either. Well, and above all, not years later, I was already an adult. I never asked either. The question never even came up for me. I just accepted it and I had my relationship with both parents and got through it safely. I had no, no reason to question anything. It was all good. So I would say.

**Interviewer:** Perfect. The next question would be, how much conflict protection did you experience as a child? From 1 to 7. 1 would be the highest level of conflict protection and the lowest level of conflict protection is when you don't realise that there was a conflict at all.

**Test person:** Then a 1 really. A 1, yes.

**Interviewer:** And how much attention did you receive as children, if 1 is the highest level and 7 the lowest?

**Test person:** So what was possible. So they were both independent, that was at least a 2. And, and attention, I don't know how you define that. About attention, about the complete package? So I would say a 2, because it's not possible to do everything. And I don't claim that my parents had to be perfect. Yes, they are human, they are my parents and everything is fine the way it was. I've also had my, in between times, my thoughts, the others have this, that and the other, but in the end, everything is fine, so I'm happy with 1 and 2 something in between. Take your pick.

**Interviewer:** And how is your current relationship with your carers?

**Test person:** What do you mean by reference persons? My partner?

**Interviewer:** Exactly.

**Test person:** So my current partner, I would say on a scale of 1 to 7? 7 is very good and 1 would be very bad, at least a 6.

**Interviewer:** Sorry that it still relates to your parents.

**Test person:** Still. Yes, of course we have less contact, there's nothing between us, so we can also say 6 to 7.

**Interviewer:** 6 to 7 would be very low, i.e. 1 to 2.

**Test person:** Oh, then again the other way round 1 to 2.

**Interviewer:** And the next question would be whether you had contact with family courts, youth welfare offices? You explained that earlier.

**Minute 20**

**Test person:** I did. But without fear, no. That's what I value, that was fear-free, unbiased.

**Interviewer:** So there were also lawyers and experts and things like that?

**Test person:** No, not that. It was really just about the pure fact that I made my statement there and it was given weight and then I never heard anything about it again, not before and not afterwards.

**Interviewer:** And how would you describe this relationship with the courts? As helpful, supportive or friendly, so was that helpful for you?

**Test person:** Well, I didn't have one. I can still remember the day, I wasn't scared and they were absolutely friendly. Of course I don't remember exactly what they explained to me. They asked me questions, I answered them honestly, with a good feeling and they said goodbye to me in the friendliest way and I never saw or heard from them again. Everything was fine.

**Interviewer:** Perfect. And would you use the professional support again or recommend it to others if they get into a conflict like this?

**Test person:** I've used them all and it's made my hair stand on end. And I'm still chewing on it today and that's not going to change any time soon. On the one hand, it took me a long time to get professional support, which is what I mean by professional support, in these contact proceedings with my children. But it came too late, it definitely came at least 18 months before things finally went in the right direction, 18 months too late.

This procedure was always postponed and an interim agreement was reached and none of it was implemented and it didn't work because it was too slow. And that's why, from my point of view today, I would no longer make use of it. From my own experience as a child, I would never do it again as an adult mother who was affected herself. I would try to go the other way again, but yes, as they say with the knowledge of today, I would like to have the past back, but that's not possible.

**Interviewer:** So, now come the questions about your own family. So you, your partner, your children. So what are the conflict situations in your own family on a scale from 1 to 7, if 1 is the lowest level and 7 is the highest?

**Test person:** A 7 to my own children and a 1 to my partner.

**Interviewer:** That means that the highest level of conflict is with your children and very low with your partner.

**Test person:** Right, we're talking about my current partner, not my ex-husband, you can make a distinction.

**Interviewer:** You had the children with your ex-husband, didn't you?

**Test person:** Right.

**Interviewer:** Oh, it refers to that. It refers to that.

**Test person:** Aha, okay, okay yes, that's all a 7 then.

**Interviewer:** So everything.

**Test person:** Although I would like it to be different. No, yes 7.

**Interviewer:** Did you or the other parent involve the children in the conflict? If so, how much?

**Test person:** 7.

**Interviewer:** So both you and your ex-partner?

**Test person:** No, no. So then I'm most likely at a 2 and my ex-husband at a 7.

**Interviewer:** And in what form was this done?

**Test person:** Where should I start? So if you look at the points as a whole, of the 13, I think he used 11. Everything, he left almost nothing out. He bribed materialistically, he told lies, he staged scenes, everything in front of the children. He looked for coalition partners behind my back, from friends and relatives. He lied to the youth welfare office, he didn't keep appointments. He replaced our dog because I took it with me when we moved out. Our child [child 2] was very attached to it, he [the ex-husband] completely replaced the [dog] within 4 weeks, so that the child or our child had one of their own. Expensive holidays I don't even know, he didn't miss out on anything and that for several years.

And this coalition environment still hasn't stopped after more than 5 years. I am still in my "retirement" as far as the conflict is concerned. And behind the scenes, these friends and acquaintances are still hustling and making and doing. And they tell me this directly and I just find it so bad, such a high potential for conflict over such a long period of time. Yes, I can only express it with a 7 to get to the point.

And I could think of even more if I dug around in the past. I would almost say that I can't quite prove that, but I can prove that the mobile phone numbers were exchanged. I was blocked, I don't think I exchanged messages with my children, but I think I wrote to my ex-partner.

He had a divorce party with the kids. He made a photo documentary about it with themed T-shirts and dropped it in my letterbox. So he didn't leave out anything that in any way strongly influenced the children and tied them to him. And he didn't seek any psychiatric or therapeutic help either, although the family court judge suggested it at the

time, either for the children or for him or something. His own lawyer then said at some point: "Please approach your ex-wife now". But none of that was feasible.

So I'm going to write a book about it at some point. Other mums have probably already told you that. But I just can't leave it in my life like this without our children having the chance at some point. You never know how quickly life comes to an end, but once I've written it down, you can at least read it and find your own explanations.

And the worst thing I think is standing between me and our child [child 1]. Is that he thinks I was violent towards the father because he staged a scene, when he came in the door he threw himself on the floor in front of me and pulled on my foot so that it looked as if I had kicked him and I doubt the intelligence that our child [Child1] actually has, and he was actually ordered for a public school. That he didn't even notice that I was standing there in flip-flops, 15 kilos lighter. And the father, who was standing in front of me in work shoes with steel toe caps, well, he was standing right in front of me, I could never have kicked him over with the energy he displayed. And I think that was the trigger that broke everything with my child [Child2]. Between this child and me. He didn't question it at all. And the child lacks the ability to reflect, because it doesn't have to reflect on anything, because the whole time you kept repeating how bad I am, right. And the child has also completely internalised this and our other child [child 2] has lasted longer, has lasted about three and a half years, has always come up to me a little every now and then. And now that he's almost an adult, there's been no reaction either. So I still need a lot of courage. And the inclination or the urge to want to know something. So, now I have to make a point, otherwise we won't finish.

#### **Minute 29**

**Interviewer:** All good. What else did I want to say? Yes, after all the difficult situations that happened. How much conflict protection do you think your children experienced overall? It's about the children now. From 1 would be highest conflict protection and 7 would be lowest conflict protection, regardless of which side.

**Test person:** That's a 7. Almost nothing was protected. When I left the house, there was no more protection, but I myself had to protect our children from experiencing such scenes again, I also discussed this with the youth welfare officer at the time, I said, "I can't stay there anymore! I can't protect my children from such situations so that they don't experience it!". And she agreed with me. And anyone with any common sense would have said: "For God's sake, take the children with you!". The only problem is that I didn't even have my own flat, I didn't even know where to go! I took my things overnight and went to my father. I didn't know where to go! And it's not as if I said: "Yes, if you hit someone, you leave". No, firstly you can't say it like that and secondly, it's all his property, where we've lived all these years. That means I wasn't entitled to anything, it was his inheritance. And I had separated anyway, so I had to leave too. Yes, at least that's what I thought, normally I should have told you so and now we'll call the police and we'll sort it out properly here on site. But then we would have involved the children even more, that would have been even more active. And so I just passively broke the resistance, so to speak, by simply pulling myself out. But I couldn't protect the children any more, nothing at all. And that's very, very regrettable and I don't know what I could have done differently, I still don't know today whether that would have been the right thing to do or whether I should have simply stood up to them even more. But what good are the questions? It is the way it is.

**Interviewer:** Yes, you let it go through your head. So you do that automatically, that you find a solution for past situations. That's normal. So how strong is the current bond between your children and you and your ex-partner?

**Respondent:** What is 1 to 7? What is now how round?

**Interviewer:** So 1 would be the highest commitment level and 7 would be the lowest commitment level.

**Test person:** So from her side, a 7. All 3s. And from me towards the children, definitely an A. So at least emotionally, yes. You can't really measure the actual bond. Although I'm still convinced that there is a bond. It's just extremely fragile and the bond from the



parents, i.e. from the mother to the child, is always much stronger than the other way round anyway. And I'm aware of that too. But I don't believe, and I'm pretty sure of this, that they don't have a bond with me. I'm far too present for that.

We live in a village. I have so much strength and my ex forbade me to move back to this place and so I said, now more than ever. I didn't tell him that, I just did it because he was no longer in a position to say anything to me in any way. Maybe I also poked him a bit with it. I don't know, but if he were to reflect honestly, he would also say, what the fuck did I say? And so we've been living side by side for over 5 years without having much contact. And not making any attempts either. The only thing I've really done is including last year. Whenever my ex-partner came to ask for signatures, because he always said to the outside world that this was actually the perfect world, whether it was driving school or opening a bank account or whatever, I always provided the signatures and usually without resistance or for trips abroad for the children or whatever. He made sure that I put my second signature underneath it. But I think he always liked to do it just to get in touch with me. I don't know if he then had the helpless contact. For many years he was always provocative, until at some point I said I wouldn't be provoked any more, just the most necessary sentence, the ink was dry and then I closed the door and the conversation was over again. I said from my side that he probably wouldn't be able to change the way he spoke to me. For me, it was actually important that you get your act together at some point and signal to the children that they are at least talking to each other. But you probably never realised that we were talking to each other normally the last few times, because they were. And I have no idea how he communicated anything at home, I don't know.

### **Minute 35**

**Interviewer:** That was about you and your ex-partner.

**Test person:** Yes, yes exactly.

**Interviewer:** And to your children a little more?

**Test person:** What do you mean?

**Interviewer:** Your children, in other words the bond. How strong is the bond between the children and their own father?

**Test person:** Yes, at the moment I assume that it is very strong.

**Interviewer:** So the highest level of commitment.

**Test person:** I think so, because they don't have any other option, so they have the compensation. These are assumptions, that's how I see it.

**Interviewer:** Yes, yes. These are all estimates from your side.

**Test person:** And I always get, yes, I always get it from the other observers, with the neutrals, the neutrals, that the children are doing very well. And there are no conflicts between them and their father. Outwardly, everything is going wonderfully, they have common goals and they realise them. And he enables them to achieve their goals and I don't really see a moment when I would have to question that in any way. I can't imagine that. At the moment, things are going really well and everyone is going in the right direction and is really happy with it. But I don't know what it looks like behind the scenes.

**Interviewer:** Yes, you can't know either, because they're not there.

**Test person:** Exactly.

**Interviewer:** And what about contact with your children? So with you. From 1 to 7 and 1 would be very low, as you said, right?

**Test person:** For me a 0, a flat 0. Nothing is possible.

**Interviewer:** No contact at all.

### **Minute 36**

**Test person:** No contact, no telephone number, nothing. I just know where they live and you know where I live. And I also told my ex at some point, I say and who wants what from me. The last time we spoke on the phone, I know for sure that my ex-husband was there, my child [child 2] verbally abused me on the phone for the first and last time and I was pretty sure he [the child] wasn't alone. But I couldn't prove it and three

quarters of a year later, when I signed a document like that, my ex contradicted himself. Yes, we called you the other day. First of all, the other day isn't quite correct, but well, this word "we", "we" was so present and so strong that I said, OK. My child [child2] or our child [child2] can't help it if he [the father] is there. And even if he's not there, he doesn't have the courage. We had an encounter in the field this summer, he didn't have the courage to stop, but the child did manage to smile at me, so I'm sure there's a bond there. But the other influence is still so strong that it can't help but say, no, I can't do it. I'm now hoping that when the child grows up and gains a bit of self-confidence, things will get better at some point.

**Interviewer:** As a mother, do you have or have you had contact with family courts, youth welfare offices, lawyers, experts, etc.? Did you say yes, yes.

**Test person:** I didn't leave anything out, yes.

**Interviewer:** Now I would like to know how you would describe this relationship in more detail? Was it helpful or not helpful? Was it supportive or annoying for you?

**Test person:** Well, it's also important to me now that, yes, shortly before I separated, I contacted the youth welfare office and wanted information. How I could do it in the fairest way for the child, what options I have because I don't have my own flat. I didn't have a job because I was helping out with my ex-husband but had been out of my actual profession for a long time. In other words, I actually still had a nice relationship, to put it flatly, with the first caseworker. She was still very young herself, fresh out of university, no children. She knew where I could register, where I needed to go and, and, and I didn't even ask any questions. Job centre searches and so on. So I didn't take a cent from the job centre for any support or retraining or whatever. I was there, they couldn't place me, I was supposed to make my own efforts. That's what I did.

And then at some point I split up and was still living there and tried to somehow manage it with a lawyer, because we had so much financial and structural crap around us. And I thought I'd somehow manage to resolve it in a friendly, good way with my ex-partner. But he was so emotionally involved that it was really difficult and within 14 days, the mood had really changed and I had the feeling that I wasn't getting a solution and he wasn't listening to me properly and didn't understand what I was saying. He always wanted to, he didn't understand the reasoning either and there had been a crisis for a few years and he had suppressed it. So it was very difficult and then I said to myself, OK, if he doesn't want to do the joint lawyer thing now, then I have to find a way to get back on my feet and I wanted that too, I didn't want it the other way round. So I didn't want a second attempt, I definitely wanted this separation. And so I continued to use this lawyer and made sure that I had some form of income, be it alimony or something similar. But that escalated immediately and completely. And then when I experienced these scenes with the children, when I pulled out, he didn't even manage to agree with me when I could see the children. He did everything straight away, always putting the children first, no, they don't want to see you. My children hadn't told me that before, so my one child [child 1], yes. I still suspect that it was really this, this normal separation conflict pain. The reaction towards me was that this was not yet instrumentalisation.

But he was already showing the first tendencies, because once, after 2 weeks, I actually managed to get our child [child 2] into his car with me, because I didn't have one, but I travelled there by bus and he lent me the car for 3 hours. And we drove off together and he stood in front of the door, in front of the open car door and cried bitterly or was about to start crying really theatrically. "Will you bring it back to me?" - the question in the first place. Questioning a child abduction in front of the child in inverted commas. And will you bring it back to me, this ME is possessive and I'm still, and so I really went to the youth welfare office again. I say something is wrong here. Yes, and then this woman was in the middle of it. But she didn't really have the courage to tell him that he couldn't do it like that. She didn't explain to him what's good for children and what's not. I didn't get any help from her and somehow it was never possible to reach an agreement. And she refused everything, didn't give out timetables so that I knew when I could see the children at school, because they were also in the town where I lived, at school, so that I

could perhaps invite them for an ice cream or something, so she boycotted everything, so that I had to take care of it myself at school.

Yes, and then? Oh, it just escalated. Yes, then you took the bus earlier or he picked her up or whatever. So it wasn't possible to get anywhere and so I went to the family court very quickly and with my lawyer because the intervention, sorry, before I forget, the family counselling didn't help either. He just categorically refused everything. He wasn't prepared to co-operate in any way, he didn't understand what it was all about. He was completely overwhelmed with himself and the pain of his separation from me and lost focus on the children. Completely. And unfortunately, I also got involved in the fact that I then discussed it a lot with him. And I got caught up in justifications, which was a waste of time.

Yes, and then at some point at the family court we first had a judge who wasn't bad. Then the case worker at the youth welfare office changed, she became a bit more sensitive and also went to talk to the children, but couldn't achieve anything because they were both around 12 or over 12 and so on. Yes, and then, as I said, this ominous divorce party came along and the court was involved, i.e. via the youth welfare office, because I then took the photo to the youth welfare office and I say, and here's the proof that I'm not telling any stories here, and they were also immediately prepared to get an expert on board, but he never wrote an expert report because my ex-partner refused. He never spoke to the children either, except on the last day when the decision was made. But he made every effort again to try and persuade them, but nothing worked.

Yes, and today I'm still paying for the contact procedure without having achieved anything. And that's really bitter, because he, I'll say it again now, as it is very clear. He hasn't lost out financially in any way. He paid everything it cost out of his postage pocket. And I really worked my way back up from 0. And I think I'm also in a position to say something. He once shouted after me that I should go back to where I came from and only with what I brought with me. And that wasn't much. But that's what I did and I think he was probably a bit disappointed that I somehow managed to catch myself, he probably didn't expect that. I am, yes, at the limit, I'm just swimming around like this. But I'm... mentally, I no longer got involved with everything that came from their side, I'll say their in the plural now. I distanced myself from it and went my own way. And I think that helped to calm things down a bit. I don't think so, I don't know, but we'll see, but I'm out of the conflict. Not together into the abyss, as Glasl always says so beautifully, but I got out. But I also lost contact as a result, no.

**Interviewer:** So now it's over with the courts and youth welfare offices. There's an order, so everything is off. You also said earlier that you no longer wanted to make use of their support. Or you wouldn't recommend them to other families who have experienced similar situations.

**Test person:** Right, I've studied it a bit and I also know where the points are if you don't get the parents, if you can't reach them. You do more harm than good.

Unfortunately, that's the way it is. We have the laws, we have the laws, the judges just have to apply them, but as I said, I had just said that. We had the first competent judge, then there was a change, then the clerk was suddenly good, but the judge was too lax, he saw that, he spoke to my conscience again, but he simply didn't apply what he could have done and from that point of view, yes. I'm at peace with it. At least I tried it, but I wouldn't recommend it to anyone else.

**Interviewer:** But that was in reference to a specific judge, not the entire legal system.

**Respondent:** I don't know any judges who have made good decisions. I don't know of any case where a decision has been made in such a way that contact could be restored. For example, I had also agreed to be accompanied during contact, where I said, "Hello, I'm the mum here, I've never needed that before, I don't need anyone to take me by the hand!". I really would have agreed to anything, I opened myself up completely, so to speak. But it didn't happen. But I also know that in rare cases it does help. I know that too, but there really has to be staff behind it, the whole chain. They have to be really professional and have a great deal of sensitivity, and they have to understand and be able

to put themselves in the children's shoes and not be put off immediately by any comments, but simply listen again and observe a lot and memorise things and then make the connections. And that's so difficult when you think about how quickly a conflict can boil over. And then you want to say something from the outside with one hundred per cent certainty? Whence both truths of those involved are, in part, not consistent. So I don't need to tell you how it all works in this dynamic. But in rare cases it is helpful. At the moment at least. I wish that would change. Whether through internal or external influences, I don't know what the best way would be.

**Interviewer:** [...] And that's why we try to scrutinise everything and include individual aspects, which are very often left out. But from experience I have, from acquaintances who have also experienced similar problems, the court very often involves a mediator, for example. Was that the case for you?

**Test person:** No, that was actually the idea, the family counselling. But the counsellor realised that we were on different levels, that is, I was the one who separated, I was already far removed from the relationship level. And my ex-partner was in his whole, in all his pain, just in the other, so no? We were, we were as far apart as we could possibly be. The only thing I had was that I wanted to do it on a friendly and well-intentioned basis, but he wasn't in a position to do that. And she realised that very quickly and I was able to tell her that very quickly and she believed me. But at some point there was nothing more she could do for us. Firstly, she said yes because they went to the family court. That fuelled the conflict again. I say, yes, but it's important to me that we come back now, when he's there, I recognised it as a power play, he wasn't always just depressed and sad, he also took his anger out on me, verbally, lashing out, whatever. And he was full of lies and so on. So I quickly found out about that and I just wanted and I actually saw the certainty that the family court would find in my favour and put a stop to it. That I would have a chance to be there for our children. But I never thought that it would turn into such an..., how should I put it, inactive solution, that there would be so much air around it, but in the end nothing would happen. Nothing happened. I haven't had one conversation, not one contact about all these institutions that I could have with my children undisturbed, not even with him. They couldn't give me the time of day. We simply couldn't manage to get me to talk to my children for five minutes. Whether separately or together or whatever, they couldn't manage it. And I think that's a poor performance. Really, if no, you can't even talk about performance, it's actually our responsibility, but if there are laws that say that children must not be instrumentalised, that children must not be forced to do anything. Yes, we are there, but I really wished or thought that our bond was so strong that they would at least manage to speak to me once. So that they could just let out what was bothering them. Then I would have been able to deal with it better. And I still miss the fact that I don't have any answers to questions. I don't get any either.

[...]

**Interviewer:** Exactly. But was there anything in your relationship that worked? Can you say, for example, what worked in your relationship? I mean in relation to your ex-partner.

**Test person:** Yes, so you mean before the separation or after the separation?

**Interviewer:** Before the separation, of course.

**Test person:** Before the separation, as long as we still had a common goal. That means a common goal: he inherited a farm. So we lived there for four generations, with our children, and it always went so well as long as I followed along. So somehow it's very unpleasant now. When I've followed. And followed the family goal, the multi-generational family. I was often asked for advice on how I would do something. Yes, but in the end, I always had to take part without being asked, but they didn't actually listen to my suggestions and I only realised that many years later, which was many years. I realised that I had lost myself in the whole procedure. I was always so grateful that I always went along with everything and yes, I also learnt a lot from it and yes, I also benefited from it. But I don't understand a relationship to mean that you get on really

well in your own flat and have an opinion. And when you get out of that flat, your ex-partner suddenly has a different opinion and leaves you out in the cold in front of family members. So this not really being a unit, and I made that clear at some point and also said that I missed that. But nothing changed. And it didn't improve with the sudden death of my ex-father-in-law. On the contrary, he took over the business without asking me and without talking to me about it. He went to work full-time and left me standing there. With everything, with the office, with the children, with work, with the household, with everything. And he simply went about finding his own solution. And that's when I really realised that I was in a situation that I had never wanted, never planned, and that it didn't really suit me either and that it wasn't my goal to run after someone in life and always say please, please. But if I do, then as a team, just like we started out. But not that you're just someone's wife. That may sound a bit selfish, but I have my own values. And the fact that I've made something of myself from my biography. My parents always made something of themselves and we still somehow functioned well, so you don't have to be angry about that, but they didn't betray me and that was actually a betrayal of me and my values. And then, above all, to the outside world and I couldn't deal with that.

**Interviewer:** So what worked for him at the beginning was this co-operation, teamwork, that they were a team at the beginning and got on well and yes.

**Test person:** And it was, I was also very proud of him, because he really was or still is. So I don't give him any credit, he's an incredibly goal-orientated, creative and very, very hard-working man. I really have to say that. And he actually gives everything for his family. If it wasn't for this certain flag in the wind, and I should have known about this flag in the wind back then, he was always saying: "My watch, my wallet, my keys and then you" at the very beginning, when we weren't married yet and didn't have any children. I should have realised. I should have known and he would always say in between and let it slip out that yes, if we ever got divorced, the children would stay with me. I never thought about it, firstly A, because that wasn't even on my mind and at the same time, yes, it's actually logical because they feel really comfortable here, but I didn't pursue it any further.

But if I had realised back then that it would happen at some point. Then I would have translated too. By 24/7 he means for life. That they stay with him. He's actually always demarcated his claims to ownership from me. It's bad that I never saw that. But still. So I'm at peace with him personally, I've never told him that I'm at peace with him. He once actually wanted to apologise to me by text message because he had really verbally attacked me again in front of our child [child 2]. I really have to say that, it's not a different word, it's better than pooing. I said to him, you will never speak to me like that again, never again! And I said that very loudly. I never accepted this apology because it was the wrong address. He should have apologised to our child that he [the father] spoke to a mother like that. I don't think he would ever have understood that to this day, but I let it go in peace. Who I won't forgive is this whole field of friends he has around him, who have influenced him, who have judged him without asking, who have gone along with him, who have fuelled him. I don't forgive them, I have forgiven my ex-partner, I can say that, yes.

**Interviewer:** How are things now? So are you in a committed relationship now?

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** And how would you characterise this relationship with regard to your situation, as support or as encouragement for you?

**Test person:** It's like that again now. It was like that at the very beginning. Then there was a phase where my partner said, that's OK now, I can't do it like this any more, I can't or don't want to support you more permanently because I had a different opinion. He would have taken a slightly different approach to me. I still hesitated for too long and oh well, I don't need to talk about it now. We've been like that again since I've been completely at peace with my ex-partner. I didn't tell him that and I didn't tell my partner either. But things have calmed down since then. So that means when you see him and say, "Oh look, there's your ex husband again," then I say, "Yes, then leave him alone."

That's my way of dealing with it and he realised that and it calmed things down a bit. What I also did, however, was get external support, not in the form of therapy, as I just said, but I built up a network of like-minded people and everyone is at a different stage. So as an experienced, more advanced mum, you can provide good support for acute cases. And I always say that you have to go your own way and deal with it. My experience is the one I had with the family court and so on. Yes, you can do that. But maybe you should try something else, yes.

**Interviewer:** Is this a self-help group?

**Test person:** Well, I wouldn't call it a self-help group because we never saw each other.

**Interviewer:** Oh well

**Test person:** No, I actually got to know an estranged grandmother. Yes, but not an estranged mum in person. We are networked and we talk to each other by voice message or sometimes on the phone, but I haven't met one in person yet, i.e. face to face. But the questions we ask each other bring out so many good things. And soothes a lot of things, yes. We sometimes ask ourselves what we would have reacted differently here and there, or could it be that he communicates differently and you're getting it wrong right now? We also scrutinise the way we communicate, so we try to support each other regularly. Yes, and if there are legal matters to discuss, I also look them up. What's going on there? And that you can also say to the other party: "Watch out, the law says so and so. Can't you just do a little...". That we can approach each other, somehow. So it's very different, and I've been doing it for two and a half years now, I think, and I would say that a lot has come out of the exchange and a lot has been resolved and loosened up. Mhm, yes.

**Interviewer:** And that is very helpful. So this group to exchange information and communicate with each other?

**Test person:** Yes, yes, absolutely. So I can't imagine that it's possible without it, that it's feasible without it, because you must never forget, regardless of whether you have to grieve, whether it really is a death. I am firmly convinced that this social, that you can grieve for a maximum of 12 months and then it's fine and we won't give you any more time. So this, this attitude, because grief never really ends. And certainly not with your own children. And if you're still there, it's almost unbearable. But your circle of friends or your partner or whoever can't stand it for long. But it keeps the person concerned, i.e. the estranged parent and certainly the children, busy for a lifetime, until the conflict can somehow be resolved. Or until you have a fresh start or the chance to do so. And that's how long it smoulders inside you and then you can't really expect even your friends to want to discuss the news with you every time or to give you advice or analyse it again, we could have reacted better. You can't do that. The only one who really accompanied us well, in colour, in liveliness, was a very good friend of mine who also lost his son, and therefore his son together with his wife, when he was 23 or 24. It was a long, long-term battle with cancer, and they were the only people who could understand me. So I'm stunned that the mother, a friend of mine, said to me: "At least we can come to terms with it, but what you're experiencing is even worse". And this statement, that people who have lost their child say to me that or that they imagine that or that it's worse than losing a child through death. I had to think about it for a week. And actually...

**Interviewer:** I see.

**Test person:** It's like that. And that's where this circle closes, the permission to grieve and the endurance of the environment that gives you these, these fluctuations that you have, you also have good days. But now, for example, this moment. Many people can't bear it anymore, they don't want to have anything to do with it and that's why it's good to find each other via social media or whatever. Exchanging phone numbers. To somehow give each other strength and support.

**Interviewer:** How stressful was the separation for you?

**Test person:** I wouldn't want to today. Well, I found it painful, even though I broke up, but it wasn't easy for me either. When I think about it today, it still hurts because something came to an end that you didn't really want.

**Interviewer:** So that would be the highest level of stress, so to speak.

**Test person:** Yes, absolutely, absolutely. I would never want to experience it like that again in any form. Pure stress. Pure stress. Good, but I also lost a lot of weight then. [...] No, I wouldn't want to experience it like that again, not even with the knowledge I have today. No, not emotionally anymore. Not at all. Everything else could perhaps be reorganised in a different way. Yes, exactly, but emotionally again. No. Absolutely not.

**Interviewer:** So how and what was that like for your children? The separation? How stressful was it for them from 1 to 7?

**Test person:** Very stressful. I have so...

**Interviewer:** Even at 7, i.e. the highest load level?

**Test person:** Yes, 7, yes. I saw that in the reactions. So if you just compare the normal symptoms or the reactions of children and adolescents in the corresponding age phases, how they can react, depending on their gender, full board, full programme, full 7.

**Interviewer:** And what do you think are the motives of the other parent, so to speak? That he has brought the situation to this point, the way it has gone?

**Test person:** I think a lot of things come together, but I can only speculate because I knew my partner for a very long time and because I know how he grew up. I mentioned this generation, multi-generational history, which is very pronounced in agriculture. He was the second son, which means that the first son moved out with his family back then, which means that he took over and wanted to have the farm. He then had this inheritance. And I don't think he ever really mourned his loss. I imagine that was missing, that he wasn't really in a phase of mourning for his father. He was overwhelmed by this new change, then the conflict with us and then suddenly the point where he experienced that I wasn't just talking, but that I was also doing something, that he no longer had a chance, that he was powerless and this powerlessness, that he tried to somehow turn the tide, but wasn't able to, neither emotionally nor in the way he did, he never learnt. He never learnt to use any other methods to convince someone to do it differently or to let go if someone wasn't ready, but then to find a solution together. So I would say that he also lacked a bit of the conflict resolution strategy of good communication. And what also played a role was this village environment. These supposed friends, but I have to say that they all have so many problems with their parents and their children that communication is completely disrupted. And also their attitude towards other people. That had a lot to do with it.

**Interviewer:** And how did this situation come about again? What factors influenced it? Well, you just said that friends also had an influence. The loss of his father.

**Test person:** Yes, the amount of work he had to do because he also had the children with him, he was completely overwhelmed. But it has to be said that my ex-mother-in-law has done a great job to this day. I've never had a problem with my ex-mother-in-law either. We no longer have contact because it's her son, she took his side at some point, but she never attacked me and I'm convinced she supported him as much as possible, but she never did. But even in her marriage, she wasn't the one who said, this is as far as it goes. She never opened her mouth, so he didn't have anyone to set boundaries in his relationship with his mother either. He didn't get any good advice from anyone, I'm firmly convinced. And I think that was also a trigger. Instead, he was, yes, stroked over the head, in his role as a victim, and at the same time his friends were egged on. So and so had to do it now. Show her the ropes now. It was a really bad and stupid mixture. A complete overload.

**Interviewer:** How old were your children? So back then, and how long did the process take? From the beginning until there was a decision?

**Test person:** So they were over 10 and just over 10 when they separated. And until the decision was made, it was a bit gradual. I think I appealed to the court six months later and it took two or two and a half years, these proceedings, these contact proceedings, yes. There were always an incredible number of breaks in between, where you had to seek help somehow and go into dialogue. And this and that and then these supervised visits, that was the next stage, which didn't materialise because you couldn't even talk to the children yet, in preparation. And that's when the will of the child counted - it was

asked at the beginning and it was asked at the end, but nobody ever thought in between: "How did that come about?". So we're talking about children's rights here, that and participation, that's all great, but nobody asks how it comes about.

And when I read things that say, yes, even a manipulated will is a will. If you also talk about education and schooling and so on. If you look at it from the point of view of educational pedagogy. All well and good, but seriously, if I can prove, as in my case, that I had this picture of the divorce party in full colour on A4. It must be clear to everyone that there is danger in delay here, that the child's welfare is not guaranteed and that the father is not authorised to raise the child or capable of raising the child and is intolerant of attachment and all these technical terms. Simply wiped away, waved through. And the was also for Professor J., who I had as an expert, or we had as an expert. He said to me at the end that he had rarely experienced a trial as bad as this. And he already had a lot of experience. That says a lot and he probably called me again six months later and asked me how I was doing and he also spoke to the young judge again and told him in no uncertain terms that he had messed up, that it shouldn't have happened like that. Because that's also a symbol or a sign for the other parents who will go down this path at some point, along the lines of, nothing will happen. Nothing happens.

**Interviewer:** Did you receive any support in this regard?

**Test person:** Well, my family supported me and still does in a passive way. They are also affected by it. They no longer have any contact. And they regret it very much over the years. And they're not getting any younger. Some of my grandparents are still alive and even at their advanced age, they can't really understand why it's taking so long. That's one thing, I also had a very select group of friends, but I've also buried some of them in the meantime, including this father who lost his son. That really meant something to me. Because we had a very neutral relationship, he also had access to my children and my ex-partner, but he remained neutral and he never set out to extract information from me or always just asked himself: "How are we going to get your communication back on track?". And it was somehow so nice because he already had a bit of life experience, but I miss that.

Mhm, I mentioned this mums and dads affected group, I don't want to reduce it to gender, for God's sake. I'm still of the opinion that it doesn't matter which way round, which part you are. It hurts just as much. Although I almost say that we have mothers, it's socially more difficult in terms of stigmatisation. I'm lucky, so far I haven't experienced anything when I've said something, when I've been asked directly about my children and I've explained what it's like. Thank God I haven't experienced anything like that yet, so that stabilises me again and yes, I've read and read and read and worked with this knowledge and built myself up again. And then I took other paths to somehow stabilise my health a little more.

**Interviewer:** You just mentioned stigmatisation, so do you mean that society somehow ostracises or stigmatises you as a separated parent, that you...?

**Test person:** No, as a mother, when you no longer have any contact with your children. That's abnormal. That's not possible. Just like that. But it's true and I can only guess, but I think we're getting more and more. But that's not because there are more and more mums who dare to open their mouths and those who are in contact with others, but because it really is the case. I don't know what it is. I can't do it at all. No, I don't think you can capture that scientifically either, you would have to illuminate the alienators accordingly.

[...]

**Interviewer:** Do you now have contact with the estranged parent? So to your ex-partner and your children.

**Test person:** No, absolutely. The only thing I've done now was actually drive a present round on Saturday and there are 2 front doors and the first one is unlocked in the morning so that I can get into this anteroom where the front doorbell is. I put the present down there, rang the bell and left, because I have to respect the fact that they don't want to see me. It's always very, very difficult to honour that, even though I know it's not really



what they want. But I, that's also the difficult thing, to put up with it and somehow understand it. No, actually you can't understand it at all, from a psychological point of view, that was the only time I crossed that line again, so to speak, and I won't do it again in the future.

It was now my coming of age. I have now symbolically gone along with it. And I've tried and tried again, but I've now decided that the youngest child has reached adulthood in inverted commas. And now I won't do anything more and I'm no longer responsible for it. So that means I will no longer cross that line. But I'm also no longer going to make myself invisible. So I'm not going to feel my way around it if I see it somewhere in the distance. No, I now have a life that belongs to me again, that's the wrong way to put it. No, I don't actually have to be considerate anymore because I'm no longer responsible for it. I no longer need to react sensitively. I can now just react as I am and don't have to think about what I say. Instead, if someone speaks to me, I'm mum again and the person I hope to be. And I have to think about yesterday, was that yesterday? No, it was the day before yesterday when I went for a walk in the woods and I actually walked more or less 5 metres past each other with my ex-partner. In other words, I was out with the dogs. He drove past in a car but didn't stop. I also turned my back on him, simply because I don't think he can communicate with me normally. I'm also protecting myself to a certain extent. I don't want to provoke it at all. I think that's the right word. Maybe he always feels provoked by my presence.

**Interviewer:** Do you understand and is a reunion with your children possible for you personally? At some point from your point of view?

**Test person:** Always. So my door is open for life. I've told my child [child2] that as long as I'm breathing, I can always and I won't change it. Even then, you can pick on me even more or shut me up even more. It won't change anything, because that's what I want. So it would be fatal if I said, no, now, but not any more, no, it's out of the question.

**Interviewer:** Well, many questions are from 1 to 7, which are very, very emotional questions. But they were asked like this for the study. From 1 to 7, how stressful is the alienation for you? If 1 was a very low stress level and 7 was very, very high. Or the highest.

**Test person:** Well, that's one thing that's not so easy to answer. I'll try to describe it now: I'm able to learn, set myself goals, pursue goals. I'm motivated to tackle certain things. I am an absolutely optimistic person, I have my life under control, everything is actually perfect. And on the other hand. As soon as my head is not in a conversation. Like the two of us now. With my partner or at a birthday party or wherever. As soon as my head is at a normal level when I'm doing things like making tea or lugging in wood, whatever, driving, I'm always thinking about my children, always. And that drains my energy. Yes, that's it. So you can't scale it because you don't know what actually outweighs it, so you should at least be able to measure it in terms of time. But I think if you look at it from a health perspective, it can't be healthy. As soon as you take your mind off concentration. That it goes in that direction. And that you then have to ask yourself the question, are you really well, how do you get on with your life, can you deal with it at some point? Have I made any mistakes? Have I not given enough? Do we ever have a chance? Until the end of our lives, will we ever manage to talk to each other and not just about each other?

**Interviewer:** Those are very, that's right, those are very deep emotional questions. I can understand if you can't answer them. And that you...

**Test person:** That's why this endless cycle goes on, so you can, you can really try to switch it off through mental training or whatever. But you can still say, Ah, you've let go 10 times. But even I, as an optimistic person, am still realistic enough to say that. That's only 10% that we have. The fact that the bonds down there are as strong as they are means that someone from the older generation would first have to pass away. And that's such a terrible thought for me, that this has to happen first so that they can free themselves from this bond, this toxic bond, in order to somehow decide something for themselves without being influenced in any way, and I think that's another point. I would

prefer it to be like my parents, that we can talk to each other, that we can sit next to each other and our spouses can talk to each other, that everything is actually as it should be. But after more than 5 years and no change, it's hard to keep believing in miracles or to have any hope.

**Interviewer:** And I know that you can't know that. But how stressful do you think this alienation is for your children?

**Interviewer:** That is elementary.

**Test person:** By elementary, you mean a very low load level, right?

**Interviewer:** No, it's particularly high. Even if you may not necessarily be aware of it or consciously living it right now. But I can tell you about a situation. A friend wrote to me: "Hey you, I think your child [child 2] is there in the field and he's fiddling around.". In other words, he was there alone, he couldn't leave because he had this processing device behind him, so I went there because I knew that we now had a moment where we were alone. And at that time, he had never antagonised me or said stupid things or whatever, he just rejected and refused contact, but the child was never able to justify it well and he was always very reserved towards me and I was still able to reach him emotionally. And that was a matter of, that was a contact of 2 minutes and I really approached the matter with sensitivity. And I opened this, this tugboat door. And I went up a step because of the engine noise, so that it could understand me at all. And there was a child sitting in front of me and her whole body was shaking, trembling. And he categorically refused everything I asked him, just for the sake of it, so commonplace, and it was OK for me at first. But I could feel in his body how frightened the child was. And it wasn't anger, it was fear. Because I can tell the difference as a mum. And then at some point I just said, because it does that so well. I don't want to keep you any longer, you go ahead. But could you imagine approaching me at some point, coming up to me? And then it turned from its rejected position to me. She held her hand out to me, looked me deep in the eye and we squeezed very tightly and said: "Yes". And that is the proof that this bond exists. And now he's an adult and still can't make it because he lives in this household and has these common goals. And I had, and I'm not joking, an hour later the father was standing outside my front door and he was shouting at me to stop stalking. That was the only contact I provoked in those years because I knew the child would be alone for once. That was my only moment and I was accused of stalking. It's such madness. An absolute nightmare and I don't even know where these words come from? It's a term, it's legal, it's relatively protected and it can't really be expanded. It has a certain meaning and you can't just use it in such a case of contact. Yes, that wouldn't do justice to the victims of stalking, if you put it that way.

## **Farewell**

### 10.8 Transcript anonymised Respondent 11 - Estranged mothers

#### **Greeting**

**Interviewer:** So, we'll start with the first question, how old are you?

**Test person:** I am over 45.

**Interviewer:** And which gender do you feel you belong to? Man, woman?

**Test person:** Female

**Interviewer:** Female. Did you grow up in Germany or do you have a migration background?

**Test person:** I grew up in Germany.

**Interviewer:** How would you categorise the socio-economic status of your parents' home in terms of income, occupation and education, i.e. from 1 to 7, if 1 is a very low status and 7 is the highest status.

**Respondent:** 7 is highest status?

**Interviewer:** Exactly.

**Test person:** I see. (...) 5

**Interviewer:** And what is your own socio-economic status from 1 to 7.

**Test person:** 4

**Interviewer:** 4. what is your highest qualification to date?

**Test person:** Secondary school

**Interviewer:** That would be the 2nd question, so many questions, they are also weighted from 1 to 7 so that we can then analyse them. Do you have siblings or half-siblings?

**Test person:** I have a sibling.

**Interviewer:** And how old?

**Test person:** It's older than me.

**Interviewer:** So, did your parents stay together until you were of age?

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** And are they still together?

**Test person:** Yes

**Interviewer:** OK, great.

**Test person:** Married for over 65 years, married.

**Interviewer:** Yes, that's a very long time, so it's been like that for two lifetimes. How was your relationship with your mum? From 1 to 7, if 1 is extremely bad and 7 is excellent?

**Test person:** 7.

**Interviewer:** Excellent and to your father?

**Test person:** 6

**Interviewer:** 6, and why?

**Test person:** My father is (...) more of a taciturn type. (...) So he doesn't - I don't have that many - he's a listener, but not a talker.

**Interviewer:** So how do you feel? So from the experiences you had at home. So how emotionally prepared do you feel for adult life? from 1 to 7, if 1 is extremely poor and 7 is excellence.

**Test person:** 5

**Interviewer:** 5 would be good. And how do you feel mentally? So mental health from 1 to 7.

**Test person:** Current now?

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Test person:** 1 to 7?

**Interviewer:** 1 is extremely poor and 7 is excellent.

**Test person:** Mhm, what would be 4 now?

**Interviewer:** 4 would be average, 5 would be good, 6 would be very good and 7 would be excellent

**Test person:** 4.

**Interviewer:** And physically?

**Test person:** 6.

**Interviewer:** 6, are you or have you received psychological or psychiatric treatment?

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** And for how long?

**Test person:** From 2017 to 20.

**Interviewer:** So 3 years. Was there a diagnosis?

**Test person:** Yes, (...) post-traumatic stress disorder.

**Interviewer:** PTSD. [PTSD] (...) So just that, yes?

**Test person:** Mhm.

**Interviewer:** [...] Do you have severe physical complaints?

**Test person:** Current?

**Interviewer:** yes?

**Test person:** no

[..]

#### **Minute 5**

**Interviewer:** How would you categorise the conflict situations in your parents' home? From 1 to 7. So there are sometimes arguments at home, but how would you categorise it if 1 was very low and 7 was the highest conflict situation?

**Test person:** 2

**Interviewer:** 2?

**Test person:** Yes

**Interviewer:** Did your parents

**Test person:** Of course there were phases in puberty when it was a bit more heated, but now, on the whole, I would say 2 mhm.

**Interviewer:** Did your parents involve you or your siblings in the conflict?

**Test person:** No

**Interviewer:** So how much conflict protection did you experience overall as a child? If 1 is highest conflict protection and 7 is very low now that is-

**Test person:** 2

**Interviewer:** At 2, above average. How much attention did you receive overall as a child? If 1 is for the highest level, still and 7 is very low affection level

**Test person:** 1.

**Interviewer:** What is the current situation? How strong is the current bond with your carer?

**Test person:** Very strong 1 too.

**Interviewer:** And the contact? Do you have, so is it regular? So 1 would be-

**Test person:** I am in daily contact with my mum.

**Interviewer:** So from 1 to 7, would you say 1 or a 2?

**Test person:** 1.

**Interviewer:** OK

**Test person:** So more than once a day is almost impossible.

**Interviewer:** And did you have to deal with family courts, youth welfare offices or lawyers as a child?

**Test person:** No.

**Interviewer:** No? Okay, then we'll skip a few questions. So, now we come to your biological family. Your own family. Excuse me. How would you categorise the conflict situation, if 1 is a very low conflict situation and 7 is the highest conflict situation?

**Test person:** So now with my child and mine, the father of my child, right? 7!

**Interviewer:** Highest level of conflict. And did you or the other parent involve the children in the conflict?

**Test person:** Yes

**Interviewer:** And how much? So it's from 1 to 7. 1 would be practically unconscious

**Test person:** 6.

**Interviewer:** Very strong. OK and in what form was that done?

**Test person:** Well, my child heard a lot. And the father told us a lot. About our conflicts.

**Interviewer:** How much conflict protection have your children experienced overall? From 1 to 7, if 1 is the highest level of conflict protection and 7 is very low.

**Test person:** Already 2.

**Interviewer:** And how much attention did your children receive overall? From 1 to 7. 1 is still the highest level of affection and 7 is very low.

**Test person:** So from both of us or from me now?

**Interviewer:** That would be overall, so-

**Test person:** Overall, yes (...) Yes, it's difficult because my ex-husband and I are different.

**Interviewer:** That's exactly why. So all in all.

**Test person:** 3.

**Interviewer:** And how strong is your children's current bond with their carers, i.e. with you and your ex-partner?

**Test person:** It's also difficult because I have no contact at all with my- So that's why I would say. None at all, so that's the highest. No contact at all. But my child lives with my father. So a lot of contact with the father. Difficult

**Interviewer:** Yes, that's why.

**Test person:** The centre then, right?

**Interviewer:** Yes, so I would. So depending on. So you can be a little more than the centre a little less than the centre that.

**Test person:** A little less than the means, because-

**Minute 10**

**Interviewer:** That's up to you. So. A little less than the centre would be slightly below average commitment level.

**Test person:** Mhm.

**Interviewer:** So the current contact with your children, i.e. with you, does your child, i.e. you only have one child, yes. He has no contact with you at all?

**Test person:** No.

**Interviewer:** Cancelled?

**Test person:** Yes

**Interviewer:** And to the father, your child...

**Test person:** One hundred per cent contact.

**Interviewer:** So from 1 to 7 we do a bit less than the middle, slightly below average.

**Test person:** Mhm.

**Interviewer:** All in all, great. And as a mother, did you have contact with family courts, youth welfare offices, lawyers, experts, etc.?

**Test person:** yes

**Interviewer:** And in what form?

**Respondent:** Well, there were two court cases about contact.

**Interviewer:** OK. So only 2 court cases and you had none.

**Test person:** Exactly and appointments at the youth welfare office. And appointments in parent counselling and family support.

**Interviewer:** And how would you describe this relationship? So as helpful or not helpful?

**Test person:** Not helpful.

**Interviewer:** Not helpful. Were they friendly or were they not unfriendly or so.

**Test person:** Well, you were friendly, but not helpful.

**Interviewer:** Can you explain that in a little more detail?

**Test person:** Yes, of course. So I thought - well, I had the feeling that I was being left a bit more alone with the problem. I had to follow up a lot with the youth welfare office before I even got an appointment. I was often just told off by email. And in my opinion, they didn't see our issue as a whole, but always just the rejection of my child. But why, why, why that is, was not questioned or is not questioned. (...) And at the court hearing, it was only ever about the child's will, regardless of whether it was manipulated or non-verbal communication. Not even the surrounding issues, but only the will of the child and it was only ever said that my child needs peace and quiet.

**Interviewer:** That you finally have a - What do you say?

**Test person:** So no goal, no support in the sense of... Well, of course, they said we should go to parent counselling, this and that. But the father refused and that was the end of it, so to speak, and I was given a six-month exclusion from contact at the last hearing. So that our child could calm down. But at that point there had already been no contact for over 2 years.

**Interviewer:** And this contact committee is only limited to 6, isn't it?

**Test person:** First of all, yes, they are over as of today.

**Interviewer:** Oh, so today? That means that from next week or something like that everything is legally...

**Test person:** From next week I might ask again if I can write a letter, but I have to ask the father first, the court has instructed me to do so.

**Interviewer:** Do you still have custody?

**Test person:** Yes. And it will now be... I have currently submitted an application for health care. I think that will take place in December or January. Because I would like it to be transferred either to me or to the youth welfare office.

**Interviewer:** Your child's health concerns? And so how would you, would you use this professional support again, or?

**Test person:** Immediately. Yes, well, I think that because the child's father and I are very estranged, it would be good if we could have a conversation in a supervised situation about our child and how we can get our child out of this conflict of loyalty. And how we can simply look together at how he could have contact with me again. After all this time, of course, it's not enough to just talk and then everything is fine again, because I think that my child also needs therapeutic support.

### **Minute 15**

**Interviewer:** And the next question would be, what worked in your relationship? Would you have any advice?

**Test person:** The relationship between me and my husband? Ex-husband?

**Interviewer:** Yes, yes.

**Test person:** In my opinion, we actually worked relatively well as a family until the break-up because we socialised a lot. So of course I did a lot, all this leisure time fun and stuff. It was all on my list or I took it over, but we swapped ideas, we did a lot together as a family and were actually always a good threesome. Until it came to this break, then that completely fell apart. (...) And that was certainly difficult for my child to understand.

**Interviewer:** Yes, understandably, yes. Are you currently in a new, committed relationship?

**Test person:** Yes

**Interviewer:** And with regard to your situation, would you describe this relationship more as support or as...?

**Test person:** Yes

**Interviewer:** Yes, and how would you categorise it from 1 to 7 if 1 was the highest level and 7 was a very low level of support.

**Test person:** So the 1.

**Interviewer:** OK and how stressful was the separation for you? From 1 to 7. 1 would be the lowest stress level and 7 the highest.

**Test person:** 6 (...) Because it came very suddenly. So it really caught me completely off guard. So there wasn't this creeping process and then at some point you argue, you argue and argue and then it's over, but there was an affair that came out and so of course everything changed from one day to the next. (...) I didn't know anything about it either, so I had already suspected that something was wrong. And I had also asked about it and then there were problems or difficulties, but (...) in life I wouldn't have expected that (...) it would happen the way it did.

**Interviewer:** And what-

**Test person:** That really blew me away. In the truest sense of the word, yes.

**Interviewer:** And how stressful do you think that was for your child?

**Test person:** I guess it was just as stressful as it was for me. Because of course the family broke up from one day to the next. We had to move out of the house we shared. We no longer went on holidays together. So my child went on holiday with her new partner just 5 weeks after the separation - on our planned holiday. So it was a holiday flat that we had always travelled to and which was of course very difficult for my child to understand: one minute the family nest and suddenly the father goes on holiday with a

new woman, lives with her, including the child. And including language barriers, because this woman wasn't from Germany.

**Interviewer:** So a new language and a new person at home.

**Test person:** And a new child who always lived with the father. Yes, because they lived together and my child was then. We were in the alternating model at the beginning and so of course my child wasn't always with his father, but this child, yes, and that was very difficult for my child to understand.

**Interviewer:** So the new wife also has a child?

**Minute 20**

**Test person:** Yes, exactly. (...) And she has now also had a child with the father. But the child is not being looked after because the father is already back together with a new woman, with whom he has also had a child who is 4 weeks older - younger.

**Interviewer:** So he also separated from his new wife?

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** So, now he has another wife.

**Test person:** But he's already broken up with her again.

**Interviewer:** Okay. And despite all that, he is still allowed to keep your child, so they don't say anything?

**Test person:** Yes, at the moment. At the moment I don't know where my child lives because my ex-husband hasn't told me. I've only heard from others that he no longer lives with this woman and no longer does. So I don't know where. That's why I also filed this application. So that's included in the entry, but there's no application in that sense. But the thing is, my ex-husband lives somewhere else now. But I don't know where, because he hasn't answered any emails since September.

**Interviewer:** Do you have a family lawyer, i.e. a lawyer who is familiar with family law?

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** Oh, so good. And what does he say to that?

**Test person:** A bit speechless, actually, because it's like this. Now it's not the classic case.

**Interviewer:** Yes, exactly. That looks very special.

**Test person:** It's just a bit more specialised. Well, now I can't make such an application, my ex-husband already has a new wife and I don't know where my child lives. There's no such application and that's why we came up with health care, because my ex-husband isn't making sure that our joint child starts therapy, as he promised, and goes to a cure for stressed children in everyday life. That's what the school recommended. And also not taking care of the medical card, which has expired. After repeated requests from me and the health insurance company, because my child is co-insured with me. They didn't respond and that's why we've now submitted this application and have included the fact that we don't know or I don't know where my child is currently staying and living.

**Interviewer:** One moment please. I'll be right back.(...) You say. So, that your ex-partner disturbs or has cut off the bond between you and your child.

**Test person:** Well, yes. I don't have the classic proof of it now, but it's my perception and because my child was with me for a week in spring 2021. Then he went to his father and suddenly I got the message that my child was afraid of me. I would complain so much. He doesn't want to live with me anymore. I'm aggressive and I have an alcohol problem and so on and so forth. And that's how it all started. And because my child left here somehow happy and cheerful, in my opinion, and was still crying the night before, that he didn't actually want to go to his father and I persuaded him. It just makes sense to me that the father was there, especially as we had a procedure beforehand that he [the father] should have the alternating model again. Because a year before that, when this estrangement occurred, we no longer had the alternating model. And accordingly, a lot of things were discussed with my child during this hearing that were not intended for his ears. So my child claims that I lied in court, but he wasn't there. Then I ask myself, how would he know what I said?

#### **Minute 24**

**Interviewer:** And from your point of view, what are the motives of your ex, your partner? That he wants to break off contact because, as you explained the situation, they don't bear any responsibility for the separation, so to speak, and because very often the woman, for example, finds a new partner and therefore (??) and the partner then organises the whole thing out of revenge. How does it look -?

**Test person:** Not in my case. Of course, there was the situation where my ex-husband wanted me back after our separation, but then I said, no, I can't do that. I don't want that. I don't want that. I can't, I actually don't know these reasons. I've been trying to find out what's behind it for almost three years now. I had the feeling when it came to this separation or rather this alienation. I'll just call it that now, I had the feeling that I was in a good position. I had the relationship, I was financially independent, I was doing well, I had come to terms with my child here, even through this corona period and so on. I had a bit of a feeling that I was doing too well, maybe something like that. Maybe you weren't happy yourself and wanted to take it away from me or something, that's my theory. I'll probably never know.

**Interviewer:** So the chances are not 0, but it is difficult. In any case.

**Test person:** Yes, it's just like that. I've been dealing with narcissism a lot since the separation and of course it's a classic. Yes, of course the ex-husband has to be a narcissist, right. But it's a new word that we all use now when we get out of relationships. But I'd say that in, in, in 8 out of 10 cases it applies to my ex-husband. So it's also due to different behaviour and I got that from my therapist back then, she told me that for the first time when my child was still with me. And I've simply learnt a lot. I've also changed again since my separation and I've realised a lot of things. So it's very close to me and.

**Interviewer:** And how did this situation come about? So what influenced this situation? Because your husband had an affair very often. (...) But how, how, how did the whole thing come about? That it became public, that they realised that they had reacted in this way and that they had to move out.

**Test person:** Hm, well, the affair. So my ex-husband always went on a business trip to Eastern Europe in the winter after 2015, after the first time. And that's where he met her. In the evening in some club. It just turned into a lot more and we felt incredibly close and probably fell in love too. And these business trips turned into more and more trips, more and more travelling. And at some point I thought that somehow it couldn't all be true and tried to find out. And the good lady had posted everything on her Instagram. And then I wrote to this woman with a fake account, asking her to accept me as a friend because her account was private and when she didn't make it private, i.e. when she accepted me as a friend, I saw practically everything. I saw how much time they spent together and that they were actually together in Berlin at the time, where my ex-husband was actually working. That's how it came out. And then it all happened relatively quickly. Then it actually was. (...) It was clear to him (...) that he would break up our marriage because of the breach of trust... And then she was pregnant and then actually lost the child relatively quickly. But then it was already clear that she would come to Germany and they would live together here.

#### **Minute 30**

**Interviewer:** So what were the consequences and how long did the separation process take? Well, sometimes it takes a long time, sometimes quite a short time.

**Test person:** Really. So we really, really officially separated in the spring. So my husband, ex-husband, moved out. And I'll put it this way, the first time that I was back in. I moved out of the house in the autumn. So when I was here in my own four walls, I really got over it again, even before that [...] a bit, but in the autumn it was practically like this (...). So that was the worst, the worst phase.

**Interviewer:** Why did you have to move out? If I.

**Test person:** Because the house. We, meaning me, couldn't have kept it on our own anyway. It belonged to my parents-in-law and they sold the house and then I only had four weeks to move out. At first they said I couldn't move out until next year. So I could



take my time and then I was more or less told in the autumn that I had to move out on 1 November. So I had a month to find a new flat with my child.

**Interviewer:** But that wouldn't be possible either. So legally speaking, that wouldn't be possible unless you somehow gave a person a month to find a new flat, like that. That really is months.

**Test person:** Yes, but I was in such a state of shock. I just put up with it and then luckily found a flat.

**Interviewer:** Thank goodness. That - a month's time is not feasible like that.

**Test person:** No, especially not if you're planning to start your own business. But if you have a child, are a single parent and a dog. Of course, every landlord screams "Hurray!" That was really tough. So we looked at, I think, over 20 flats, 21 of which I couldn't have got from the outset. So it was clear from the outset that they didn't want me and the one I could have got. She was so rocked out, but I would have taken her now. But luckily I got a good tip. And then I went there and told them what my situation was and they said yes, it's difficult being self-employed and all that. And then I started crying really hard. And the nice lady is a single parent herself and just saw the need and said: "Watch out. You'll have a look at the flat tonight, which is, I got the notice today. So it was such a fate. And if you like the flat, we'll get it." (...) That was good.

**Interviewer:** So much. Very nice of the lady who did the.

**Test person:** Yes, totally. She also got a big bunch of flowers from me.

**Interviewer:** She deserves it. So.

**Test person:** Yes, actually.

**Interviewer:** So what consequences did the separation have for you, your child and your ex-partner? That you moved out. Yes, that is one consequence. And what else was there?

**Test person:** Well, we argued right from the start. So we weren't a team at all. Not at all. We argued a lot, we didn't understand each other about all kinds of crap. It would have made everything easier if we had just sat together at a parent counselling session. I wanted everything, but my ex-husband always rejected it all.

**Interviewer:** It's very often like that. (...) And did you receive support after you separated?

**Test person:** Well, I had, I was in a therapeutic, so I was in therapy. That helped me a lot. I actually have a lovely circle of friends who were very supportive of me. My family, of course, and yes. Financially, I also got myself some support. In the first few months.

**Minute 35**

**Interviewer:** That's exactly how we were with the support. What other support would you have liked and from whom?

**Respondent:** From the youth welfare office (...) and from the court.

**Interviewer:** And what kind of support?

**Test person:** That you can practically see that we need support together as a family. That you then simply inform the father that it's high time. Or that we get a family therapist or therapy so that we are more or less forced to manage this together for our child.

**Interviewer:** Did the court somehow recommend mediation, or?

**Test person:** Mhm, they did that and I also went to the parent counselling alone. But my ex-husband doesn't feel ready for that.

**Interviewer:** OK. (...) Do you now have contact with the estranged parent or no contact at all?

**Test person:** No contact at all.

**Interviewer:** Not with your child either. And from your point of view, is a reunion with your child possible again?

**Test person:** Yes (...) So that. Duration would of course take that one. So you would have to work through a lot. You would have to talk a lot and you would have to involve the child a lot in things that I would have liked to have spared him - but because he is so

messed up and has such a strange, skewed perception of what happened, I won't be able to do it alone.

**Interviewer:** And the next question would be, how stressful is or was the alienation for you, if 1 is the lowest level and 7 is the highest stress level?

**Test person:** 6

**Interviewer:** And why?

**Test person:** Well, because it's my only child and from one day to the next I was no longer allowed to be a mum. So everything I did for my child for over 10 years was taken away from me. Supporting him, school, this and that. And now I'm not allowed to do anything, according to my child. So I could, but I don't do it. And of course it sometimes feels as if my child has died. So you have a children's room that's covered in dust and clothes in the wardrobe that no longer fit. And cuddly toys that are still here and you just try to deal with this situation every day. And it's very, very difficult to endure this powerlessness. Also the worry about, about, about our child, I mean. Of course I ask myself how the child is doing. (...) And then when I asked, don't you think so or don't you believe? So I asked the father, "Don't you think it's not good?" and this and that, then all I get is: "No, the child will be fine. And it's better than ever before." And I'm told in the most florid colours how they have family time with their now ex-girlfriend. And I'm sent pictures of their family life. So I've practically been erased from the life of my child, our child.

**Minute 40**

**Interviewer:** And what does it look like for you? Because very often with alienation processes. So parents, do you have the feeling that you, as a parent, have experienced a process of alienation with your own child? Do you think that's the case for you too? Because often when parents are separated from our child for a very long time. For a long time and the bond becomes weaker and weaker and that's just the alienation, that the child also becomes alienated.

**Test person:** Yes, of course. So when I hear about this super child in these development reports, which I get every 3 months, when I receive them, I am of course sometimes irritated. But when I see a picture or maybe even get a video or because I've been blocked on Instagram, but always had an Instagram profile and videos of myself, I immediately recognise my child. The way they move, the way they breathe. So that's, I don't know anyone anymore, but myself. But still, when I try to remember my child now, I actually have very little memory. It's totally faded. So I don't remember what the voice sounds like, because it's probably a voice change now due to puberty and I don't know how big the child is. So, I have no idea at all whether it is smaller, bigger, how much it has grown. Of course, because I haven't seen it, it's difficult for me. But the child will never be a stranger to me, like that. But of course.

**Interviewer:** Because, well, we ask that because in many cases there is that and we also try to analyse that.

**Test person:** Well, of course it's the case that my child. So I have, of course I also have a me, everyone has to try to find their own way of coping with it. Of course, I love my child more than anything and would always do anything for them. But my own person and what defines me and my family are also important to me, because I'm also a daughter. And a partner. And a sister. And a friend. And that's why my care has been very important to me over the last few years. I just think about myself a lot and take care of myself a lot and now I'm just trying to let go. Because at the moment I don't see any possibility or chance of getting close to my child. So I can't tug at it, because that won't make it any better and it's not good for me either. So I try to look after myself. Also to allow the feeling of happiness. So that has also helped my relationship a lot. Allowing happiness. I used to start a lot of arguments with my partner in my relationship when it was really nice, because I couldn't stand the fact that I had this now, that I was ashamed to feel happy. (...) Because somehow I thought I wasn't allowed to feel happy because I had this situation with my child, and I put that aside. So I did, even though I know that my child checks my Instagram. I still lead my life there and also show myself in moments

when I feel good. Some people are really broken by it, which I can understand, and I certainly went down that path too. But I turned off and said, no, I'm living my life and I have my life and this bond that my child and I have will always remain. At some point it might get a bit closer again.

#### **Minute 45**

**Interviewer:** And did the therapy help you? To find this new path? Or did you come to it on your own through experience?

**Test person:** Well, I have to say. Well, the therapy helped me to come to terms with this whole separation and this marriage, because of course it's only when something like this is over that you really start to reflect and see things that didn't go well. But things that you let happen to you, I say. So now I'm back to the person I was before the marriage. My friends who knew me before always say that I'm back to the old [name of respondent] or the old person is back. And those who got to know me when I was married were totally amazed at who I am now, suddenly and. I'm very happy with that. The therapy, I think going down this path now (...) has done me good in that sense. I realised it on my own. I exchanged ideas with other like-minded sufferers. And I just realised that this way of breaking is not the right one for me. Because my life is very precious to me and, as I said, I also have a responsibility towards other people. And I didn't let myself down, but perhaps sometimes took on challenges (...) like working in a job where I have to deal with children every day.

#### **Conclusion and farewell**

#### **Minute 50**

### 10.9 Transcript anonymised Respondent 12 - estranged mothers

#### **Greeting**

**Interviewer:** So, I'd start straight away with the first questions. How old are you?

**Test person:** I am over 50 years old.

**Interviewer:** And which gender do you feel you belong to?

**Test person:** I guess you can tell (laughs) Female.

[...]

**Interviewer:** So did you grow up in Germany or do you have a migrant background?

**Test person:** No, I don't have a migration background.

**Interviewer:** So they grew up in Germany. So how would you categorise the socio-economic status of your parents' home in terms of education, income and occupation? From one to seven, if one is very low and seven is the highest status.

**Test person:** Well, I think I come from a good family, six of them.

**Interviewer:** Six, very good.

**Test person:** Or six, I don't know how to assess that. What is a good parental home and what is a good status? But in any case, I don't think they lacked anything.

**Interviewer:** Great. There are a lot of questions from one to seven, which I will always repeat [...]. So what is your highest qualification to date? From zero to six, if zero is not a school-leaving qualification and six is a doctorate, i.e. after a Master's degree.

**Test person:** So I completed a diploma...

**Interviewer:** Exactly five would be Master's and Diplom.

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** Perfect. Do you have siblings or half-siblings?

**Test person:** No, no siblings.

**Interviewer:** No siblings. So, did your parents stay together until you were of age?

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** So you're still staying together?

**Test person:** Yes, unfortunately my father passed away recently.

**Interviewer:** Okay, so my condolences.

**Test person:** Yes, thank you.

**Interviewer:** So how was the relationship with your mum from one to seven, if one is extremely bad and seven is excellent?

**Test person:** Yes, about five to six, somewhere along those lines. That's fine, but sometimes it's also different, maybe more like five. (laughs)

**Interviewer:** Okay and from the father?

**Test person:** Yes, I would say that too. A good relationship as it is, five.

**Interviewer:** Five, very good. And thanks to the experiences they had at home, do they feel emotionally well equipped for adult life? So well prepared from one to seven.

**Test person:** I think so. Maybe sometimes, because I was with my grandparents, it was too much, too much soft carpet sometimes. I realised that afterwards, which is why I would say that. Sometimes a piece was missing, yes, but still, I think five should fit.

**Interviewer:** Five would be good. Exactly. And how do you feel mentally from one to seven, if one is extremely bad and seven is excellent?

**Test person:** I'm actually doing quite well overall. Normal... I'm coping quite well with life, I'd say. Of course, everyone has something, which means that seven is just as unrealistic as a one, somewhere in between. Yes, maybe even a five. Realistically speaking.

**Interviewer:** How, how and physically?

**Test person:** I've been through a lot, but I'd say I'm very stable, even five.

**Interviewer:** Mhm, are you or were you undergoing psychological or psychiatric treatment?

**Test person:** I saw a psychiatrist, but not because of me, but because of my child. So...

**Interviewer:** Ok, that concerns...

**Test person:** I have never been in psychiatric treatment. No.

**Interviewer:** And do you have any severe physical complaints?

**Test person:** Mhm, no.

**Interviewer:** No, okay. So how would you categorise the conflict situation in your parents' home, if there was conflict?

**Test person:** Not as... I would say there weren't that many conflicts, so it was always solved constructively. The problems.

**Interviewer:** So from one to seven, one would be a very low conflict situation.

#### **Minute 5**

**Test person:** Yes, there were relatively few perfect ones, I would say, when I look back on my childhood. Of course, there were arguments and trouble everywhere, but maybe two or three, so there wasn't much.

**Interviewer:** And were they involved in the conflict by their parents?

**Test person:** No.

**Interviewer:** No, ok. So the next question would be, how much conflict protection did you experience as a child, but since you didn't experience any conflict and it was very little, that would be....

**Test person:** Well, of course I noticed when there were arguments, but I didn't get involved and was never actually directly affected by them. At least as far as my parents were concerned, they managed that quite well.

**Interviewer:** Mhm, so in terms of conflict protection. How would you categorise that? From one to seven, if one is the highest level of conflict protection and seven is the lowest.

**Test person:** No, we pretty much kept me out of it, maybe three of us, so I was never directly involved in the topics.

**Interviewer:** Slightly above average. So what about affection as a child? How much attention did you receive overall as a child? From one to seven, if one is the highest level and seven is the lowest?

**Test person:** A lot. I grew up with my grandparents and parents, so there was always someone for me to talk to. So there were probably three, so I got a lot. So maybe in a positive sense, or sometimes not, because... (laughs) um yeah...

**Interviewer:** What about the bond with your carer? So how strong? Would you describe the bond? From one to seven and one is still the highest level.

**Test person:** I'm not the commitment type. I'm more of a freedom lover and would say more of a middle ground. Maybe five or so or four or something in the middle.

**Interviewer:** And do you have contact with your carer, i.e. your parents?

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** So, how much contact do you have?

**Test person:** Usually until my father died. About once a week.

**Interviewer:** Once a week, that would be average. So you have contact with both parents, even with your father?

**Test person:** Yes, so contact now in the sense that you meet or also by phone, so phone. We also spoke on the phone once, normally once a week, so that would be twice a week. Mhm, normally in everyday life, I would say.

**Interviewer:** And you would rate that from one to seven? So that's according to your perception.

**Test person:** I always thought it was OK, what, what do you mean, one would be good now, wouldn't it?

**Interviewer:** Highest, highest contact level and seven would be very low contact level.

**Test person:** I thought it was quite a lot for my taste. So maybe five.

**Interviewer:** Only before five would be slightly below average, so if one is the highest.

**Test person:** Oh one is the highest okay, then four.

**Interviewer:** Okay. And did you have contact with family courts, youth welfare offices or experts as a child?

**Test person:** No, thank God not.

**Interviewer:** Great, very nice. So, now we come to your own biological family. How would you categorise the conflict situation there? From one to seven, one is now the lowest level and seven is the highest.

**Test person:** Well, I can only assume that it's my partner. Well, there are always differences, again and again. So it always depends on the subject areas, but there will be five, so there are a bit more conflicts.

**Test person:** The five would be slightly above average.

**Test person:** Yes, probably yes. So it always depends on the day.

**Interviewer:** Yes, of course, of course.

**Test person:** In the area ... huuh (laughs)

**Interviewer:** Did you or the other parent involve the children in the parental conflict?

**Test person:** You mean from the ex-husband now?

**Interviewer:** Exactly.

**Test person:** Yes, he did.

**Interviewer:** And how much, so if one was practically unconscious and seven was extreme.

**Test person:** Well, he really staged it. So you could probably even give him a seven, he's a master at it.

#### **Minute 10**

**Interviewer:** And if you take them both, as parents, and if you were to rate them on a scale of one to seven?

**Test person:** You mean... Well, I tried to keep the conflicts out of it because I think that's wrong and simply... Children have nothing to do with parental conflicts, that's how I learnt it in my childhood. You mean, you mean now on the scale of, of now I didn't quite understand. Now together, so how we handled it together?

**Interviewer:** Exactly, so you as parents. How much did you involve the children in the conflict?

**Test person:** Mhm. Unfortunately very different. I tried to keep it out and he acted it out, that's exactly the issue, so you can't really see it together.

**Interviewer:** Okay, then you would draw an average like this, around the middle.

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** So if you have zero and he has seven, then you would put a four or a three in between.

**Test person:** Well, I wouldn't presume to give myself a zero, but in any case I've always tried to pull it out. Yes, then make it a four as a mean.

**Interviewer:** Mhm and in what form did your former partner do that?

**Respondent:** Yes. (...) So, on the one hand, of course, dealing with the conflicts in front of the child has always been an issue.

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Test person:** But also by manipulating it earlier, I would say, I didn't know the word before, but today I would say. By making the child feel bad directly towards me, directly in front of him. So that I was the worse person of the two, directly in front of the child, and yes, as I said, that too... He portrayed me as negative in front of our child. Alone, but also in my presence.

**Interviewer:** I was going to ask that straight away, but you've already answered that. So, how much conflict protection would you say your child has experienced overall? From one to seven.

**Test person:** I think it got a lot, too much. So I think it hardly got any conflict protection at all, what, what was the, so in the much conflict...

**Interviewer:** Exactly that on the rating scale: One would be the highest conflict protection and seven the lowest.

**Test person:** So I would say maybe a five, because it's always a mixture of both parts.

**Interviewer:** What about the attention? Did your child, how much attention did your child receive? From one to seven? Still, one is still the highest level.

**Test person:** Also very unevenly distributed, unfortunately. So I spent most of the time with my child and he [the father] spent very little time with the child when it was small. So it was very unevenly distributed. I don't know whether they can differentiate between the two or whether that's a point in common, so to speak.

**Interviewer:** Yes, you can differentiate. In any case.

**Test person:** Exactly, so I spent most of my time with the child. So for sure it has... I would say normal attention, I don't know the five or so probably. He got a lot of attention... So I was there for him a lot.

**Interviewer:** And what about the attachment? So how strong is your child's current bond with their carers?

**Test person:** To me zero, the father completely alienated it three years ago.

**Interviewer:** Mhm.

**Test person:** There is no contact with my child, despite all my efforts. And it's always difficult to say about the father, I don't really know at the moment, I can't judge.

**Interviewer:** Ok.

**Test person:** In principle, he has had very little time, relatively little time for the child, because he also works full-time and is very involved. I can't imagine what that does to the bond at the moment. To be honest, I have no idea and can't form a picture of it.

**Interviewer:** And the current contact with your child, i.e. you no longer have any contact at all?

**Test person:** No.

**Interviewer:** And your ex-partner?

**Test person:** That lives with him. [...] He put together a new family and that made me superfluous.

**Minute 15**

**Interviewer:** So he got married again and...

**Test person:** Exactly.

**Interviewer:** ...your child, i.e. your child together, lives with his new family together with his...?

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** Ok. And did you have contact with family courts, youth welfare offices, lawyers, experts?

**Test person:** Far too much.

**Interviewer:** Far too much. In what form? How would you describe that?

**Test person:** The catastrophe. Well, it really is an absolute catastrophe, so I can't think of anything else. Everything I've got to know is really subterranean, what happens here in Germany.(...) Both from the court and from the institutions like the youth welfare office. I only got to know one youth welfare office employee briefly, who I would still give a very good grade, but the rest is a real disaster. Really total. Absolutely failed.

**Interviewer:** How would you describe the fact that they were unfriendly, or? Were unhelpful or uncaring?

**Test person:** Well, if you consider that parents need both children and that this is also urgent, then you also have to find ways for children to keep both parents. My child has gone through a difficult career now, from psychiatrist to psychologist and he has still had a carer for many years. And if someone wants to recognise what a child really needs and simply cut off the mother, who had a good relationship with the child, as it were. Then that's just an absolute disaster. First and foremost for the child, but also for me and for everyone involved, and no-one has managed to find a sensible way forward. (...) My ex-husband has more or less fought his way through the courts, you could say.

**Interviewer:** Ok, so family court and so on. So they had lawyers and they also had a lawyer or lawyers.

**Test person:** I had no other choice, I had no contact there per se. The day after I moved out, I already had the first complaint on the table from him.

**Interviewer:** Ok.

**Test person:** Before he had even had a conversation or anything. And it just manifested itself over the years and completely took hold with him.

**Interviewer:** And he now has custody of their child and she doesn't?

**Test person:** No.

**Interviewer:** Not any more.

**Test person:** No. Incomprehensibly. There was never any reason to do so, and normally it's not that easy, but in Germany it obviously is. Nothing ever happened there, so... I've never committed a criminal offence, nor has there ever been anything to do with a child, nothing has ever been proven against me and nothing has ever happened.

**Interviewer:** (...) So you are very disappointed with the professionals, with the courts, youth welfare offices and lawyers and so on. That is? Would you want to make use of this help again or not?

**Test person:** Never. (laughs)

**Interviewer:** So you wouldn't recommend it either?

**Test person:** It's no help, if it was help and you could find a way, then that would be fine. But nobody bothered. So the court and youth welfare office in particular are really disastrous. You can't say anything else about it. And the proceedings and the guardian ad litem are basically no better and have also tooted the same horn. (...) I don't want to have anything to do with it. Definitely no.

**Interviewer:** Ok. (...) So then, I would ask the next question. So, when it didn't work out at some point, you said yes, but what worked in your relationship? What advice would you have for that?

**Test person:** What worked?

**Interviewer:** Exactly.

**Test person:** I'll put it this way, in the end it was common interests that worked. And somehow an age that also worked in the end. And although I'm a bit smarter now, I was the one who simply went along with and supported a lot of things.

**Interviewer:** And then when they no longer had these common interests.

**Minute 20**

**Test person:** I wouldn't even say that. It has nothing to do with the interests. There was one memorable experience: his father passed away nine years ago and there was a very, very strange funeral that I didn't understand. And that's when I actually woke up and realised what kind of person he was and who I was really living with and I started to do some research and decided that I was going to separate from him.

**Interviewer:** Ok, and what about now? Are you in a new committed relationship?

B: Yes, mhm.

**Interviewer:** And how would you categorise this new relationship with regard to your situation? As encouragement, as support?

**Test person:** I'll put it this way, you learn from your life, from certain things and you won't make the same mistakes a second time, I always say. I believe that when two people live together, it's going to be like that anyway, there are no rose-tinted spectacles, all your life and I'm just, I think it's just a normal, normal potential for conflict. It's certainly on a different level for every couple. And here too, of course, it's not possible without conflict. But I didn't find the issues that stemmed from my ex-husband there again. I would never have accepted that again.

**Interviewer:** And how stressful was the separation for you? From one to seven, so if one was the lowest level and seven the highest?

**Test person:** I think you have to differentiate. The separation from my ex-husband was really a liberation for me, I have to say that quite clearly. I was very happy to have got away from him and I realised relatively soon that I was simply much better. However, the absolute catastrophe was what happened to our child.

**Interviewer:** That will be the next question, so how stressful was the separation for your children?

**Test person:** An absolute catastrophe.

**Interviewer:** So very stressful. The highest level?

B. Yes.

**Interviewer:** And why? How did you realise that?

**Test person:** The main problem was always that I noticed very early on that he kept telling the child things and made me feel bad for him. Things like our child then saying: Dad will always love me, but he doesn't love you any more or how I wanted to move, how it was then said that asylum seekers were playing in the street and smashing car windows and so on. Yes, lots of things. Everything I did was criticised. As an example. Of course that happened in many different ways (...) So I was able to experience the things I fled from earlier, from the marriage, through the mouth of my child.

**Interviewer:** (...) And do you have the feeling that you have already said this, but that your ex-partner wants to cut off the relationship between him and your child?

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** And what, what do you think, are his motives for doing something like that from your point of view?

**Interviewer:** Well, the biggest reason is definitely revenge, because I was no longer available to him, he used the extended arm of the child, so to speak. And of course I was also in control. I was in a new relationship, he basically spent one or more days with me again, he had already remarried after the divorce and of course he didn't really want to coordinate dates and other things with me. He wanted to stay in charge, he wanted to remain the boss. Everything had to go the way he wanted it to, of course it didn't work like that after the separation.

**Interviewer:** I see. Did this situation come about that you split up in the first place or what influenced that?

**Minute 25**

**Test person:** Yes, what I said earlier actually. At some point I realised that somehow things weren't right and that's just it. I then very often, let's say, things like that, there were sometimes statements like "you're sitting on my sofa" and when he... Yes, he always



put himself in the foreground and my work, I have a breadless art and I'm worth nothing in the relationship. And then at some point I noticed it, more and more, more and more, that I realised something wasn't right, you can't treat each other like that and the initial spark to really break up was, as I said, his father's funeral. (...) That really irritated me and that's when I finally made the decision. So that's no longer acceptable for me.

**Interviewer:** And how long did the separation last? And when you separated, how old was your child again?

**Test person:** It was over 5.

**Interviewer:** He was over 5 years old. Ok. And how long did the separation, i.e. the divorce, last?

**Test person:** Well, that's the usual separation year of about a year.

**Interviewer:** Oh, so fast,

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** So what consequences did the separation have for you, for your child and for your ex-husband? For the whole family, so to speak.

**Test person:** Well, the consequence of my child was that he was cut off from his mother as a resource. He lost his mother. The ex-husband looked for a replacement and found himself a new partner, obviously during the marriage. And for me? Well, in the end I lost my child, at least for the moment. I mean, life isn't over yet and I mean, there's still a chance, I'm an optimistic person, but for me it was a great liberation in any case.

**Interviewer:** And did you receive any support? So after the separation?

**Test person:** Yes, not, not directly. Well, it was there, of course. No, actually, my parents didn't live here yet, but so, by phone, of course, I think my parents were the biggest support and of course my circle of friends in any case.

**Interviewer:** OK, and what else would you have? What would you have...?

**Test person:** Oh yes, I forgot the fathers' break-up was also very important, because I also got to know them. But I have to say that in my case it was a double case, not only my child was alienated, but also the child of my new partner, who was alienated in exactly the same way as me. At the same time.

**Interviewer:** The child of the new partner?

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** And do you, do you now have contact with your estranged parent, i.e. with your ex-partner, so do you communicate with each other now, or how, how is that?

**Test person:** So communicating with the ex-partner is actually an impossibility. The last time was on the day of the funeral, when I tried to persuade him that our child had a right to say goodbye to her grandfather. And that started from the fact that he searched the funeral parlours, went to the deputies to get an appointment of his own, which was not agreed with us. And finally, he kept our child completely away from the funeral. He also berated me, saying that my child would never forgive me if I didn't do things the way he wanted. So he fell right back into the old pattern of what mine was during the marriage, but this time I didn't react to it.

**Interviewer:** And do you have no contact with your child at all? At the moment?

**Test person:** Refuses, I mean, when the father keeps saying how bad I am, he doesn't even have the courage.

**Interviewer:** Ok. How old is your child at the moment?

**Test person:** Now it's under 16.

### **Minute 30**

**Interviewer:** And he, his father, your ex-partner refuses contact?

**Test person:** Yes, and he manages quite well. He also keeps our child away from social relationships as much as he can, which means he has hardly any friends, or none at all, which is also a huge problem.

**Interviewer:** Okay. And so what do you think, from your point of view, is a reunion with your child possible?

**Test person:** Definitely. So we had, because I knew, yes, I also had to go through the expert report, and at least the expert, which is perhaps the only positive ray of hope from

the matter, also certified that I have a very good relationship with our child, so to speak. And I always believe that. And I always believe in it, even though it may have destroyed a lot of things, as far as that's concerned now, I think somehow everything hasn't been completely lost with the child. And it just needs someone who is able to resolve the whole thing and simply tell the father that he needs to change his attitude and his behaviour towards me. Very urgently.(...) I don't have any problems with him, certainly not, but I'm not going to put up with him telling me that I'm only second choice and that he can tell me how things should be done. Of course that's not possible.

**Interviewer:** And how stressful was the estrangement for you? Because the separation was a liberation for them, as you said, and the alienation, what? From their child?

**Test person:** Disaster. There is no other word for it, extremely difficult.

**Interviewer:** So the highest stress level.

**Test person:** Yes. I always knew a bit about what was going to happen to me, because the other child was basically also estranged a few weeks later. And because I'm still in contact with the father to this day, I've always been aware of what was happening there and I knew what was going to happen to me. It was particularly bad, it was really psychological terror, I would say.

**Interviewer:** Are you in contact with the ex-partner of your ex-partner's new partner? OK.

**Test person:** Exactly.

**Interviewer:** So...

**Test person:** Or with his new wife, with whom I get on very well, we write to each other from time to time.

**Interviewer:** With his new wife?

**Test person:** Mhm.

**Interviewer:** You get on well and...

**Test person:** So not from him, but from, from the, from the other father concerned.

**Interviewer:** I see, I see about the ok, yes. I understand. Now, I understand.

**Test person:** Exactly. Exactly.

**Interviewer:** And what do you think, how, how stressful was the alienation for your child? The fact that it was...

**Test person:** I mean, I don't have to say any more than that it was completely unsuccessful for over two years, over March two years, almost three years I think, completely unsuccessful with the psychologist. The child was in psychiatric treatment for a long period of time and since living with the father, which was not the case before, the child has had a family helper, who in the beginning was scheduled for ten hours a week at the absolute maximum, I don't think there's anything more to say.

**Interviewer:** And the last question would be, what you have already said, have you as an adult experienced a process of alienation with your own children? Whether? Have you, and?

B: Unfortunately, yes.

**Interviewer:** So that's all the questions. Thank you once again.

**Test person:** Gladly ... Well, it's important to me and I've also said before that it's always very important to me to take part in things like this, because I only believe that you can simply avert this real misery to a certain extent with specialised studies. And for that to happen, more simply needs to happen, more needs to be understood about what is happening there. And yes, I think it's simply a protection against further alienation. I just hope that the work will contribute to the fact that perhaps something will change in Germany at some point.

**Farewell**  
**Minute 36**

## 10.10. Transcript anonymised Respondent 13 - estranged mothers

### Greeting

**Interviewer:** How old are you?

**Test person:** over 40 (laughs)

**Interviewer:** And which gender do you feel you belong to? Man, woman, diverse?

**Test person:** Still a man. Er, nonsense, woman, sorry. (laughs)

**Interviewer:** All good. (laughs)

**Test person:** No, woman. (laughs)

**Interviewer:** Did you grow up in Germany or do you have a migrant background?

**Test person:** No, I grew up in Germany.

**Interviewer:** Great. How would you rate the socio-economic status of your parents' home in terms of education, income and occupation? From one to seven. One is very low and seven would be the highest status.

**Test person:** Well, I would say five to six.

**Interviewer:** Slightly above average to average.

**Test person:** Yes, exactly.

**Interviewer:** And what is your socio-economic status from one to seven?

**Test person:** So in the current economic situation I would go for a four again, but in principle I would say a five or six? Yes, I would.

**Interviewer:** So, ok like with the parents.

**Test person:** Exactly, yes.

**Interviewer:** What is your highest qualification to date?

**Test person:** I have a diploma.

**Interviewer:** Oh, that would be number five, diploma.

**Test person:** Mhm.

**Interviewer:** So do you have siblings or half-siblings?

**Test person:** I have a sibling.

**Interviewer:** And did your parents stay together until you were of age?

**Test person:** Yes, we're still together. (laughs)

**Interviewer:** That would be the next question. So, yes. So what was the relationship like with your mum from one to seven, if one...

**Test person:** A seven.

**Interviewer:** Excellent, very nice. And your father?

**Test person:** Can I also say: also a seven. Yes, yes.

**Interviewer:** And the experiences you had at home make you feel emotionally... So how emotionally equipped do you feel for adult life?

**Test person:** Very good. They gave me very good foundations for life and I stick to them. I always meet the wrong people, I'm a bit of a bad judge of character, but you can't look inside people, so it's sometimes a bit difficult.

**Interviewer:** Yes, that's right.

**Test person:** Mhm. Yes.

**Interviewer:** Ok, you can't look at the people, how do they feel in terms of their mental health? From one to seven.

**Test person:** So up until six years ago, I would say I would have given myself a seven, but. Since I've been going through all this drama with my ex-husband, yes, I would give myself a four.

**Interviewer:** So mediocre, about average.

**Test person:** Yes, Mhm, Mhm.

**Interviewer:** And physically, in terms of health?

**Test person:** Yes, well, I think that's more of an old-age story, where the first aches and pains slowly appear. Here it cracks and there it cracks. No, but otherwise my health is still fine, so I'd say a five.

**Interviewer:** Have you received psychological or psychiatric treatment?

**Test person:** No, no. Mmmm.

**Interviewer:** So what exactly are the physical complaints? So you have severe physical complaints, I don't know, permanent back pain, do you?

**Test person:** I have a pinched cervical vertebra, that's my main problem at the moment. No, otherwise I'm actually fit.

**Interviewer:** How would you categorise the conflict situation at home? Well, because there are always conflicts at home.

**Test person:** Mhm.

**Minute 5**

**Interviewer:** So from one to seven. So I mean now with your parents, where they were.

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** One is very low and seven would be the highest level of conflict.

**Test person:** Oh, then say one thing. It was the usual thing. You didn't feel like studying or you wanted to stay out late in the evening, but it was, so an A, yes.

**Interviewer:** And that is also related to their parents, when they discussed with each other or with each other, so to speak. Or yes, were there punishments or something?

**Test person:** It was always settled very quickly. So there were none, no big dramas of any kind. I was caught smoking once and he didn't talk to me for a fortnight, but my father didn't talk to me otherwise. (laughs) That was actually the worst thing I can remember.

**Interviewer:** Ok. So. And when there was a conflict between your parents at some point, did you involve them or your siblings?

**Test person:** Yes, my sibling was already too old, he was five years older and I mean that he always stood in front of me protectively when it came to something and joined in the discussion and argued in my direction and then it was settled relatively quickly.

**Interviewer:** Ah, ok. And how much conflict protection did you experience overall as a child? If you could categorise that? From one to seven. One would be the highest level of conflict protection...

**Test person:** Mhm.

**Interviewer:** ...is the other way round. And seven would be the lowest level.

**Test person:** Well, there were hardly any conflicts with us, so I would say an A now, I have to say. Yes, there were.

**Interviewer:** How much attention did you receive as children? Overall, if you can categorise it?

**Test person:** Seven is high again and one is low, or what?

**Interviewer:** It's still the other way round.

**Test person:** So one is high and seven is low. Then I'd say I've been travelling a lot because of my hobby, which I've been doing, but I'd give it a two.

**Interviewer:** And how strong is your current bond with your carers, i.e. your parents?

**Test person:** Still very strong. Yes, they live next door.

**Interviewer:** Oh, so we need... at one, the highest attachment level? Or two?

**Test person:** Yes, so two take two. We'll take a two.

**Interviewer:** Ok. And you also have very good contact?

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** So strong contact would also be a one?

**Test person:** Mhm, so almost every day.

**Interviewer:** Ok, so that means the next question would be whether you had any contact as a child with family courts, youth welfare offices, lawyers or anything else.

**Test person:** Not at all.

**Interviewer:** So, now we come to your own family. How would you rate the conflict situation? From one to seven. One is the lowest conflict situation and seven is the highest conflict situation.

**Test person:** Seven.

**Interviewer:** Highest.

**Test person:** Jo.

**Interviewer:** Did you or the other parent involve the children in the conflict?

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** And how much so from one to, so one would be practically unconscious, and seven would be extreme, that you seek out all means to involve the children.

**Test person:** Seven.

**Interviewer:** Seven. So she or you...

**Test person:** Yes, my ex-husband.

**Interviewer:** So only from his side and from her side?

**Test person:** Not at all. So... Yes, I have to say that. All the court proceedings that have taken place have always been my ex-husband, the applicant

**Interviewer:** And in what way did your ex-husband involve the children?

**Test person:** By talking badly about me and my family. It's now so bad that my one child no longer has any contact with me and my family. So for three years. Mhm. And now he's trying to do that with the second one. So he also talks badly about my, sorry.

**Interviewer:** You're still in contact with the second one, aren't you?

**Test person:** The second one lives with me. So we separated over 5 years ago, we drew up a divorce settlement agreement that said I would give up everything and the children would stay with me and he would have regular contact rights, which we did, and four weeks later the first custody dispute arose and this has been going on for over 5 years now.

**Interviewer:** Okay. And how much conflict protection do you think your children have experienced overall, from one to seven? So one is now the highest level and seven is the lowest level.

**Minute 10**

**Test person:** I tried to protect her, but. So I would say, looking at the other side, we're at five to six. In any case.

**Interviewer:** And how much attention did you, did your children receive overall?

**Test person:** Very much, very much.

**Interviewer:** Ok. So if one is the highest level now, where do we see....

**Test person:** ...then already an A, yes.

**Interviewer:** Great. And how strong is your children's current bond with their carer, i.e. with you and your ex-partner?

**Test person:** I have to split it in two. (laughs) Because, as I said, my older child is no longer attached. So in the meantime... He's been suing me for maintenance since yesterday.

**Interviewer:** Ok.

**Test person:** I don't know whether it does it consciously or whether the father pretensioned it. I can't say. Yes, and with the second child? He's about to throw the contact agreement overboard too. So I'm trying my best to tell the child that he should please keep it the way we had it but. I have no idea. He does it with money, I say. Trying to steer the child in his direction.

**Interviewer:** So to you, the eldest child would be like this if we weighted it. The older child would be a seven because they no longer have any contact.

**Test person:** Right.

**Interviewer:** And the second child would be a three or four?

**Test person:** Well, I already have a very strong bond with him. So I would give it a two, a two, yes. But he just can't let go of her father, which I can understand, because he's not her father and he always tells a lot of... And a lot of untruths. And I just can't keep shooting back all the time and saying it's never true, it's never true, it's never true. It's difficult. A very difficult situation. Mmm.

**Interviewer:** And so, those who have contact with their ex?

**Test person:** Exactly.

**Interviewer:** The first had no contact with them at all and the second has contact with both of them?

**Test person:** Exactly, yes.

**Interviewer:** And the second child has good contact with the father, too, so...

**Test person:** Yes, quite crazy.

**Interviewer:** How would you categorise this so that we can...

[...]

**Test person:** Yes, I would also give it a two.

**Interviewer:** Above average.

**Test person:** Mhm.

**Interviewer:** And okay, you mentioned that your ex-partner had already filed the complaints. But as a mother, did you have anything to do with family courts, youth welfare offices or lawyers?

B: For six years, yes. Plenty every day, every year.

**Interviewer:** Family court and youth welfare office?

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** Do you also have a lawyer to represent you legally...?

**Test person:** Yes, I did.

**Interviewer:** So how would you describe this relationship with the family courts, youth welfare offices, lawyers and so on? Helpful?

#### **Minute 14**

**Test person:** No, not at all. I feel helpless, I have to say. Because people don't recognise what's happening to the children. Because I have to say, I have a narcissistic ex-husband, I've heard that from many people. And unfortunately the courts and youth welfare offices don't recognise that. You suspect it, you tell me too, but you say you don't want to mess with him. So the guardians ad litem, I don't know if you know them, they are the children's lawyers, so to speak. She was sitting here at the table with me and made the statement and I'm not crazy enough to tell him that he's narcissistic and that he's behaving wrongly towards his children. I'm not going to mess with him. Yes.

**Interviewer:** I see. And how would you describe this professional support or would you recommend it to others?

**Test person:** No. No, if I could, I would do without them all. But unfortunately they're involved. They're appointed by the family court and then they're suddenly standing on your doorstep and you can tell them whatever you want. Put evidence on the table, put facts on the table. If the other person claims the opposite and can sell themselves better, then they'll be believed. So I feel totally helpless.

**Interviewer:** Unfortunately, that's the case.

**Test person:** Yes, don't look at them. I have, I even have audio files from my ex-husband where... I even submitted them to the court in writing. How he drags me and my family through the mud, how he talks badly about me, about my education, about my parents and about my partner, so he really drags us through the mud. I have that in writing. So in, in audio, so to speak. And the court read it because I was supposed to put it in writing. They weren't interested.

**Interviewer:** Did not play a role in the...

**Test person:** Ne.

**Interviewer:** So do you, do you still have custody of your older child or does your ex...

**Test person:** No, I haven't since March. Because my child has said that he wants the father to have sole custody.

**Interviewer:** Mhm. So that there were so many conflicts and so that, you clearly showed and weighted that. But what worked in your relationship?

**Respondent:** What was the relationship with my ex-husband?

**Interviewer:** Correct.

**Test person:** (laughs)

**Interviewer:** Because it worked at some point, didn't it?

**Test person:** What worked? Well (...) When he was at home, what worked was that he was really busy with his children. So he played a lot, made a complete fool of himself. Playing Punch and Judy, having his hair plaited, lipstick painted on, earrings put in,

everything that children love when they can dress up the other person. Exactly, yes. But all the commitments, such as nursery, school, paediatrician and what have you, that was all my job, even though I work full-time.

**Interviewer:** Mhm, yes. And are you currently in a new, stable relationship?

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** And how would you describe this relationship in terms of their situation, i.e. as support or encouragement for them?

**Test person:** Yes, definitely. He's going through the same thing.

**Interviewer:** So, how stressful was the separation for you? From one to seven, if you can weight it in any way. One would be the lowest level and seven the highest.

**Test person:** Well, I split up because I couldn't take it any more. So it was actually liberating for me. At the time I didn't know what he was doing with my children.

#### **Minute 19**

**Interviewer:** And how do you think that was for your children? How stressful?

**Test person:** Well, first of all I would say that it wasn't stressful, it was certainly different because they first had to deal with it, living with mum and going to dad every now and then for a while. But I don't think the little one really realised it at the time, she was over 5 and the big one was under 10, so she was more aware of it, but they were both used to it. Dad wasn't around much and yes. Mmm.

**Interviewer:** And you have shown that you have said that your ex-partner tried or successfully tried to cut off the bond with your children.

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** In your opinion, what are his motives for doing this?

**Test person:** His motives?

**Interviewer:** Exactly.

**Test person:** Well, I assume we have one here, which means I assume, I know he has a migration background.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Test person:** He is South American and I believe that these people cannot accept it when a woman separates from her husband. Right.

**Interviewer:** Were there also religious reasons, because South Americans are Catholic? So strongly cath...?

**Test person:** No, he wasn't Catholic, he was Protestant. So.

**Interviewer:** Oh, oh, ok.

**Test person:** Yes, but I don't think so. So he's still single since then, doesn't have a girlfriend and he just can't cope with the situation that I'm in a happy relationship. Yes, the children lived with us for two years, all four of them, so to speak [two children from the new partner and two children from the test person], and then the terror started. In the worst possible way. And he realised that the children also got on with my new partner. And that was an absolute no-go for him and he actually wants to see me down and he's now doing it through the children. Because I've never been financially dependent and it just didn't work out because I didn't care, but now he only has one way to get me down and that's my children and one child is already gone. Yes.

**Interviewer:** How did this situation come about? What somehow influenced or worsened the whole thing?

**Test person:** That I had a new partner relatively quickly after the separation, yes, exactly.

**Interviewer:** How long did the separation last? (...)Because sometimes it takes years and sometimes weeks.

**Test person:** Well, how can I put it, we were, we were yes. We were married for almost ten years and I'd say it went relatively well for five years, or I'd say I was more focussed on the children. The older child was six months old when we got married. And I actually focussed on my children, no. In the first few years, I didn't actually realise that I was the one who was keeping this family going and not my husband, so to speak. And after five years, I made an announcement at some point. "You, it can't go on like this. It's not just

me who has to look after the family, the house and the farm and everything, you have to too." And then at some point he said. "I'm a workaholic, you have to live with that and either you go with me or you don't." So I looked at that for a few more years. And then we said we'd only stay together because of the children. That you have a perfect world view, a perfect family image here. That's how I met someone during that time. And that was the anchor for me, where I said, I don't need this here anymore, I'm cutting it off. Exactly, and I think that was the worst thing ever for him, that I fell in love again (laughs). Yes. But there was one person who was there and who looked after me. And when I needed someone, they came to me. And my husband at the time didn't do that.

#### **Minute 25**

**Interviewer:** And what consequences did the separation have for you, for your children? And for your ex-partner?

**Test person:** Well, I think it was a bottomless pit for my ex-partner. He's still not finished with the break-up. I'm convinced of that. And for me it was a liberation. Yes, and I think for my children too, because they realised that I was happy again. But they realised that their father couldn't cope on his own. And my older one is a bit, how can I put it... She always wants to. That's it. So she always looks after everyone and always wants everyone to be well and has just realised that her father isn't doing well, he can't cope with the situation. Then he had a bad accident and was in intensive care for a week. And then he asked the child if he could come: Do the laundry, clean the house and so on, and he did that for a while and I think that was the deciding factor for him. And oh mum, I can leave her alone, she has someone who looks after mum and mum is fine, but dad can't cope on his own. Yes, and he did that for six months and then the child was gone from one day to the next.

**Interviewer:** And after the separation after all the consequences and did you receive any support?

**Test person:** No.

**Interviewer:** There was no support from nowhere?

**Test person:** No, no, I was, I was at the social welfare centre for a while for a chat. I was able to get everything off my chest there. And yes, but I didn't get any real advice there about how I should behave, what I should do. So I tried that, I ordered umpteen books myself. How do I cope with the fact that my child is turning away from me and going back and forth and. There are so many books, so. Or a book like this, Mum gives up or something. So I read all that a bit and. Then I understood what was actually happening here.

**Interviewer:** And what kind of support would you have liked?

**Test person:** I would have liked, I would have liked someone to put my ex-husband in his place and make it clear to him that a child needs mum and dad and, above all, that a child of the age that my older child was at the time, she was under 15, that a child like that also needs care during the day, so when it comes home from school, that someone is at home and looks after it. Making meals, doing homework, whatever. But my ex-husband was away three days a week and the child was on its own. Then my child had a first steady relationship and since then the child has been sleeping there two or three days a week because dad isn't at home. And I told all this to the family courts, youth welfare offices, guardians ad litem, lawyers, everyone. The child had a will. "I want to live with dad" and that was accepted for a child under 15. Because he was on his own three days a week. Nobody was interested in that. It was the will of the child, no attention was paid to the child's welfare at all. The will of the child was the deciding factor and so I had lost my child and ruined her whole future. Because now he's dropping out of school and going abroad. Next year. (...) Yes, exactly. And was never actually allowed to be a child. Actually took over my role with the father, the household. Dog. Garden. Shopping. Everything.

**Interviewer:** So you said that you no longer have any contact with your older child. Is that because...

**Test person:** So I have to...



**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Minute 29**

**Test person:** Well, it hasn't completely broken off yet. We occasionally write to each other via WhatsApp and there are also times when I meet up. Where we see each other, where it's also totally me, oh mum and so on my birthday for example or something. And oh mum, I love you and mum and then I always say, well, why don't you come round more often? Yes, I will, I will. And it stays that way. So, if I don't start, if I don't take the lead, nothing will come of it. And now I've received a letter from his lawyer saying that my child is suing me for maintenance. And now I've made a cut for myself for the time being, because it's getting slow now. I've slowly had enough. I don't hear anything anymore.

**Interviewer:** So now that you have little contact with your eldest child, do you think it is possible to reunite with your child?

**Test subject:** I keep telling her that the door is open, you can come home at any time. Always. Every time I see it, when I hear it or anything always.

**Interviewer:** And how...?

**Test person:** But that would mean turning away from the father. Because he won't allow it.

**Interviewer:** That it is forbidden to them.

**Test person:** Yes, yes, exactly. (...) He always sends these two, two messages. Of course you can do that, but then you pull a face like that. And the one time my child was there for a day, they said yes, you can stay here for two or three days. And then I thought, oh gosh, nice, we can do something during the autumn holidays and then he had to go home again in the evening because the father really wanted to discuss something with the child. That didn't happen. So nothing, he interrupts, so to speak. He doesn't give me the opportunity to be with the child for any length of time. He doesn't, so he keeps trying to interrupt it and cut it off. Mmm.

**Minute 32**

**Interviewer:** The next question would be, how stressful is or was the alienation for you? From one to seven, if one is the lowest level and seven is the highest?

**Test person:** Yes, I'll say a five. I try to make up for it with my work. I try to throw myself into my work and distract myself with it.

**Interviewer:** And why? Because they're distracted, right?

**Test person:** Yes. Exactly, so it's with me all day and everything. But when I'm absorbed in my work, I forget about it for a moment. And because you work eight hours a day. Yes.

**Interviewer:** So, and how much of a burden do you think the alienation was for you and your children? And your older child, if from one to seven.

**Test person:** Well, I think at least a six, because I've been seeing a psychologist for a year and a half.

**Interviewer:** Ok.

**Test person:** That was when I still had custody and he had to ask me for permission for the child to see a psychologist. And of course I did that because I had hope in the psychologist that the child would somehow convert and try to make it clear that mum and dad are there for her, which was certainly done, because in the end it came out that she didn't want a custody dispute and that she didn't want custody to be taken away from me. It wasn't really taken away from me in that sense either, so it wasn't taken away, they wanted to draw up a family report in court. And because I knew that my child had been seeing a psychologist for a year and a half, I said I didn't want that. Another one of those who sticks to your cheek and talks you into it and puts you through your paces. No one can stand that, and I said that the child is now almost 16, as the expert report is being drawn up, and before court proceedings are filed or initiated, he will be of age and I don't have to do a family report and then I said that I would give it [custody] up voluntarily and then the family court decided that way. So I got confirmation from the youth welfare

office at the time and from the guardian ad litem that there were no grounds whatsoever for taking custody away from me. And yes, nevertheless then. Mmm.

**Interviewer:** So that she can calm down.

**Test person:** Yes, exactly. (...) Well recognised (laughs). I've also written it in the protocol so that at some point, when my child is back in their right mind, they know who meant well and who didn't.

**Interviewer:** So very. ...

**Respondent:** The last thing anyone should do is go against a parent, so asking your child to do that is the last thing.

**Interviewer:** Of course, so very often the courts decide that so that the children can finally rest, because that's for...

**Test person:** Exactly, the standard saying. Yes.

**Interviewer:** Yes, so the last question would be, have you as an adult experienced an alienation process with your children, have you been saying and presenting this all the time?

## **Farewell Minute 40**

7.11.

### **Transcript anonymised Respondent 14 - estranged mothers**

**Interviewer:** So the first question would be: how old are you?

**Test person:** I am over 35.

**Interviewer:** And which gender do you feel you belong to, man, woman, diverse?

**Test person:** I am a woman.

**Interviewer:** Did you grow up in Germany or do you have a migrant background?

**Test person:** I grew up in Germany, I was born in Austria. And my mum is from the Caribbean.

**Interviewer:** How would you categorise the socio-economic status of your parents' home in terms of education, income and occupation? (B:mhm) From 1 to 7, if 1 is a very low status and 7 is the highest status.

**Respondent:** 5, 4 so yes 5.

**Interviewer:** OK. And what is your highest qualification to date?

**Test person:** Uh, secondary school leaving certificate

**Interviewer:** OK, then we have number 2. Do you have siblings or half-siblings?

**Test person:** No.

**Interviewer:** Did your parents stay together until you were of age?

**Test person:** yes

**Interviewer:** And are they still together?

**Test person:** Erm, we would still be together. My father has passed away.

**Interviewer:** OK. And how was your relationship with your mother? So from 1 to 7, then a 1 would be extremely bad and 7 would be excellent.

**Test person:** Ne 3.

**Interviewer:** And how was your relationship with your father?

**Test person:** Mhhh hmm ne 4? or 5?

**Interviewer:** Why?

**Test person:** Uhh In general, well, we did a lot, a lot, but it was the interpersonal, there was little physical affection, so that, well, my parents couldn't show me that in that way. Umm and my father and my, well my mother, they argued quite a lot, and er, he was quite choleric and er so yes, patriarchal, exactly. Of course, as I got older, I saw and felt that more as a woman, as an adolescent woman, so I would say that overall (...) if I were

to rate my childhood and up to now, well then let's say a 5, that would be fairer.

**Interviewer:** And uh through the experiences you had at home, uh, do you feel emotionally equipped or prepared for adult life or how prepared do you feel from 1 to 7?

**Test person:** 5

**Interviewer:** And how do you feel in terms of your mental health from 1 to 7?

**Test person:** mmmh 3

**Interviewer:** (ok) How are things physically? So are you, are you well, physically?

### Minute 5

**Test person:** I already have complaints. So I can't deal with stress at the moment, I'm also in therapy. Um, yes, so it collects a lot in the stomach area when I'm stressed, angry, sad, so the strong emotions. Exactly, I cry a lot sometimes, um...the listlessness has got a lot better. I've been in therapy for a while ahm. But it was already enormous, the listlessness.

**Interviewer:** And how long have you been in therapy?

**Test person:** Um, since last year.

**Interviewer:** Hm. December last year, yes?

**Interviewer:** And er was there a diagnosis? Did they say anything about what you have or?

**Test person:** And now I'm seeing a therapist and he said I have a mental stress disorder.

**Interviewer:** Okay. And about the physical complaints, are they very severe, the complaints you have in your stomach, in your whole body?

**Test person:** Mh, situationally, so really, when I remember the events um or when my child who comes to see me no longer lives with me um then uh after the separation, so when I see it again after the parting, then these complaints come up again.

**Interviewer:** How would you categorise the conflict situation at home, i.e. when there were conflicts at home, as you said at the beginning. From 1 to 7, if you can weight that somehow, because it's a bit difficult to differentiate. Exactly seven would be the highest level.

**Test person:** Erm, 6.

**Interviewer:** ne 6. And did your parents involve you or your siblings?

**Test person:** I was involved, yes.

**Interviewer:** Exactly, just you. Are you an only child or did you say?

**Respondent:** Yes. yes.

**Interviewer:** And how much did you do that? Did you do it unconsciously or...?

**Test person:** Umm, the arguments usually happened in such a way that I was in the room. I just heard them and my father usually left the flat at some point. In a rage and my mum stayed behind and um cried or was desperate and um I was then the contact person.

**Interviewer:** And then she discussed everything that happened with you?

**Test person:** Yes, what I didn't hear or know was then repeated or it was simply repeated again and... exactly.

**Interviewer:** So how much conflict protection did you experience as a child?

**Test person:** What is conflict protection, I almost have to ask (laughs). No, I didn't have any.

**Interviewer:** Not OK at all. So very low. What about the attention from your parents?

**Test person:** Um, towards me? Um, as I said, hugs and cuddles, I can't remember that now... I can't remember anything like that, maybe as a small child, but...

**Interviewer:** Exactly. It refers to children's ages.

**Test person:** Yes, um So again from 1 to 7?

**Interviewer:** Exactly.

### Minute 10

**Test person:** Mmm. I would also choose 4.

**Interviewer:** The 4 would be an average allowance. What is your current relationship with your parents, i.e. your mother?

**Test person:** Not at all.

**Interviewer:** So you have no contact with your mother at all?

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** OK, that would also answer the next question. And when you were a child, when you were little, did you have any contact with family courts, youth welfare offices or lawyers?

**Test person:** No.

**Interviewer:** Ok, now we come to your own biological family. How would you rate the conflict situation there? On a scale from 1 to 7.

**Test person:** We talked about my biological family all the time before that, didn't we?

**Interviewer:** Uh uh - sorry, your own family. yes. How would you categorise the conflict situation in your own family?

**Test person:** Er(...) Ne 6.

**Interviewer:** OK, and did you or the other parent involve the children in the conflict?

**Test person:** I tried to avoid it. Because I knew from my own experience that it was stressful, yes. So I certainly wasn't infallible, I also sought advice from Caritas. Um, but I would put myself in the lower segment, so at most a 2.

**Interviewer:** And what was it like with your ex-partner? How did he involve the children?

**Test person:** Ne 7.

**Interviewer:** And in what form did he do that?

**Test person:** Um He told the children, um, so he just portrayed me as the one to blame for the separation. Um, "that I wanted the separation, he didn't want it, that he um had to pay a lot and I was still unkind to him, that he took care of everything, um, so financially beyond the separation. Um First of all the year of separation and um that um I fell in love with another man. And if he told me any more now, he would start crying." That's what my younger child told me.

**Interviewer:** So he made a fuss, so to speak, to get them on his own side, didn't he?

**Test person:** That it was all about the money. And yes.

**Interviewer:** And how much conflict protection did your children experience overall? If you put it on a scale from 1 to 7? (...) That's just your opinion/

**Test person:** Mhm, yes. I would say. No, no 3.

**Interviewer:** Ne 3. And what about the attention? Did you give your children a lot of attention?

**Test person:** From my side, yes. So, um, a 6.

**Interviewer:** Excuse me, uh, with the allowance, that's uh now the other way round 1 is the highest allowance level and 7 the lowest.

**Test person:** Ah, ah then I would say a 2.

**Interviewer:** How strong is the current bond between your children and their carers, i.e. you and your ex-partner?

## Minute 15

**Test person:** Mmm I don't have any contact with my eldest child at the moment. Um And I have a very good relationship with the middle child, whose contact is regulated.

**Interviewer:** You have 2 children, yes?

**Respondent:** Yes, children, 2 children from this marriage, yes.

**Interviewer:** OK. And what about contact with your children?

**Interviewer:** Well, they don't have any contact with him at all.

**Test person:** No at the moment.

**Interviewer:** How long ago was that? About that?

**Test person:** Hm. So not at all now. You can't really judge the other one either. Certainly not at all for 3 months.

**Interviewer:** So, so very low relationship. And did you have contact with family courts, youth welfare offices or lawyers?

**Test person:** Yes

**Interviewer:** And in what form? How was that?

**Test person:** Um, that was all after the separation. So um. The conflict was triggered by the fact that I got pregnant by my new partner and that's how it started, so um (..) and I wanted to move away with the middle child. Um, and I first called the youth welfare office, because this manipulation and pulling away from the father started and I got tips in the initial counselling session, in the telephone counselling session, that you first contact Caritas, the educational counselling centre, and that's what I did. (...) Exactly.

That was last year in late summer, yes. Then I contacted the educational counselling centre and the father was invited and the father wasn't enthusiastic at first and said to the children that I would force him to go to the interview and he didn't want to.

**Interviewer:** And was it also in [court] with your ex-partner?

**Test person:** Yes, it was this year in the summer.

**Interviewer:** And what and what came of it? So did he get custody of all the children or of one child?

**Test person:** No. The older child is already of age, so he was out of the whole thing anyway, out of this conflict about the child. He [the ex-husband] applied for sole right of residence. But he didn't get it because I backed down. I didn't fight for sole right of residence. And then we made a decision by the end of this year.

**Interviewer:** And you both have that now, or what?

**Test person:** We still have both, the right of residence and custody. And yes, nothing has changed in legal terms. The child now lives with him due to the whole development and the older one has moved out and is studying.

**Interviewer:** And how would you describe the relationship between the courts, i.e. the experience you had with the courts, with the authorities? Was that helpful for you or not?

## Minute 20

**Test person:** The first case worker was very competent. He was also able to immediately make sense of my descriptions, including manipulation. So he, I myself was so desperate and just told him. And um, the term manipulation came from him, from the caseworker, from the educationalist and exactly. And the phone calls were always very helpful. Very supportive too and. Exactly. And then when it came to a head, the conflict and the father made the application. Then the other people involved, like the guardian ad litem, joined in and she was very much in favour of the father. Erm, at first it was rather hidden, but later, towards the hearing, it became more and more obvious that she was very much in favour of the father.

**Interviewer:** Was that a woman / procedure...?

**Test person:** A woman, exactly.

**Interviewer:** OK.

**Test person:** Yes, that was a woman. And exactly. And um at Caritas, they have to be neutral, that wasn't really helpful. That was also fruitless. So the counsellor did his best, um, but it wasn't good enough and um to come to an out-of-court solution because the father just completely um boycotted the cooperation and um we as parents couldn't come to a decision. And um so at the last meeting the mediator said that there was no way around having the whole thing resolved in court. exactly. And um, the judge (...) was

sympathetic to me, I think she was even more willing to grant me more contact during the holidays if the guardian ad litem hadn't kept interfering.

**Interviewer:** And so the legal guardian was she responsible for her child or was that...

**Test person:** yes.

**Interviewer:** Oh, and did you have your own lawyer?

**Test person:** Yes. Yes. I had.

**Interviewer:** Was he or she helpful for you, for the situation?

**Test person:** No.

**Interviewer:** He didn't say anything about the trial, did he?

**Respondent:** Yes, but um you didn't quite understand what it was about and didn't take my interests into account.

**Interviewer:** Can you represent?

**Test person:** Not completely represented, no. (...) It seemed more like they were trying to calm things down through me. And she also spoke to me in a calming way, talked to me. During the process we also briefly requested an interruption and she said "So [name of respondent], if you, if you had to fight for your child, fighting alone is already, um/ You don't fight for your child. Either the child comes to you voluntarily or not," and I said, "but that's manipulated will." And she said, "Yes, but that's just the way it is now and if you don't fulfil the wish and don't do it the way the [child's name] wants, you could lose him even more." And um, she would also advise me not to apply for a psychological assessment.(...) Exactly. And then, we have one, an agreement (..)

**Interviewer:** So you and your ex-partner or the court?

**Respondent:** The court.

**Interviewer:** OK. (...) Perfect. And you said the judge was there. Somehow so ... more competent. And because she understood the whole situation that way, but there were so, influences....?

## Minute 25

**Test person:** Well, she didn't understand the situation. You also um, you also um denied the, my, my suspicion that the child was being manipulated, um, um. Denied it, er but the judge was open to granting me more contact in the sense that we, we got out a calendar, it's really idiotic and have weekly or how should I say, fortnightly, of course I have my visits, but the holidays were meticulously worked out and every time, and every time the judge wanted to award me MORE on the basis of MY arguments or the arguments of my lawyer, um, the guardian ad litem came from behind and said "No, but [name of child] doesn't want that and it wouldn't be good for the child and um yes." And then it remained that I wanted to have half of the holiday during the holidays. Um, and I have um extended we PAnds in the holidays, but also only fortnightly, so if my contact we PAnds fall on the holidays, the we PAnd was um increased to one day.

**Interviewer:** So 3 days, right?

**Test person:** Normally from Friday to Sunday and now from Thursday.

**Interviewer:** So 4.4 days, right?

**Test person:** 4 days and then the next discussion was on Thursday: When do I pick it up, because in the holidays it could also be that it has um training from the hobby, then I would have to pick up the child at 18:00 and then I said that "We can also leave the hobby in the holidays" and um I would like to pick up the child at 11:00. That was also a bit of a struggle to achieve, but the judge agreed straight away. And I said I could kill my time and if the training was cancelled, then I could pick the child up at 11:00 and if the training takes place, then we'll spend our time there and yes...

**Interviewer:** And would you use Professional Help again or recommend it to others?

**Test person:** My lawyer definitely not. (...) The öhm - It's also difficult to say how her, how her commitment would have been if I hadn't applied for legal aid now. I

think that also plays a role to some extent. At least that was my experience. Ahm, but um, I wouldn't vote for her again. I wouldn't vote for her again because she's not sensitive enough, sensitised enough about... about the... about the manipulation,(...) about all that, about all that. (...)

**Interviewer:** You said that you had not applied for cost assistance. Um Would you have proceeded differently?

**Test person:** I could imagine it. So you...um, I've often read that among the self-help groups, in the experiences, in the testimonials, that many have complained that there is a lack of commitment.

[...]

**Interviewer:** And, er, what worked in your relationship? (...) Would you have any advice?

**Test person:** In what way? What relationship?

**Interviewer:** Erm. Between you and your ex-partner.

**Test person:** Mhm, what was it that FUNCTIONED?

**Interviewer:** Exactly, except for what didn't work, you've already said that, but what did work?

**Test person:** After the separation? As parents?

**Interviewer:** Generally speaking, generally speaking, if you look back at the whole situation and you see that OK, this and that and this didn't work, but this and that did work.

### Minute 30

**Respondent:** (...) Hm, (...) the organisation of um of (...) events or the organisational aspects worked well. The arrangements, that is, when I organised it, he always went along with it. Mmmm. Yes, the organisation. So you could always rely on him. And otherwise? Tjoa.

**Interviewer:** And are you currently in a new, stable relationship?

**Test person:** yes.

**Interviewer:** And how would you describe this relationship? In terms of your situation, as support, as encouragement?

**Test person:** It is definitely a support. Yes, yes, very much so.

**Interviewer:** And on a scale from 1 to 7, if 1 was the highest level.

**Test person:** In terms of support? In terms of quality. Mhm. 1.

**Interviewer:** And eh, how was the separation? For you? It was stressful for you, wasn't it?

**Test person:** It was stressful before the separation. (...) So a year before the separation was very, very stressful, but the separation itself was a liberation.

**Interviewer:** And how stressful do you think the separation was for your children, on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 being the lowest level and 7 being the highest?

**Test person:** Um, the older child was going through puberty at the time. Erm Buried himself away, so difficult. Um, he didn't show much emotion, but you can read the stress (...) from that too um and the younger child was a kindergarten child and was doing very, very badly. So I would categorise the stress as very high. Yes

**Interviewer:** Mhm. And umm you have the feeling or you said that the bond between you and your child is being disturbed or cut off by the other party. From your point of view, what are the motives of your ex-partner?

**Respondent:** Injury.

**Interviewer:** So just to do them harm, right?

**Test person:** Through his, through his offence eh. So I was um. I was, I was really um in love with someone else, yes. Erm, but only mentally, emotionally. But that's enough to close yourself off and no longer allow a relationship. And he knew that.(...) And that must have done something to him. Yes, because he fought hard for the relationship for the last year, but it was already too late for me and (...) I don't think this hurt has left

him yet. (..) He's still pretty (..) damaged.

**Interviewer:** And, er, those are his motives, do you think?

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** And how did the situation come about again, that they split up? What influenced that?

**Test person:** I met, um, my childhood sweetheart. Actually, it was low esteem. Actually. I was very unhappy in the relationship, I didn't feel seen, I was... the main carer for the children. I also took over the, the part of the care and the duties. (...) And um, he was the carer. That's how the whole thing took its course and er settled down. But yes, it just got into a rut and I didn't feel, didn't feel respected any more. How a woman should actually feel or want to feel or want to be treated. And yes, then I met my childhood sweetheart and then it went boom. Emotionally. In my heart. Exactly!

### Minute 35

**Interviewer:** Exactly. In your opinion, it was the main factor for...

**Test person:** It was... For me, I'd been toying with the idea of separation for a long time, but I didn't dare because I was existentially dependent. To take this step, and that was already. uh At least, where I was also uh secretly looking for flats at home. 4 years before the separation. But then, the fact that I summoned up this courage was due to this highly positive emotion, I would say, which gave me the strength to go.  
[...]

**Interviewer:** And so this process took how long, the separation process and with the court and so on?

**Test person:** Um, the court, that only came into play a few years after the separation. Before that, we found a solution out of court. The children lived with me after the separation.

### Part 2

**Interviewer:** So what consequences did the separation have for you, for your children and for the alienating parent?

**Test person:** (...) mmm. Yes, not really for the first few years except for (...) conflicts between the parents. But you mean the situation since last year?

**Interviewer:** What were the general consequences of the separation?

**Test person:** Yes, so yes, we have um moved. We left the neighbourhood, um, we had to leave. And we moved to the neighbouring village. (...) Um, the consequences for my children were, of course, that I had to increase my working hours. (...) Yes, those are mainly the consequences. Of course, my children saw their father less, we organised it fortnightly. And because I've increased my working hours, they've also seen him twice an hour during the week. I would say those were the most drastic and noticeable consequences, yes.

**Interviewer:** And did you receive any support in this respect, i.e. after the separation, so that you were able to spend the first few months, weeks....

**Respondent:** So, support in terms of childcare?

**Interviewer:** Childcare, family, mother, father, father-in-law like this?

**Test person:** Mmmm no, the support. No, not much has changed, no, it was mainly me.

**Interviewer:** So you didn't have any support at all directly after the separation, i.e. with the move, all the things. You did everything on your own?

**Test person:** They, they, my friends helped me with the move. Yes, there, I had support, yes, but in general? Erm - My whole life just went on like that, so it's not like my parents visited me more often or took the children away more often because of it or anything.

**Interviewer:** Um, what kind of support would YOU have liked?

**Test person:** Um, I would have liked more support from the father, the children yes.



**Interviewer:** Yes, in what way?

#### **Minute 40**

**Test person:** Erm, (...) that he (...) Well, I also suggested an alternating model back then, he didn't want that. And um, we did back then too. The whole thing was the other way round. He was less willing to take half of the children during the holidays um and um even if the holiday times um days from the employer didn't allow him to take them alternatively, ahm, on extended we PAnds or on additional we PAnds ahm that, he didn't want that. So I was already in a very tight corset. (...) I would have liked more support, but that wasn't possible.

**Interviewer:** (...) Um, and do you, do you now have contact with the estranged parent, in general, your ex-partner?

**Test person:** Um, when it's about the younger child, yes. Yes, but very rarely. Thank God.

**Interviewer:** And you still have contact with your child, who lives with your ex-husband, don't you?

**Test person:** Yes

**Interviewer:** But no more contact with the eldest child?

**Test person:** Exactly, yes.

**Interviewer:** And from your point of view, is a reunion possible? With the uh eldest child?

**Test person:** Yes, but that will take time. Who knows. I, I think so,

yes. **Interviewer:** (..) And uh, how stressful is or was the alienation for you?

**Respondent:** Er - On a scale from 1 to 7?

**Interviewer:** So 1 would be the lowest stress level of 7 would be the highest.

**Test person:** hmm, 7.

**Interviewer:** And what do you think it was like for your children? How stressful was it?

**Test person:** Also um, a 7.

**Interviewer:** And why do you value .... So why do you think that?

**Respondent:** Mmm, so with my older child it's like that, um, when I pick up the younger one, um, from his father and he's at home visiting his father, he doesn't even show his face at the door.

**Interviewer:** So it's hiding?

**Test person:** yes.

**Interviewer:** But it's not the case that the child is there and you are there. And then it doesn't say anything, so ignore it. It just hides.

**Test person:** Yes. Erm (...) exactly. (...) And um/ With the younger child, that has improved in the meantime. I have good access to the child again. It also became apparent that he avoided contact with me. Mm And when I called him, he was immediately surprised and overwhelmed that I was calling him. (...) Yes, exactly, you know, I noticed a change in behaviour straight away, it was very tense and um didn't want to stab the father in the back. yes. When I asked, when do we want to see each other again? And it responded: "Yes, I don't know now, because dad has plans and I don't want to thwart them now." Exactly.

#### **Minute 45**

**Interviewer:** And so the last question would be, have you as an adult experienced a process of alienation with your own children, that is, that your children (..) become strangers to them, so to speak.

**Test person:** Yes, I felt this effect with my older child.

**Interviewer:** So, the question is I mean that the children become strangers to you

personally.

**Test person:** Yes, that my child is a stranger to me.

**Interviewer:** Exactly. Exactly.

**Test person:** Yes. Yes. Because with the younger child it was very brief, but I think that because we were in constant contact, so we also had to, yes, because it was court-ordered, it regenerated very quickly. (.) But with my eldest child, who simply isolates himself and now probably also distances himself a bit from the father. Um, I can already feel a clear alienation, so it's difficult um, for me. I have, well, I'm struggling to overcome the fact that I'm trying to make contact again from my side. (...) So it's definitely something for me. (.) It's not what I knew before.

## **Farewell**

### 10.12. Transcript anonymised Respondent 15 - estranged mothers

**Interviewer:** Yes, how old are you?

**Test person:** Under 55.

**Interviewer:** And which gender do you feel you belong to?

**Test person:** Female, rather female.

**Interviewer:** Female ok. Did you grow up in Germany or do you have a migrant background?

**Test person:** German.

**Interviewer:** How would you categorise the socio-economic status of your parents' home in terms of education, income and occupation from 1 to 7, if 1 is a very low status and 7 is the highest status?

**Test person:** 3.

**Interviewer:** 3.

**Test person:** 3 to 4.

**Interviewer:** 4 would be...

**Test person:** My parents are uhh from the, from the farm, they came from the old German umm so, like here the stop was so traditional.

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Test person:** My dad works, my mum is a housewife.

**Interviewer:** So, what is your own socio-economic status from 1 to 7?

**Test person:** Yes, also about 3 or 4.

**Interviewer:** 3 or 4.

**Test person:** I have a qualified secondary school leaving certificate.

**Interviewer:** That would be the next question. What is or what is your highest qualification to date? Would that be Realabschluss yes? - Extended Realschule, okay.

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** Do you have siblings or half-siblings?

**Test person:** Yes. One part still alive and one part already deceased.

**Interviewer:** So... Did your parents stay together until you came of age?

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** And do you still stay together?

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** Ok.

**Interviewer:** So... The next question would be, how was the relationship with your mother from 1 to 7, if 1 is very bad and 7 is excellent?

**Test person:** 4.

**Interviewer:** An average. And how was the relationship with your father from 1 to 7 if 1 is extremely bad and 7 is excellent?

**Test person:** Ah that's actually um..., yes until about the age of 30 it was more like 3 and now it's more like 6.

**o Interviewer:** Okay. Okay, very nice and why?

**Test person:** Yes, well, I had this religious background. That's another special story, Jehovah's Witnesses. My father wasn't that active in contrast to us, where we were very close. And now that I've been excluded, I've actually got to know my father from the other side, even more positively. Over the years. My parents used to have problems with each other, but I was always on mum's side and that image has changed a bit.

**Interviewer:** Okay, sorry. Did I understand that correctly? When you were a Jehovah's Witness, so when you were active, you didn't have such a good relationship with your father and now that you are no longer there you have a very good relationship with your father. Did I understand that correctly?

**Test person:** Exactly.

**Interviewer:** Great. So, because of the experience you had at home, you feel emotionally well equipped for adult life, well prepared from 1 to 7?

**Test person:** 2.

**Interviewer:** So very bad.

**Test person:** Yes, when I look back now, I can find a lot of my problems in the relationship between my parents and myself. Which I never actually realised to such an extreme, but I do now in hindsight.

**Interviewer:** Mhm.

**Test person:** 3 maybe also.

**Minute 5**

**Interviewer:** How do you feel about your mental health from 1 to 7?

**Test person:** 3.

**Interviewer:** Ok.

**Test person:** Because of the alienation.

**Interviewer:** Okay, that's understandable. And physically, so physically?

**Test person:** Physically so, yes 4.

**Interviewer:** Yes, better. Are you or have you received psychological treatment?

**Interviewer:** Yes, I am and was.

**Interviewer:** So, how long in total?

**Test person:** Since my separation more than 5 years ago until now, although now only sporadically from time to time.

**Interviewer:** Was there any diagnosis, such as depression other disorders, anxiety disorder or adjustments...?

**Test person:** So depression, anxiety disorders, adjustment disorders. So those were the depressions. So and this assessment, I still think that there is also some kind of trauma, but this psychologist that I have now is not equipped for this, this separation thing with the children and so on.

**Interviewer:** Yes, that would also be in the answers here with me. That would be post-traumatic stress disorder. If you've had too much stress, then you have post-traumatic stress disorder.

**Test person:** Yes, I assume so, because I informed myself that I already have it, but it wasn't diagnosed directly, just anxiety disorder.

**Interviewer:** What about physical complaints, do you have severe physical complaints?

**Test person:** Not so much at the moment. I now have more of that kind of psychosomatic stomach. After the separation, I had strong tremors for the first few years. Yes, weakness, tiredness, exhaustion, that's still the case.

**Interviewer:** So then I would go to the next question. How would you categorise the conflict situation in your parental home? Well, of course there are sometimes conflicts at home.

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** From 1 to 7, if 1 is the lowest conflict level and 7 is the highest?

**Test person:** Yes, 5.

**Interviewer:** 5 And did your parents involve you or the other children in the conflicts?

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** And how much from 1 to 7, if you can differentiate between them?

**Test person:** Well, actually we were always in the middle of it, because it wasn't... So my father always liked to drink too much in earlier years and ahh yes, my mother was always very, very annoyed and that didn't go quietly. And I was always in the role of trying to restore harmony. As the middle child back then, before my sibling died, I could see a lot of problems that I was later unable to deal with in any other way.

**Interviewer:** And in what way were your parents involved?

**Test person:** Yes, of course, these religious backgrounds. My dad with the alcohol. That wasn't scriptural, so to speak, and my mum always made me a substitute, she discussed her problems with me and actually what you don't do with children.

**Interviewer:** And how much conflict protection did you experience overall as a child, if you can differentiate between 1 and 7?

**Test person:** None at all.

**Interviewer:** None at all. And what about attention from your parents, how much attention did you receive as a child?

**Test person:** Yes, yes, so 1 to 7 again?

**Interviewer:** Yes

**Test person:** Then I would say 5, 6.

**Interviewer:** Okay, sorry. 1 would be the highest and 7 would be the lowest level.

**Test person:** Good, or let's say 3 like this.

**Interviewer:** 3, slightly above average.

**Minute 10**

**Interviewer:** And how strong is your current bond with your carer?

**Test person:** Yes, she is quite strong at the moment.

**Interviewer:** Mhm.

**Test person:** Yes, so low is now 1 or 7?

**Interviewer:** Low is level 7, the highest is 1.

**Test person:** Yes, then about 2, 3.

**Interviewer:** And what about the contact with your carer, how strong is it?

**Test person:** So to my parents, yes, we see each other regularly, every few days.

**Interviewer:** Regularly. And did you have contact with the family court, youth welfare offices, lawyers or experts as a child?

**Test person:** No, not at all.

**Interviewer:** So, now we come to your own family. How would you categorise the conflict situation in your own family? From 1 to 7, if 1 is the lowest level and 7 is the highest level of conflict?

**Test person:** So you mean the one where my ex is with the children or my current role relationship.

**Interviewer:** No, no. So where you, your own family, where you still lived with your ex and your children.

**Test person:** There was never actually any conflict in the family because I was always conflict-shy until I broke out. And now, of course, it's been a really long conflict. But I'm calm because, in my opinion, there doesn't need to be any conflict, but I'm excluded from the family situation. And I can't get to it and if I try to get to it, I'm called a liar who knows what, loudly, quietly, so it's actually disastrous.

**Interviewer:** I see. Did you or your ex-partner involve the children in the conflicts when there were misunderstandings?

**Test person:** Yes, I broke out quite quickly and then he immediately said to the children, "we are the team" and involved them in everything and presented himself as incapable of acting and gave the children the decision and the lawyer's letter and everything really.

**Interviewer:** So that would be a very strong involvement?

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** What about child protection, i.e. conflict protection for the children? How much did they experience?

**Test person:** At the time I was away, the father probably turned everything round again. Before that I always tried to take the children out. Shortly after my side separated, I tried to explain, but then it was interpreted differently. Yes, which I eventually stopped doing because explaining doesn't get you very far.

**Interviewer:** I see. What about the affection you receive. So did your children receive a lot of attention? If so, approximately how much from 1 to 7, if 1 is the highest level and 7 is a very low level?

**Test person:** Yes, actually 3 I would say. 2 to 3, which is not quite, well, I was at home, we lived very, very much in the family in a religious context. However, in retrospect, I have to say that you often dragged the children along for religion, so to speak, and then in this context you didn't look after the children as you should have done. And that was this religious structure that I now look at from a distance. But I was still very much there for my children.

**Interviewer:** Was the whole family religious, you, your ex-partner and the children all?

**Test person:** Yes, and it was the case that my ex-partner actually acted as the eldest and he actually left the children out of it and I left his back free for the activities he had there. You could say that. They actually had more of a relationship with me than with their father. It was only when I left that he naturally had the power, the religious power.

#### **Minute 15**

**Interviewer:** What do you mean by religious power? So that he was authorised by religion to have power?

**Test person:** Yes, it's like that with Jehovah's Witnesses, if someone breaks the marriage, they are excluded and that leads to the whole environment ostracising this person. My parents had spoken out against this ostracism, and that led to a more intensive relationship between me and my parents. But all my other relatives are actually gone except for my sibling, who was not a Jehovah's Witness. So my children were no longer allowed to have contact with me. My one child was over 8 at the time and my ex imposed that on him too, so it was very blatant.

**Interviewer:** I see. And how strong is the current bond between your children and their carer?

**Test person:** To the father?

**Interviewer:** So is only the father the carer now, or does the father have a new partner? Depending on who is with the children.

**Test person:** Yes, it's the relationship with the children. Well, some of my children are already grown up, my one child has moved out. But I don't think he has much of a relationship with the children, because my one child refuses to go to school. He's over 16 [years old] and he doesn't approach life. And I have no contact.

**Interviewer:** Ok, I see. So to be able to differentiate a little from 1 to 7, what do you think? Because none of the children have any contact with you?

**Test person:** So you have no contact with me. And you do have contact with your father because you live there. But I don't think the relationship is good either, from what I hear, but I don't really hear that much. So if it's bad, I would say, yes, I mean, if a father can't get his child to school, it can't be a good relationship. So if it's bad, what would the 6 be now?

**Interviewer:** Bad would be 6. below average accuracy.

**Test person:** Yes, I think so.

**Interviewer:** What was the legal situation like. Did you have contact with family courts, youth welfare offices, lawyers?

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** And in what form?

**Test person:** Yes, so after my ex took my children away from me in 2016, directly and also imposed this ostracism on my youngest child, I went to court and first made an urgent application. This was then rejected because they listened to my child's statement

that he didn't want to see his mother. The background was understood. Then they drew up an expert report, which took six months, during which time my child became a blatant, i.e. it was already starting to become moderate with the exclusion from me, it directly refused to go to school. That was from 2016, January to 2016, December. The report ended with a recommendation to take the child out of the father's household, which happened in December 2016. Then he went to a clearing group where they looked at what the child was like. They realised that the conflict of excluding me and not wanting to be resolved by the family. And then my child was transferred to a permanent residential group. Then there were proceedings for custody, but because they were summary proceedings. Unfortunately, my ex was able to change his mind at the end of the proceedings, otherwise he would have lost custody because he wouldn't have wanted to put the child there. We both still had custody, then mediation was scheduled within the residential group, whereby my ex initially portrayed himself as understanding and nice and declared me to be incapable. That made my anxiety disorder worse. Because when you saw him, he seemed so nice and friendly and behind my back he was stabbing me in the back. Then there was a psychological report from the youth welfare office. It said that the child had to stay in the residential group, otherwise the same abnormalities would continue as soon as he returned to any household because the parental conflict had not been resolved. My ex got very angry when we discussed this. He then applied for custody. I then filed a countermotion. Yes, because I was guided by this expert opinion. The youth welfare office then withdrew neutrally, despite their own report. And a new guardian ad litem was appointed. She spoke to the father's family, only very briefly with me, and she pushed through the decision that the child would be returned to the father, that he would have sole custody. And that was in 2020, when my child returned to the father. He assured me that it was just my fear that I wouldn't be able to see my child and that he could see me at any time. Visits were arranged and none took place, then I appealed again and that was the worst thing. The appeal process took 2 years during the corona period, the youth welfare office had all the abnormalities, my child was immediately absent from school again. The youth welfare office withdrew and. And even now, because my child was at the OLG, she was already over 16 years old and there was not much that could be decided. My ex made a solemn promise that he would put the child in a psychiatric ward, because the expert opinion on the judgement said that he should actually be deprived of custody in terms of health and that she should be committed to a psychiatric ward. That didn't happen either. Then it was sold in such a way that the court hearing was about what I was doing here that was making my child ill, so I was the bad guy again, but then he just had the child psychologically examined, and the child has now cancelled all things and doesn't go to school. He's at home, doesn't do anything and I spoke to the youth welfare office again, they said, yes, he's almost of age, they won't do anything if he doesn't want to, if he doesn't want psychotherapy. Yes, that's unfortunate and I just don't understand what's going on.

#### **Minute 22**

**Interviewer:** And are you allowed to see your child?

**Test person:** I wrote to my ex a few months ago and asked him to do something different so that my child could get back on its feet. He then told me that he would write to me himself about what he wanted, the child wrote to me saying he didn't want any more contact. Two weeks ago, I visited him briefly, went there and brought him biscuits. Then I realised it wasn't in the same mood as it had written to me, but no one was there. Then I tried again last week, brought some bread rolls and my other child was there, who treats me terribly and then I was banned from the house by the father, even though I left on good terms and came on good terms.

**Interviewer:** It's a difficult situation.

**Test person:** Yes, creepy.

**Interviewer:** So again, because it's very important that we understand this whole judicial process, i.e. these solution approaches. You described the relationship, the whole

process and so on. But how did you feel about that? Was it helpful for you, did it continue to support you or how would you describe the whole process?

**Test person:** Well, in my opinion, they lasted far too long. After the first year, when my child left the father's household, I was very relieved and I felt much better because I realised that people were looking out for my child and helping. He wasn't being instrumentalised in the fight against me. And he was also really happy. Things developed really well in the residential group, we had regular contact. And when the child went back to the father. I didn't understand why they had to wait so long for the child to drop out of school. My lawyer phoned the court a few times to ask why it wasn't going ahead. She couldn't understand it either.

**Interviewer:** Not during the pandemic, right?

**Test person:** Exactly.

**Interviewer:** A lot of processes were slowed down, unfortunately that was the case, it was very, very bad back then. There were so many applications because of that, it was because of all the pandemic stuff and lawsuits and things like that, they were all overwhelmed because of that, but it was very bad.

**Test person:** Yes, and the result in court is that they first wanted to take custody away from the father and then in the end it was confirmed. So sometimes I don't understand either, then you think, is this a money machine or what, what is it now?

**Interviewer:** Which one now? Excuse me, what is a money machine?

**Test person:** The courts! The courts, because the facts spoke for themselves, right. And yet when the child is 16, the court says, "Yes, we can't do much more here". And I just don't understand that, even now, the child doesn't go to school. I don't understand why they just let it go on like that and then take custody away from the mother, who doesn't understand it, because of the parental conflict and make things even worse, because I no longer have the opportunity to look at it and possibly act on behalf of my child.

**Interviewer:** You no longer have custody of the children?

**Test person:** That's exactly what the father was given because of the parental conflict, which is a completely stupid measure. Yes, when someone plays the wrong game. And, and I didn't do anything wrong, I was only involved with this residential group back then and, and that was justified and I found out afterwards that it wasn't legitimate to take custody away from me because I had a basis for wanting to keep the recommendation. Well, I wasn't guilty of anything.

**Interviewer:** Yes, I see, I see. Would you make use of the professionals again, i.e. the professional support of the courts and youth welfare offices and things like that?

**Test person:** Courts no, youth welfare office no, diaconal counselling centre yes. They made a great effort. Unfortunately, if the father refuses mediation, they can't do anything, which I think is a shame.

**Interviewer:** So there was a judgement. Mediation judgement or not?

**Test person:** No, no, that doesn't exist in Germany. There is only the recommendation.

**Interviewer:** Oh, because I've heard in a lot of cases that the judge says, here in Lüneburg, in the district of Lüneburg: "I sentence you to 50 hours of mediation, and then you can come back to me".

**Test person:** Really?

**Interviewer:** Yes, well, they can do that too. From what I've heard about special cases.

**Test person:** So they always said: "Yes, you have to do mediation, you have to do mediation". And in this case I withdrew from the mediation because I said that this man, who was acting so insidiously, was killing me because he was intervening like that. Yes, and now? When I look at it, I say we need mediation. Now he has sole custody and refuses mediation. Now I've gone back to religion in the hope that the elders will do something about it.

**Interviewer:** Do Jehovah's Witnesses have councils of elders or not, that they have something to say when there are conflicts?

**Test person:** Yes, exactly.

**Interviewer:** Just like in the communities, OK.

**Test person:** Yes, although he doesn't want to either. The father refuses.

**Interviewer:** Is he even allowed to do that? Because I have also heard interviews and things like that about Jehovah's Witnesses who have left, or that, because they say that they have a lot of power, the elders, they can also exclude them from the community.

**Test person:** Yes, of course. I was also excluded and that's where I basically say, plead, if a Jehovah's Witness couple separates, one is excluded, the other takes the children away, then you have to act immediately and give the children to the other, because otherwise they will be taken away from the parent. And I know several cases, not just mine. Only I'm now purely official again, but my ex says you're a fake and that's why I'm not doing it and continues to exclude me.

**Interviewer:** Difficult like that. OK, there were all the conflicts and everything worked out the way it did. What would you say worked in your relationship? Because you've already described what didn't work. But what did work?

**Test person:** In the separation phase or before?

**Interviewer:** No, I mean before. What went well for you?

**Test person:** Well, well, I actually took my Christianity very seriously. That went well. So outwardly the relationship was very harmonious. Yes, it was quiet, in contrast to my parents, who have a lot of loud conflicts, it was just quiet. That went well. I'm just well-adjusted and that's why the relationship worked well. It lasted as long as it did, over 25 years, but in the end I was exhausted. And in this exhaustion I broke out.

**Interviewer:** I see, so it went harmoniously as you said. Would you have any advice for other people who want to know what should work in your relationship?

**Test person:** Yes, I think I had a Christian attitude and that means you always have to give, you have to give, which I didn't realise is not a one-way street, but you also have to look at whether you are being done good yourself or whether you are always giving. And here I think you have to set your boundaries very clearly and not be afraid of conflict, but, yes, I didn't tackle the conflicts and in the end there was just a huge conflict. Psychologists have said that I was in a control-submission conflict and that's also the case with religion. The woman is supposed to submit and then it works like that, but in the end you say, no, I'm not going to do it, then you just feel the power. And that's where I say you have to make sure that you're seen. And not just conform. That's actually the big problem for me.

**Interviewer:** And how are things now? Are you currently in a new committed relationship?

**Test person:** Yes, exactly, for over 5 years. Right after the separation, I actually became very attached to my current partner and did a lot of psychological work. Yes, and then I was also diagnosed with an attachment personality disorder. Yes, and I realised that was exactly the problem. Now I realise that my current partner doesn't control me, he gives me space, I can develop myself. I don't have to explain myself. So for the first time I realise that I am perceived as a valuable person and not just as a worker. That was a great experience for me.

**Interviewer:** Is that a support for you, i.e. an encouragement?

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** Very good and back to the separation. It was most probably stressful for you, but how stressful was it exactly? if you can categorise it from 1 to 7, if 1 is a very low level and 7 is the highest.

**Test person:** Yes, 7 was really, really bad.

**Interviewer:** And why was that bad for you?

**Test person:** Yes, because at the time I left I no longer had any standing as a person. I was already exhausted and depressed beforehand. And, and then, then I had the positive ray of hope with my new partner, who did me a lot of good, but everything else was taken away from me. The children, the honour, everything.

**Interviewer:** And how was it with the children? That is, what they experienced. Was it stressful for them?



**Test person:** Yes, also 7. So 7 is very stressful. Yes, because my child didn't go to school any more. My other child dropped out of school, but all the children had to ostracise me religiously and break off contact.

**Interviewer:** And you had the feeling that your bond with your ex-partner, your bond with your children, was being cut off by your ex-partner, didn't you?

**Test person:** He didn't have a secure attachment at all. I got that from the reports, I had a secure attachment to my children and my one child was diagnosed with an insecure attachment to the father.

**Interviewer:** Exactly, so we mean the relationship, your relationship with the children was broken off by the other parent. So he contributed to your relationship getting worse in some way.

**Test person:** Yes, of course, of course, he had told them that they had to ostracise me.

**Interviewer:** And the reasons were religious or something else?

**Respondent:** Both religious and power, hate.

**Interviewer:** And on a personal level, that he felt he wanted to exercise his power in some way?

**Test person:** Exactly. He had already done that before. If I worked, everything was fine, if I didn't work, he was moody, so you just didn't realise it.

**Interviewer:** Excuse me, how do you mean when you were working, when you were doing well or do you mean professionally?

**Test person:** No, professionally he didn't want me to work at all. I had a mini-job. But where I had to work was religiously, because that was his profile. So I worked there, I was happy there, but I didn't work, yes. I actually worked all those years, only I was exhausted at the end. And when I wasn't working anymore, he put even more pressure on me to get me working again. And that's how he actually drove me away.

**Interviewer:** Functional means religiously active or...?

**Test person:** Yes, religiously active.

**Interviewer:** And as a religiously active person, do you somehow have to do a lot of advertising for the religion or is it at home that you read a lot...?

### **Minute 38**

**Test person:** Exactly, preaching service, meetings, going to the meetings. Preparing the children for the meetings, preparing the children so that they can give answers at the meetings, taking the children along to the preaching service and all the things that the children don't really want, you have to make sure that you manage that so that it looks good.

**Interviewer:** How old were your children when the separation began? And how long did it take, this process, because the duration is often very long.

**Test person:** Yes, the first child was over 25, the second was over 20 and the third was over 8.

**Interviewer:** And what consequences does it have for you, for the children and for the estranged parent, for the whole family, so to speak?

**Test person:** Yes, I think my children have suffered from depression. My third child is currently a school dropout, which is quite tragic. The others have graduated and when he was in the residential group, the child did really well at school. And now he's not doing anything with his father. From what I hear from the father, I think he's very hated and can't find peace in hating me and his only joy is probably knowing that I can't get to my children. So he can't be doing well.

**Interviewer:** Yes, of course, yes, of course. Did you receive any support in this regard?

**Test person:** Yes, so psychological support. I received support from Diakonie. My parents stood by me a lot. And my husband too, of course, my current husband.

**Interviewer:** Very good. And what other support would you have liked? And from whom?

**Test person:** Yes, I would have liked support from the whole environment, from all the relatives who are still there. But there was probably psychological support for me, but they would have gone to the family for support and put me on the spot and said, here, it

can't work like this, unfortunately that wasn't possible because of the religious context. Because they were all my contacts. And I didn't have a single one, so my whole circle of friends was actually completely broken off. And then I only had this official diaconal psychologist. Yes, and very few. You don't get to know very many people in a phase like that, no, so you're actually quite alone otherwise.

**Interviewer:** So you think that you are marginalised by society when something like this happens?

**Test person:** Yes, no one feels obliged to go to the father and say, here, that can't be right. I think if a lot more people did that, they would go to such alienators to say, here, you're doing something wrong. Either you stay out of it or you side with the parent you're in contact with. Unfortunately, that's the sad thing about this society.

[...]

**Test person:** Yes, and now nobody goes to my child and says, listen, you have a mother who is loving, but people don't know what to do either.

**Interviewer:** Do your children have contact with their grandparents, i.e. your parents?

**Test person:** Only my eldest child and the youngest very sporadically and my mum, she started a few times and wanted to say something good about me. Then she was cut short. You don't want to hear that.

**Interviewer:** And do you now have contact with the estranged parent, i.e. the ex-partner?

**Test person:** I must have written to him, he wrote to me the other day saying I was banned from the house because I had visited the youngest child when he wasn't there. Or rather tried to visit. It's only formal. He has to inform me formally about her treatment and about life, and that's just a bit of pressing into the wound and power, so not really anything else in writing.

**Interviewer:** So only in writing.

**Test person:** Exactly.

**Interviewer:** And what about the children? The last time you had contact. When was that?

**Test person:** Yes, I went there last week and tried to bring the bread rolls to the youngest child. Before that I tried to bring her biscuits, but it worked with the biscuits, with the bread roll, I was expelled from the house by my adult child. Yes, so you can't call it contact, can you? I've written to my adult child, who already has a flat, and he hasn't responded either. I don't even have a mobile phone number for my youngest child and I write to my eldest child now and again but he doesn't respond.

**Interviewer:** And she referred it because the father wasn't there or because it was somehow...?

**Test person:** No, because it just didn't want me to have access to the family.

**Interviewer:** Oh, OK. What do you think, from your point of view, is a reunion with your children possible at some point?

**Test person:** Well, from my point of view, yes, because I recognise the problem. As long as the children can't recognise the problem, it's difficult. So that's my only hope now with these elders. Yes, now that I'm back in religion, that they'll do something, but will it work...?

[...]

**Interviewer:** So how would you rate the stress... So how stressful was the alienation for you? From 1 to 7?

**Test person:** Yes, 7.

**Interviewer:** Highest level.

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** And how stressful was that for the children, the alienation?

**Test person:** I think 7, too, because they're no longer making their way. No, there's nothing going on any more.

**Interviewer:** How do you mean that they no longer make their way? Do you mean the career, or?

**Test person:** Yes, one child has dropped out of education, doesn't do anything professionally, anything. The other child has dropped out of school, is just at home, does nothing. That's blatant.

**Farewell**  
**Minute 50**

### 10.13 Transcript anonymised Respondent 16 - estranged mothers

#### Greeting

**Interviewer:** The first question is, how old are you?

**Test person:** I am over 48.

**Interviewer:** And which gender do you feel you belong to?

**Test person:** Female.

**Interviewer:** Did you grow up in Germany or do you have a migrant background?

**Test person:** In Germany.

**Interviewer:** How would you categorise the socio-economic status of your parents? For example, education, income, occupation. From 1 to 7, 1 would be a low status, i.e. very low status, and 7 would be the highest status.

**Respondent:** I would say good middle class. So 6 or 7?

**Interviewer:** 6 would be above average status exactly, 7 would be highest status ok, great.

**Test person:** Not yet. I thought... From where to where is the range again?

**Interviewer:** From 1 to 7, from very low, below average, slightly below average, average would be 4, 5 would be slightly above average and 6 would be above average.

**Test person:** I would say 4.

**Interviewer:** 4 average status OK. Great. And what is your own socio-economic status from 1 to 7?

**Test person:** Also on average.

**Interviewer:** So at 4.

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** Perfect. And what is your highest qualification to date from 0 to 6, i.e. if 0 is not a school-leaving qualification and 6 would be a doctorate, i.e. a Master's degree.

**Test person:** I have a secondary school leaving certificate and an apprenticeship.

**Interviewer:** Okay. Do you have any siblings or half-siblings?

**Test person:** I have 2 siblings.

**Interviewer:** So your parents stayed together until you were of age?

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** And they still stay together, yes.

**Test person:** Well, my father has been dead for a few years now, but they were together as a couple until his death, yes.

**Interviewer:** Okay. How was your relationship with your mum? From 1 extremely bad, to 7 excellent.

**Test person:** 4.

**Interviewer:** 4 would be medium, exactly. And why medium?

**Test person:** Well, you sometimes have arguments with your mum...girls sometimes have disputes with their mothers.

**Interviewer:** OK, and how was your relationship with your father?

**Minute 5**

**Test person:** It was a bit better.

**Interviewer:** Then, that means 5 or 6?

**Test person:** Because he simply worked a lot.

**Interviewer:** OK, so a bit better for you is 5?

**Test person:** Yes, I said she was on 4 when he was there, she was very good, but of course he worked a lot.

**Interviewer:** I can understand that. Because of the experience you had at home. Do you feel emotional... So how do you feel emotionally? From 1 to 7, when 1 is extremely bad and 7 is excellent.

**Test person:** If I ignore what happened in my marriage afterwards, just in relation to my parents' home?

**Interviewer:** Yes?

**Test person:** Mmhm...

**Interviewer:** Exactly, sorry, because the question is then explained again, so equipped for adult life, that was also correct, so you also understood correctly.

**Test person:** I would say a 6.

**Interviewer:** So very good?

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** Great. And how do you feel physically, health-wise and mentally?

**Probandin:** Today the stand, or how I got into...

**Interviewer:** Yes, today.

**Test person:** Today?

**Interviewer:** Yes from 1 to 7 so most of the questions are also from 1 to 7 if 1 is extremely bad and 7 is excellence.

**Test person:** Yes, that would put me back at 4 to 5.

**Interviewer:** With physical?

**Test person:** Oh physically! Physical at 5.

**Interviewer:** Yes, and psychologically also at 4 or 5?

**Test person:** 4 was the average ne?

**Interviewer:** Exactly, exactly, 4 is so mediocre, so average.

**Test person:** Then I'm at 4.

**Interviewer:** Are you or have you received psychological or psychiatric treatment?

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** Yes, and for how long?

**Test person:** I had short-term therapy that lasted a year.

**Interviewer:** OK and was there a diagnosis?

**Test person:** I had moderate depression.

**Interviewer:** Okay, moderate depression, because in the...

**Test person:** Just an adjustment disorder and then that was extended.

**Interviewer:** Anxiety disorder?

**Test person:** No, an adjustment disorder, simply because of the incidents in my marriage. And then it was called moderate depression.

**Interviewer:** And do you have any physical complaints at the moment?

**Test person:** Well, the stress really affects my musculoskeletal system. So neck pain, back pain, hip problems. That's where it regularly goes. And at the height of the stress phase, it also had an effect on my blood pressure, on stress symptoms.

**Interviewer:** Were there conflict situations at home in your family of origin, and if so, how would you categorise this, i.e. the conflict situation from 1 to 7? If 1 is very low and 7 is the highest.

**Test person:** In my family of origin...

**Interviewer:** Yes, exactly, I mean, your parents are your family of origin, for example.

**Test person:** Yes, yes, exactly. I'm just thinking about it. I'm comparing it a bit to what happened to me later in my marriage. It was low in comparison. There was that... I also had two siblings, we sometimes argued, but never in a threatening way.

**Minute 10**

**Interviewer:** Yes, it's normal between siblings and parents that they sometimes...

**Test person:** Maybe 2.

**Interviewer:** Exactly. Below-average conflict situation, OK.

**Respondent:** 3, or at most 3? Yes.

**Interviewer:** Okay maximum 3.

**Test person:** Mhm yes.

**Interviewer:** And did your parents involve you or the others, i.e. your siblings, in the parental conflict?

**Test person:** Nope.

**Interviewer:** OK, no.

**Test person:** No.

**Interviewer:** So, and this is now related to you: How much conflict protection did you experience overall as a child? From 1 to 7?

**Test person:** Conflict protection, what do you mean by that?

**Interviewer:** Conflict protection is, for example, when your parents have a conflict between themselves. And then protect you from this conflict because they don't want to involve you in it.

**Test person:** Yes, it must have been high, because I didn't notice the conflicts at all.

**Interviewer:** That's, that's good. So that would be from 1 to 7, then 1 would be the highest conflict protection, because you didn't notice anything. And the next question would be, how much attention did you receive overall as a child? If 1 is the highest level and 7 is the lowest level.

**Test person:** I would say on average again. I was already at school all day back then and so on. Of course, that limited the times we were at home, but our parents were already there when we were at home.

**Interviewer:** And how is the bond with your carers at the moment? How strong?

**Test person:** Yes, my father would have been many years old. My mum is of course very old. Yes, she also has dementia. I, I have regular contact with her, but I don't know how much she still sees of me.

**Interviewer:** So how would you categorise it from 1 to 7? So if 1 is the highest level and 7 is the lowest level?

**Test person:** Well, I orientate myself to the time when my mother was still clearly responsive. I had good contact with her then. Now he's just in need of care. But before he needed care, I had good contact with her.

**Interviewer:** Exactly. So the question refers in general, not to a specific situation. So if we look at it generally, in general?

**Test person:** Then I'll do 2.

**Interviewer:** At 2 okay above average commitment level. Wonderful. Then we've ticked off this question too. Did you have contact with family courts, youth welfare offices or lawyers etc. as a child?

**Test person:** No, not at all.

**Interviewer:** Oh, not at all. Then the next question wouldn't be directed at you either. Now we need a bit more information about your own biological family. So, how would you categorise the conflict situation in your own family? From 1 to 7.

**Test person:** So you mean in my marriage?

**Interviewer:** Exactly, exactly in your marriage. Your own family, so you, your husband, the children.

**Test person:** High, very high.

**Interviewer:** So the highest level, that would be 7.

**Test person:** There was no physical violence. But there was emotional violence, yes. So 7 would also be physical violence, wouldn't it?

**Interviewer:** Yes, so 7 would be like that, depending on how you feel about it. Because it doesn't necessarily have to be physical violence, but if you feel that 7 is the highest conflict situation then...

**Test person:** Yes, I would still say 7, because it was associated with a lot of fear and a lot of terror. Yes.

**Interviewer:** Did you or the other parent involve the children in the conflict?

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** And how much? From 1 to 7.

**Test person:** 7.

**Interviewer:** Extremely OK. So you or your husband.

**Test person:** My ex-husband, yes.

**Interviewer:** Your ex-husband. And in what form did he do that?

**Test person:** Well, he threatened to take the children away from me very soon after the separation. And with our one child, he managed to do it to the point of complete alienation. I don't even know where my child lives anymore. That's why I'm 7. Our other child had a bit of protection... It had a bit of protection. I involved an educational counselling centre early on. And I had to refer it to one child on the application and I didn't actually know which of the two I should specify. And then I just put the eldest one on there and then the educational counsellor made appointments with this child and I think that was what protected him. He simply had conversations early on. She [the counsellor] also explained how she could behave in this separation conflict. But our other child didn't have that. Exactly. So each child had their own godparents and the godparents also had a slightly different effect.

**Interviewer:** So they have the sponsors, they are more involved, so to speak.

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** Okay, and what would you say? How much conflict protection have your children experienced overall? So we mean all your children in general. From 1 to 7, if 1 is the highest conflict, i.e. protection, that is the highest conflict protection and 7 is the lowest conflict protection.

**Test person:** That's very difficult for me to say.

**Interviewer:** Yes, understandable.

**Test person:** So all in all, really very little. My eldest child already had a certain amount of protection through this counselling centre. Also through the sponsors, for example, or at school. My other child, I don't think he had any conflict protection at all. I think overall, if I had to take an average for both children, then I would stick to 2, i.e. very little conflict protection.

**Interviewer:** Oh, excuse 2 would be above average, so 6 would be the other way round.

**Test person:** Exactly

**Interviewer:** OK, so below-average conflict protection. And what do you think? How much attention did your children receive overall after the whole thing? So in total, including the whole time they were in conflict or before? So 1 would be the highest level of care. 1 would be the highest level of affection and 7 would be the lowest. From both parents, I mean.

**Test person:** Seen by both as average over the whole time.

**Interviewer:** Exactly, so in general exactly in general.

**Test person:** All in all, I would say maybe...1 was a really good attention and 7 was the really bad one.

**Interviewer:** Exactly. Exactly 7 would be the lowest allocation level.

**Test person:** It's very difficult to calculate that as an average. I would say. 4 or even just 5, so when my children were small, I was at home all the time and was often available for them. I was always available for them. But my ex-husband didn't take much care of the children, so I have to count that down and after the divorce I had to go to work full-time. And then of course I only had a little time or less time, i.e. the first few years. The first few years, my younger child, until he was 7, I was really available for my children full-time and always there for them. And after that it was just worse. And my ex-husband hardly looked after the children.

**Interviewer:** Understand and...

#### **Minute 21**

**Respondent:** 5, 5 yes.

**Interviewer:** Okay at 5 then. How strong would you say the bond between your children and your carer is at the moment? So with you and your ex-partner.

**Test person:** My older child has a good relationship with me. My youngest has completely broken off contact with me. And vice versa. So 5.

**Interviewer:** 5 would be slightly below average commitment.

**Test person:** This is already a clearly below-average bond.

**Interviewer:** Okay, so at 6: Below-average commitment okay.

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** And as a mother, did you have contact with family courts, youth welfare offices, lawyers, experts, etc.?

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** And in what form?

**Test person:** With the youth welfare office, of course. Of course I also had a lawyer, but she didn't give me much support. There was a court application on my part. But then my ex-husband forbade our [child 1 - the older one] to go to grammar school. I had to make an urgent application. Then he agreed to it after the urgent application was filed. Then it was cancelled and then there was another application from my ex-husband because he wanted to force our [child 2 - the younger one] to get a motorbike driving licence. And then there was also an agreement via the youth welfare office and then the proceedings were also terminated.

**Interviewer:** Okay and how would you describe this experience with the authorities? As helpful, not helpful, supportive?

**Test person:** Not helpful at all.

**Interviewer:** Not helpful at all. And was that supportive or stressful for you? So for your side. How do you feel about that?

**Test person:** Highly stressful.

**Interviewer:** Very stressful. And not at all friendly, warm?

**Test person:** Due to my ex-husband's various moves, different youth welfare offices were involved. So many of them were quite disastrous. One made an effort.

**Interviewer:** OK.

**Test person:** But she only recognised this alienation situation and the lies that were involved very late.

**Interviewer:** And were they so unfeeling or were they cold? How did they feel about the situation, all the offices that were involved?

**Test person:** I would most likely say overwhelmed.

**Interviewer:** OK.

**Test person:** Overwhelmed, helpless, that would be my description.

**Minute 25**

**Interviewer:** And would you use the professionals again if necessary or recommend them to others? So the...

**Test person:** No.

**Interviewer:** Not at all?

**Test person:** No.

**Interviewer:** And why?

**Test person:** Because they weren't helpful for me.

**Interviewer:** Ok, then OK, I see.

**Test person:** So they weren't helpful because they didn't understand the situation, because they exacerbated the situation through their ignorance. So my ex-husband really did go to the youth welfare office with lies to denounce me. That's a fairly typical situation that occurs during estrangement and it wasn't questioned. They just gave it to him like that. Yes, I was then prejudged. I was prejudged by the youth welfare office and it was a real struggle for me to clear that up. I wouldn't recommend that to anyone.

**Interviewer:** Apart from that, what would you say has worked for you in your relationship? Would you have any advice? I mean apart from all the problems that came afterwards. On the whole now. What worked for you, in your relationship?

**Test person:** Ah yes, the first few years worked. We also had children together, so living together worked for the first few years. At that point, there was a change and then it changed completely.

**Interviewer:** And would you have any advice, for example, from what you feel has worked? So would you have any advice for others?

**Test person:** No, no.

**Interviewer:** Okay and how are things now? So are you currently in a new, stable relationship?

**Test person:** No.

**Interviewer:** Ok, so how stressful was the separation for you? From 1 to 7 again. 1 would be low and 7 would be 7.

**Test person:** 7.

**Interviewer:** And why?

**Test person:** Because there was simply a lot of violence. Because there was a lot of fear involved. A lot of threats. Putting them under pressure. Yes, threats. Dishonesty. Existential, very existential situations.

**Interviewer:** And what was it like for your children, how did they experience it?

**Test person:** I hope that I was able to spare them some things. I hope that I was able to protect my children a little bit, but. They have also realised some things, yes.

**Interviewer:** And how stressful do you think the situation was for them? So if you were to rate it from 1 to 7, now, if 1 were the lowest level and 7 the highest?

**Test person:** 5. I have to say.

**Interviewer:** What do you think are the motives of the other parent from your point of view? So from your ex-husband?

**Respondent:** Power.

**Minute 29**

**Interviewer:** So he wants to gain more power. And how did this situation come about? What factors influenced the whole thing?

**Test person:** I think he has a basic problem. Yes, I think he has a basic problem.

**Interviewer:** And how old were your children when it all happened and how long did it take?

**Respondent:** [Child 1] was over 8 when the separation happened, [Child 2] was under 8. And that lasted for years. So of course the first year was very strong. The influence he exerted. It lasted for several years. The separation came in 2010. And in 2017, our or [child 2] went to the father and in 2017, 2018 there were also many incidents that were also stressful for [child 1].

**Interviewer:** And what consequences did it have for you, for your children and for your ex-husband, for the whole family, so to speak?

**Test person:** So emotionally at the top of the list. Yes, a lot of anxiety, an emotional, highly stressful situation. But also economic consequences. Also social consequences.

**Interviewer:** That you then move and that you are somewhere new because you no longer live where you used to live, is that what you mean?

**Respondent:** For [child 2] yes. [Child 1] and I, we moved within the same street. So the change of location wasn't quite as big, but our youngest child, when he moved in with his father, there was a bigger move, a bigger change. With a change of school. Including the loss of friends. But in terms of social issues, there was also the fact that outsiders were drawn into this conflict. We were also defamed in front of other people and contacts were broken off.

**Interviewer:** Okay, because you broke up, right?

**Test person:** So, yes, yes.

**Interviewer:** OK.

**Test person:** And socially for [child 2]. It has no contact with me. I think that's really, really serious.

**Interviewer:** Yes, definitely... Did you receive support in that respect, after all the consequences that you suffered here?

**Test person:** Well, as I said, I had psychotherapy and [child 1] also has counselling. Apart from that, we have no support.



**Interviewer:** Okay and what, what would you personally have wished for and from whom? So what kind of support would you have wished for more and from whom?

**Minute 40**

**Test person:** Mhm, so I would like support from lawyers, for example.

**Interviewer:** So legal yes.

**Test person:** I was clearly told that my youngest child is over 14, the court won't do anything anyway, there's no need to try anything. I think differently today. And of course I would have liked support from the youth welfare office. Simply that they listened better. To understand the situation properly and to scrutinise what was happening. I would also have liked support from the family.

**Interviewer:** From your family, you mean?

**Test person:** Well, actually, in that case it was my ex-husband's family. So they supported this estrangement situation and if they had left it alone and remained neutral, then it would have been better for us. But people simply interfered in this estrangement conflict and helped support it.

**Interviewer:** Did the whole thing get worse, so to speak, in your opinion?

**Test person:** Yes, yes exactly.

**Interviewer:** And what does it look like now? So do you now have contact with the estranged parent? Or with the children?

**Test person:** No, I've broken off contact in the meantime. Because it's just not getting any better and because there's no solution. And because I realised that I couldn't help our [child 2] either. So I stayed in contact as long as we still had joint custody. Simply always in the hope that I could do something for our youngest child. But it wasn't about resolving the conflict, it was about staying connected. And at the point where I realised I couldn't do anything for our child. That's when I wanted to protect myself.

**Interviewer:** I see. And what do you think, from your point of view, is a reunion with [child 2] possible? I mean in the future?

**Test person:** I would like it. I would have the openness to welcome the child at any time if it wanted to come. I don't know if that's possible from the child's side. It depends on how much influence is exerted on the child.

**Interviewer:** But it's much older now. So.

**Test person:** Yes, exactly, but it's often the case with estranged children that it continues to have an effect for a long time until they get into a situation where they can detach themselves from the situation.

**Interviewer:** Oh, that's right. And how was the estrangement from your child for you? How stressful was it?

**Test person:** High, very high

**Interviewer:** Very highest stress level.

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** And what do you think it was like for [child 2], exactly how stressful?

**Test person:** All up.

**Interviewer:** How would you explain why that was so high in your opinion?

**Test person:** Yes, the child was influenced. So he was told things and so on, so he was brainwashed and quite quickly after he went to his father, my child became depressed. Everything, the child then also had panic attacks. So yes, contact with me was also often cut off. Often for weeks and then finally completely after a while.

**Interviewer:** And now it's been, how many years, did you say over 5 years, that you no longer have any contact with [child 2]?

**Test person:** So that my child was here with me for a longer period of time, so a longer period of time would be, for example, having a coffee or something. That was last in 2018.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Test person:** After 2018, I only saw it at all when I brought a present for a birthday or at Christmas, for example. And then I handed it over at the front door. And then I might have seen it for two minutes on the open street by the front door. There have been no

more visits with my youngest child since 2018. And there's been no contact at all for a year and a half. So I don't even have an address anymore, I don't know where he is.

**Interviewer:** I see, the last question is actually a repetition. Did you experience a process of alienation with your own child as an adult? Yes, you have, you have just explained that.

**Test person:** Exactly. I would jump back again. Now, of course, I don't know what number that is. You asked whether I would have liked support. And I have to add that yes, I would also have liked support from my youngest child's therapists. Although I don't know how the therapies went. But nobody ever contacted me, for example. My child was a minor, so why didn't they talk to the mother to clarify the family context?

**Interviewer:** OK, so I understand, but do the therapists tell the parents what was discussed in therapy? So I don't think they're allowed to do that, are they?

**Test person:** No, no, they're not allowed to do that. But I only found out that my child was having therapy in a roundabout way.

**Interviewer:** Oh, okay.

**Test person:** Well, I, I didn't even know, I wasn't informed at all. My child, I found out by chance that my child was in hospital. And there was no contact with me at all. There was also no consent on my part, even though I had full custody.

**Interviewer:** Oh, I see.

**Test person:** And then I think the therapists could have. Yes, they could have contacted the mother. Maybe even had to, to ask for consent.

**Interviewer:** So that's true. But maybe because they already had a declaration of consent from one parent. Sometimes they don't have to take it from both. But that's the thing.

**Test person:** But my wish would have been, yes, in order to understand this alienation situation, you simply have to see the context.

## **Farewell Minute 47**

### 10.14. Anonymised transcript of respondent 17 - estranged mothers

#### **Greeting**

**Interviewer:** Exactly. So firstly, how old are you?

**Test person:** over 50.

**Interviewer:** Which gender do you feel you belong to?

**Test person:** Female.

**Interviewer:** Did you grow up in Germany?

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** And do you have a migration background?

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** Yes? OK, do you want to say something about that?

**Test person:** Well, my father came from south-east Europe, my mother too. And I was born in Germany.

**Interviewer:** Okay, thank you. How would you categorise the socio-economic status of your parents' home? In terms of education, income and occupation? So we have a scale from 1 to 7 and 1 would be very low and 7 the highest status.

**Test person:** OK, I would say it varied a lot. Between... 2 at times (...) and yes, at most a 5. I would rather say 4.

**Interviewer:** And so maybe overall, if they commit to a number.

**Test person:** mhm... Then I would say 4.

**Interviewer:** Okay. (...) And what about your own socio-economic status?

**Test person:** So it's just about how I rate it emotionally, right?

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Respondent:** OK, then I would say the scale went up to 7. (...) 6.

**Interviewer:** Okay. Thank you.

**Test person:** Since I started working again.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Test person:** But it's more of a general assessment, isn't it?

#### **Minute 5**

**Interviewer:** Yes. What is the highest qualification you have achieved so far?

**Proband:** Diploma. A diploma from the university.

**Interviewer:** Okay. Do you have any siblings or half-siblings?

**Test person:** Yes, a sibling.

**Interviewer:** Did your parents live together until you reached the age of majority?

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** Did your parents' parents stay together?

**Test person:** Ah yes. My grandparents, yes.

**Interviewer:** What is or was your relationship with your mother like? Again from one to seven.

**Test person:** Mhm. 4.

**Interviewer:** And why?

**Test person:** Mhm (...) Well, the positive aspects were that she is a very loving, warm person. And as a result I experienced a, yes, warm contact. (...) And the unfavourable aspects are that I now assume that my mother also has an attachment trauma from her childhood, which was very difficult, especially after the war. And that, according to the concept of learned helplessness, she never really experienced herself as self-effective and unfortunately passed this on. And also had quite a lot of insecurities in dealing with my sibling and with me. And of course I noticed that and yes. It also did a lot to our relationship. So it wasn't such a secure relationship.

**Interviewer:** Okay. And the same again for your father.

**Test person:** Mhm. (...) Yes, I would also say a 4. Now why?

**Interviewer:** Yes, again why.

**Test person:** Mhm. Yes, well, I would say that my father was a.... patriarch who was in charge. I didn't always find that so easy and he also... Yes, also so traditional, right? The wife is responsible for bringing up the children and the husband brings in the money, and of course that also characterised our relationship. Which I found very favourable in our whole relationship. I've just said that my mum was very weak, rather submissive and I... (...) I put that down to my temperament. I think I always had a lot of basic trust in God. And I rubbed up against my father a lot. And I didn't let him take the butter off my bread, as they say, and that's what got me, that's what gave me a certain strength. Exactly against such a patriarch. Yes, well, that was the positive thing, and I think when our relationship slowly grew closer, he unfortunately passed away quite suddenly. So things would certainly have been different after that. Yes.

**Interviewer:** (...) Okay. How is the experience at home, do you feel emotionally, 1 extremely poor, 2 very poor, 3 poor, 4. average, 5 good, 6 very good or 7 excellent, equipped or prepared for adult life?

**Test person:** mhm. (...) So now retrospectively, especially after my experience with parent-child alienation, I would rather say 2.

#### **Minute 10**

**Interviewer:** (...) Okay. Now there would be a couple of questions about your health in general? How do you feel about your mental health? Again from 1 to 7?

**Test person:** Mhm, so 1 is very bad and 7 is excellent, right? Like this. Yes, mhm. What time period does it apply to?

**Interviewer:** I don't think that's exactly what it says here, but I think it's been the last few months or so.

**Test person:** All right, then I would say. That was sometimes at 1. And in the meantime through therapy and um yes... I've found my way back into life and would say I'm now (...) At 4.

**Interviewer:** Okay. How do you feel physically in terms of health?

**Test person:** Mhm. Likewise [4]. And I had major physical problems, but I still have them too, but they don't need to know that specifically.

**Interviewer:** OK, and I think you have already answered the next question in part. Are you or were you undergoing psychological or psychiatric treatment?

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** And if so, why and for how long? And what was the diagnosis?

**Test person:** OK, that's quite simple. I've been undergoing psychological treatment since summer 22 and have been diagnosed with PTSD. So you know what that is? Or should I? Yes.

**Interviewer:** Yes, yes, I know what that is.

**Respondent:** Mhm and.... The last one, the last one. I think there were 3 things, right?

**Interviewer:** If yes, why and for how long? And the diagnosis?

**Test person:** Exactly OK, why because of the post-traumatic stress disorder.

**Interviewer:** Now comes the next section with questions about your family of origin.

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** And indeed, how would you categorise the conflict situation in your parental home? 1 very low conflict situation, 2 below average, 3 slightly below average, 4 average, 5 slightly above average, 6 above average and 7 highest conflict situation.

**Test person:** So the conflict situation in my family of origin would now be on average....

**Interviewer:** So 4?

**Test person:** Mhm.

**Interviewer:** Okay. Did their parents involve them, or the children, in the parental conflict? If so, how much? Again from 1 to 7. 1 is practically not at all or unconscious and 7 is extreme.

**Test person:** (...) There was a possibility, yes, unconsciously, Ne?

**Interviewer:** Yes, exactly, the first one. So practically not at all, or only unconsciously.

**Test person:** Unconsciously. Yes, then the 1.

**Interviewer:** Okay. Yes, it says in what form, but if it wasn't practically at all, then it's completely lost.

**Test person:** Oh, I see. No, sorry, then I misunderstood.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Test person:** I was always involved as a child, so the arguments, they weren't so violent, because the arguments my parents had with each other... at least since I became aware of it, I always felt involved. In that respect, I will have noticed a lot of it. And the reason is that, well, I realised early on that my mother was pretty helpless and then I argued with my father on my mother's behalf.

**Interviewer:** Okay. That kind of ties in with the next question. How much conflict protection did you experience overall as a child? Again, from 1 highest conflict protection and 7 very low conflict protection.

**Respondent:** Very low conflict protection.

#### **Minute 16**

**Interviewer:** Okay. How much attention would you say you received overall as a child? Again from.... No, but from 1 to 7, and 1 is the highest.

**Test person:** Mhm. So both physical and emotional affection?

**Interviewer:** Mhm, yes.

**Test person:** 3.

**Interviewer:** How strong is your current bond with your carers? From 1 to 7? 1 is the highest, 7 is the lowest.

**Test person:** Mhm. My father has passed away. So with caregivers. Sorry, now I have to ask again, does that mean the parents or also others?

**Interviewer:** I think that also means other people.

**Test person:** Ah OK, then. (...) Yes, can I just answer that in a differentiated way? Actually, my father passed away. It's stayed the same with my mother in the end. Now she needs care. And dependent on help. But in principle, I've always had the feeling that this was the case. Now it's just obvious and now she's also dependent on a different kind of help as far as my other carers are concerned. It's a completely different situation. And can you say the question again very briefly, then I can answer more specifically.

**Interviewer:** Exactly. Yes, how strong is your current bond with your attachment figures, attachment figures from 1 to 7?

**Test person:** So with friends very strongly. I would even say (...) 7 was the best?

**Interviewer:** No, the lowest.

**Test person:** Ah okay, then I would say it's 2.

**Interviewer:** Yes, I also don't know why the scale has now been turned round. OK and again related to that. How much contact do you currently have with your carers? One is again the highest and 7 the lowest.

**Test person:** Mhm, 2.

**Interviewer:** Do you have or did you have contact, as a child, with family courts, youth welfare offices, lawyers or experts? And so on.

**Test person:** No.

**Interviewer:** How would you categorise the conflict situation in your own biological family? 1 is the lowest conflict situation and 7 is the highest.

**Test person:** (...) Ah, now I'm a bit confused. I thought we'd already had that question.

**Interviewer:** Oh, that's right, so now there are questions for your family, which you then founded yourself, so to speak.

**Respondent:** OK, to the core family... OK. Okay. But it's clear, I'm estranged, right? So I, I no longer have any contact with my children.

**Interviewer:** Yes then, here it refers to what the stop was like before.

**Test person:** Before. OK. So still at the time of marriage, right?

**Interviewer:** Mhm, yes.

**Test person:** (...) It was a permanently high level of conflict in a subtle way. (...) I can't say it any other way right now, so a permanent tension and a permanent misunderstanding. And yes, such a smouldering conflict.

**Interviewer:** So maybe even 7? The highest?

**Test person:** Yes, yes.

**Interviewer:** OK.

**Test person:** And then I experienced 10 years of post-separation violence. When we functioned as a separated family system. That's exactly what I would rate as 7. If, yes, if it's asked. Mmm.

**Interviewer:** I think there will be more questions later.

**Test person:** OK.

**Interviewer:** Did you or the other parent involve the children in the conflict, i.e. the parental conflict? If so, to what extent?

**Minute 21**

**Respondent:** The father. To the highest degree or in the highest degree.

**Interviewer:** And in what form?

**Respondent:** Verbal. Mental.

**Interviewer:** All right. How much conflict protection did your children experience in total? 1 is again the highest and seven is very low conflict protection.

**Test person:** Well, that's part of my trauma. I couldn't protect my children. In that respect, they experienced a lot. Constant hostility. Even at 7. So they didn't have any... then 1 no? They didn't experience any conflict protection.

**Interviewer:** Oh, seven would be very low conflict protection.

**Test person:** OK, good.

**Interviewer:** How much attention would you say your children received overall? 1 would be the highest and 7 would be the lowest.

**Test person:** 7

**Interviewer:** How strong is the current bond between your children and their carers? So the children. 1 as the highest and 7 very low.

**Test person:** Well, for me. Is 0, so 7. Yes, and with the father, that's 1.

**Interviewer:** Okay, how much contact do your children currently have with their carers? Probably almost exactly the same question, right?

**Test person:** Yes, at least to me. And I can't answer anything else because I haven't had any contact with my children for a year and a half.

**Interviewer:** Yes.(...) okay. And as a mother, do you have or have you had contact with family courts, youth welfare offices, lawyers, experts, etc.?

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** If yes, in what form?

**Respondent:** Yes, once in court by the father, who has applied for sole right of residence. Then it is automatically also a matter for the youth welfare office through the counselling paragraph. The youth welfare office is always consulted via lawyers. I had a lawyer represent me. And I also sought legal advice. By a lawyer who only deals with child custody law. I'd already been in contact with the youth welfare office in advance, as the father had registered me.... reported me to the youth welfare office as a dangerous mother in spring 2020. Exactly.

**Interviewer:** How would you describe these relationships, for example with adjectives such as helpful or unhelpful, supportive, harassing, friendly, warm, uncaring, cold and so on or something like that, mhm.

**Respondent:** Incompetent. Unprofessional. Biased. Oh, that's also part of my trauma, so sometimes I have to stop and breathe a bit. Yes, the experience I had with the youth welfare office was absolutely scary. And from a purely objective and factual point of view, I thought it was really miserable work. Yes. And not helpful at all, but rather stabilising the parent-child alienation or rather.... That was the... They sealed it. Yes, definitely the youth welfare office. The youth welfare office sealed it.

**Interviewer:** So it's kind of numb, can I hear that too?

**Test person:** Absolutely yes.

#### **Minute 26**

**Interviewer:** Yes. So the next question is, would you use the professionals again if necessary or recommend them to others and why?

**Test person:** Never ever!

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Test person:** And so I, I have the impression that I wouldn't recommend it to others for that reason either. So I'm normally, everyone gets another chance from me. And I also know that it depends on the employee. Until the court. I didn't do much about the court because I was advised that I had no chance at all. Especially with the age of my children. So I haven't had that much experience with the youth welfare office. No, I think there's a good chance that I'll end up with someone who doesn't have a clue, who works unprofessionally and who isn't trained at all. In counselling at all. In such basic counselling requirements. The probability would be too high for me to advise anyone to do that.

**Interviewer:** OK, so the next question is whether you have any advice, but you've already said that. Okay, now comes another new section, if I can see that correctly. Are you currently in a new, stable relationship?

**Test person:** No.

**Interviewer:** How stressful was the separation for you? 1 is very low and 7 is the highest stress level.

**Test person:** 7.

**Interviewer:** And would you like to expand on that? You've already said a lot about it.

**Test person:** Yes, because I did. So I know afterwards. I'm not a psychiatrist or a psychologist. I know I can't make any diagnoses. But I am convinced that the father of my children is mentally ill. And these, yes, his characteristics, which of course became very apparent during the marriage.... were very formative. And that made the separation

incredibly latently aggressive and violent, not physically, but really psychologically. For example, he said quite clearly that if I wanted to separate, I would have to move out of the house we shared. Exactly, and that's how it continued. He then very quickly started to fight nastily for the children, to demonstrate that he was in charge, that he had the money and that he had the means. Yes. So a lot of psychological violence.

**Interviewer:** And how stressful do you think the separation was for your children? From 1 to 7. 7 is the highest.

**Test person:** Yes, 7.

**Interviewer:** And why? You've already said that, but if you want to say something else.

**Test person:** Yes, that's right, well, one part of it was that, of course, they always experienced this psychological violence towards me. Through what the father did. And on the other hand. I was very quick to get support. I went to a counselling centre so that I could get advice on how best to guide my children through this separation phase. And I wasn't able to implement anything I learnt there. Because the father didn't support it at all. It was all about punishing me and whether the children were harmed in the process, he didn't really care, so the children were actually involved right from the start.

### **Minute 30**

**Interviewer:** OK, that brings us to the last part of the questions. Is that specific to the whole situation again? From your point of view, what are the other parent's motives? You've already said a lot. But if you want to say something about it again.

**Respondent:** The other parent's motives for the alienation?

**Interviewer:** yes.

**Test person:** Sure, of course I've already read a lot about it and I have to say that I also have a bit of a background. I'm an educator myself and also work in this field. The father's motives. I believe that the father has a problem with sharing his children, not just with me as the mother, but it's always been very clear that when the children were with their father, they weren't allowed to sleep with the neighbour's children, but rather with the neighbour's children. So he didn't give the children any room for development at all. I believe that he simply has such poor self-confidence from his childhood, is very needy and was always afraid of losing the children to me. And on the other hand, the children are always dependent as children per se. Did you... Well, there was just this natural dependency. He didn't have to be afraid that the children would leave him, no. So he was very needy, he needed the children themselves to feel good and the children's love. I think he's very polarising. For him, this image doesn't exist, not even as an image of life, that children need both parents, but ultimately they only need him. So it's black or white throughout. And he can't accept any other opinion either. And yes, this is the safest method for him now. Now he has the children safely. And because they now only have him, they naturally bond with him again. And that reinforces the whole thing in a positive way, no. For him too, no. It also gives him a good feeling, no. It all works out. Yes, great. Yes, I would say those are the reasons. So I think he himself is extremely needy and has reasons from his childhood.

**Interviewer:** Mhm and would you say that there were other factors that influenced it? Or that the situation came about due to other factors?

**Test person:** Yes. I think I was also a stabilising factor. I myself was naturally also very unstable due to my experience of psychological violence. I was very scared. I knew what he was capable of and I couldn't stand up for myself like I used to. I made the experience myself when I tried to get someone on board to support me. I also contacted the youth welfare office and spoke to the divorce lawyer again and didn't get any support. I felt very helpless and I think that was the dynamic, which of course made it very easy for him. Yes, that's all I know. I'm currently working through it myself in therapy. Yes, I just know. That's why my therapist recently gave me some feedback when I described a few situations to her from the post-separation years or from my marriage. She summarised it as psychological terror, and that was good for me, because I always felt it was very bad, but somehow I didn't have the courage to call it that. And yes. And my part in it or what else led to it. I think I'm still working through that myself.

**Interviewer:** How old were the children and how long did the process take in total?

**Test person:** 10 years.

### **Minute 36**

**Interviewer:** Okay, so how old were the children?

**Test person:** During the separation?

**Interviewer:** Mhm.

**Test person:** Mhm. Yes, now I have to think for a moment. The younger one was under 6 and the older one under 10.

**Interviewer:** Now back to this process. What consequences did it have for you, for the children, for the receiving parent and for the family?

**Test person:** Well, the consequences of the process are... The worst consequence is breaking off contact. I can even understand my children. As a solution to this perpetual conflict. This not getting any peace. I've always called it that. I had the father at the table every Friday. So we lived the alternating model. And that was really awful. So he was also there when he wasn't and then always in a very negative way. But the consequence of this, of this alienation strategy, is that my children cut off contact with .... I don't know how they're doing, I just know that my children have already suffered a lot in these 10 years. With low self-esteem. So much so that it was clearly visible from the outside. Even from people who didn't have daily contact with my children. Isolation, my children were very isolated, they didn't go out on the street at all afterwards and didn't want to. The younger one didn't do any sport at all, the older child stopped doing sport after a few years. And the younger one was also very isolated as far as friends were concerned. So I was still worried about that myself. That's exactly what I experienced at the time, but this poor self-confidence was massive. And my older child also developed phobias at times, although sometimes I don't know, puberty also played a part. But they both... Yes, I'm really going to call it psychosomatic, because I took it seriously, of course. We also went to the doctor and that was mostly without findings and. Nevertheless, you felt incredibly bad and ill, no. That's exactly how it is with my children. I can't say too much about my father, I'm probably resisting it. And for me, yes. Definitely post-traumatic stress disorder as a result. And also the realisation. I think that....'m only now slowly realising that I experienced psychological violence and what the consequences were. What it did to me, to my personality and to my perception, that after the 10 years I was already... or 20 years if I add the time I was married to that. Simply very changed in character and.... So also clearly visible to the outside world. Now I get feedback - now you're better again, you're back to your old self. Those are the consequences for me.

### **Minute 41**

**Interviewer:** Mhm, the next question would be, did you receive support in this respect? If yes, to what extent and if no, what would you have liked and from whom?

**Test person:** So from the people in my life that I have chosen for myself.... I have received an incredible amount of support. So much that they really ensured my survival. It was very critical last year. And yes, that really has ensured my survival. I received a lot of support. Yes, from my own family, from my family of origin. As much as was possible for you. I know that was a lot, but it wasn't always the kind of support I needed. I really got it more from the people I chose, the people I chose myself. Well, my advantage was that I was very well connected. I had very easy access to professional psychologists, trauma therapists and so on. To be honest, that was also my good fortune. I also received a lot of help there. But I also asked them because I wanted to deal with the crisis and didn't want to go under. And then I also sought support from a friend, because I don't want to burden my friendships with such difficult things, they are my friends and not my therapists. I also sought support from the psychologist I'm seeing now. I went to a counselling centre and. That was also very good, at least for the transition. I also got a lot of inspiration there. I networked with self-help groups. And I've now found one that I'm talking about in this interview, which I find very helpful and very competent. So not always pulling each other down, but really looking at how we can support each other, how we can strengthen each other, what we can do. Staying self-effective, exactly,



self-help group and where I haven't experienced any support at all, that's really the youth welfare office. Not even when contact was re-established. Yes, on the contrary. So that was rather counterproductive, I was very stigmatised. The father's narrative was believed and the whole argument was built on that. Without even looking objectively and factually. Exactly, and apart from the last conversation, I never heard anything from the youth welfare office staff again. Yes, I didn't get any support there.

**Interviewer:** Yes, well, most of it was the result of the fact that they became active themselves and didn't get support from the youth welfare office, for example, or something like that.

**Test person:** yes. Absolutely yes.

#### **Minute45**

**Interviewer:** Do you now have contact with the alienating parent? Do you have contact with your children? You have already answered that and if no, is a reunion with the child possible from your point of view? With the children.

**Test person:** Yes, so I have contact with the alienated person, with the alienator, because my lawyer reminded me in December about this development report, which I have a right to. I still have custody, no, the 50%. So he always writes me 3 lines about my child every few months. Exactly. So I know more about every child for whom I write a report myself. Otherwise I avoid contact. I haven't had any contact with my children for a year and a half. And I've also given up trying to initiate contact because it was judged accordingly. And at some point I had to protect myself in order not to slide even deeper into the crisis as a result of the rejection experience. And the way I see it at the moment is that my children, the way I experience them, the way they behave, I've now had contact with the older one again about maintenance and I've clearly noticed that the child is actually only acting in his father's haze, that there's a lot of induced opinion. Manipulated. They've completely adopted the father's view of me. That's why I don't have any hope that there will be any contact again as long as they are under this influence. Yes, I think so too, when I think of it like that. They can't, they can't defend themselves against their father. Maybe that's the best way to describe it. I have that too, so I understand it cognitively. Emotionally, I often reach my limits. My psychologist recently gave me a picture that helped me understand it a bit better. We talked about the mechanisms behind children stoning their own mothers in Iran. And what strong forces, what strong views are at work in them and how much splitting off they have to do to be capable of such an act, which is absolutely against all understanding. And that's when I really realised it. And I think my children, they wouldn't, wouldn't, can't allow any contact at all now. Not as long as they are so closely connected to their father and live in the same household and don't receive any impulses from outside. I can't remember whether that was the answer to the question or whether it was the question of whether I could imagine having contact again. Whether I could imagine that or whether I... Was that right?

**Interviewer:** Yes, but that, I think the answer was sufficient in any case.

**Test person:** OK.

**Interviewer:** OK, then we have 3 more questions. How stressful was the alienation overall for you? From 1 very low stress level to 7 highest stress level.

**Test person:** 100! (laughs)... That was the worst thing that has ever happened to me in my life. I really thought I wouldn't survive it.

**Interviewer:** Mhm, Mhm. And here is the question again, why? Of course, you have already said a lot about this, but if you want to add more, can you do so?

**Test person:** Why do I rate it a 7?

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Test person:** Yes. (...) So the feelings that have remained in any case are that I find breaking off contact and alienation to be the most unnatural thing in the world. If nothing has happened to justify breaking off contact, such as abuse or any kind of violence. It is simply inhumane, degrading and absolutely unnatural against nature. Yes, that's how I feel too. My mum painted a beautiful picture. I won't forget it, I realised

then, oh, she understood. She meant every mother animal that is taken away, for example cows, no, they scream, unbelievable. And they put up a fight because it's just such a terrible thing to have your child taken away from you. And nature can defend itself quite automatically. Yes, I find it simply inconceivable and inhumane. Yes, and I can't understand why even one member of staff at any youth welfare office would support something like that and think that it's good for children. Okay.

**Note: The interview seems to have been cancelled. The interviewer can no longer be heard. End of the recording.**

**Minute 52**

## 10.15. Anonymised transcript of respondent 19 - estranged mothers

### Greeting

**Interviewer:** How old are you?

**Test person:** Over 50.

**Interviewer:** Which gender do you feel you belong to?

**Test person:** Female.

**Interviewer:** Did you grow up in Germany and do you have a migration background?

**Test person:** No, I grew up in Germany and both parents are also German.

**Interviewer:** How would you categorise the socio-economic status of your parents' home in terms of education, income and occupation? One is very low and seven is the highest.

**Test person:** I have to say (...) that was normal middle class back then. Yes, what do you say? Four? Three? Four? Three maybe, because my parents didn't have that much education... Yes, then maybe three.

**Interviewer:** Ok, and how would you define that for your own socio-economic status?

**Test person:** Oh, mhm. Well, I would say that before the separation I was definitely better than now. So (...) where am I now? Now I'm actually on the verge of Hartz four, no. But I'm educated and well trained, but economically it's just very difficult now. What would you say? Is that a two then? Probably a two.

**Interviewer:** What is your highest qualification to date?

**Test person:** I have a high school diploma and I have two university degrees.

**Interviewer:** Ok. Do you have siblings or half-siblings?

**Test person:** I have two siblings.

**Interviewer:** Did your parents stay together until you were of age?

**Test person:** Yes.

**Minute 5**

**Interviewer:** And did your parents' parents stay together?

**Test person:** Yes, we are still together.

**Interviewer:** Ok, how is or was your relationship with your mum? One is extremely bad and seven is the best again.

**Respondent:** As a child now or currently?

**Interviewer:** I think that's very general, so both, so you can also say both.

**Test person:** Ok. (...) So I thought it would be good, but actually it's not good. (...) A three.

**Interviewer:** Yes, and now it says why? So if you would like to explain that.

**Test person:** Well, as I unfortunately realised during the course of the therapy, my mother actually also emotionally alienated my father from us children in an existing marriage by speaking badly about him. My father has an alcohol problem and (...). So as a child, I was very loyal to my mum. Yes, but I didn't realise that until I was almost 50,

when it happened to me with my own children, what dynamics were at work there. So now my contact with her is very poor. One two.

**Interviewer:** And is that, would you say, how is it with your father? So again from one to seven and why?

**Test person:** My father was never there, so he was either working or drinking and then in pubs. So I didn't really have a fatherly figure to bring me up. So it was a bad two throughout.

**Interviewer:** Do you feel emotionally: one extremely poor, two very poor, three poor, four average, five good, six very good and seven excellent prepared for adult life?

**Test person:** Very bad.

**Interviewer:** So two.

**Test person:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** Okay, now come the questions about your health. Firstly, how do you feel mentally, health-wise? Again from one to seven, seven is the best.

**Test person:** (laughs) At the moment I would say I'm really crawling around at one or two. So I'm doing extremely badly. So I would say two, I'm not terminally ill now, no. Like a cancer patient now, but it's not really a life anymore, it's just an existence.

**Interviewer:** And how do you feel physically?

**Test person:** Physically?

**Interviewer:** Mhm.

**Test person:** Yes, it was worse. I would say a four.

**Interviewer:** Are you or have you been undergoing psychological or psychiatric treatment?

**Test person:** Yes. (...) I have been for eleven years.

**Interviewer:** If so, why and for how long did you just say that? And what was the diagnosis?

**Test person:** So the first diagnosis was in 2012, when they said it was depression. And then at some point it turned into recurrent depression. And now, yes, I'm basically suspected of having chronic depression. And I also have post-traumatic stress disorder.

**Interviewer:** Do you have any severe physical complaints?

**Test person:** How is severe defined? So sleep disturbance and so on, so anxiety, that would count?

**Interviewer:** It doesn't say that.

**Test person:** Ok, yes, very strong, but it was very strong. So panic attacks. It was all there. Yes, can you say, what is it then, is it already a six or is it still a five?

**Interviewer:** Oh, that's just a yes and no question.

**Minute 10**

**Test person:** Oh, yes. Yes.

**Interviewer:** Ok, now comes a new section with information about your family of origin. How would you categorise the conflict situation in your parental home? One would be very low. Seven would be the highest.

**Test person:** A five.

**Interviewer:** Did your parents involve you or the children in the parental conflicts? If so, to what extent?

**Test person:** Yes, my mother, no, she openly spoke badly about my father.

**Interviewer:** In what form? Would you like to elaborate a little more?

**Test person:** Yes, well, my mother just complained to us children. That my father doesn't work, that he's not interested in us. That he's a drunk. And that she was extremely disappointed with the marriage and that she would have loved to leave, but that she couldn't because she was financially dependent on him. And my father always shamed my mother, for example. So yes, he actually insulted her too. So my parents argued a lot. And they didn't hide it from us children. So it was very intense.(...) And we were also beaten. It was just part of the parenting style back then.

**Interviewer:** And would you say how much conflict protection you experienced overall as a child? From one to seven? One being the highest and seven being the lowest.

**Test person:** No protection at all.

**Interviewer:** Yes, so seven.

**Test person:** Seven, you could say that, yes.

**Interviewer:** Yes, how much attention did you receive in total as a child? One would be the highest and seven the lowest.

**Test person:** (...) I can't remember some of it at all. So it was probably ambivalent. There was probably some affection, but not all the time. (...) I would say four.

**Interviewer:** Well, the next question is, how strong is your current attachment to your attachment figures? One is the highest and seven is the lowest and attachment figure could be, so could be anyone.

**Test person:** Could it be anyone? Well, I'm emotionally detached from my parents at the moment. So that would actually be the lowest value, I would say. (...) I still feel very close to my children. So is it a question of having anyone at all with whom you feel connected?

**Interviewer:** Simply how strong the current bond is. So I think what counts is how much you feel connected.

**Test person:** Then I would perhaps take the second-highest value. So not the highest, but the second highest, because the bond is also under strain.

**Interviewer:** Yes. And the next question also relates to how much contact you currently have with your carers?

**Test person:** Yes, it's as good as non-existent.

**Interviewer:** Oh, one is the highest and seven is very low.

**Test person:** Then you can say six, yes.

**Interviewer:** Yes, ok. Do you have or have you had contact as a child with family courts, youth welfare offices, lawyers, experts, etc.?

**Test person:** No.

**Interviewer:** Okay, then comes the next section. Right now there would be questions about your own biological family. The first question is: How would you categorise the conflict situation in your own family? Again, one is very low and seven is the highest.

### **Minute 15**

**Test person:** So it's about how openly this conflict is dealt with, isn't it? There's a lot that goes on covertly. So is there a difference? Or just how I feel about it? It looks very calm on the outside, but on the inside it's completely different.

**Interviewer:** Yes, then probably yes, that it is possible. So how is it then?

**Test person:** Yes, then also the second-highest value. (...) Because, well, nothing feels right. I mean, it could be worse, but yes.

**Interviewer:** Did you or the other parent involve the children in the parental conflict?

**Test person:** Well, from my perspective, I always tried to keep the children out of it. But the father told the children, for example, that mum had broken up the marriage, destroyed the family, that I didn't love dad any more, and that naturally triggered a party for the father in the children. So I would say yes, that's what happened.

**Interviewer:** Again had to rate from one to seven, seven being the highest.

**Test person:** Yes, then you can say a seven, yes.

**Interviewer:** Would you like to say anything else about that?

**Test person:** About words, a story, reports about me.

**Interviewer:** How much conflict protection have your children experienced overall? One is the highest and seven would be very low.

**Test person:** Fortunately, they didn't notice everything, but they noticed enough to turn away. (...) Maybe a three.

**Interviewer:** And how much attention did your children receive overall? One is again the highest and seven is very low.

**Test person:** Yes, a lot of attention. A one.

**Interviewer:** How strong is the current bond between your children and their carers? One would be the highest and seven would be very low.

**Test person:** So it's very close with the father and with me (...) So outwardly they act as if they do. So they don't want any contact with me. It's ambivalent, no, so it depends in which direction you ask, no.

**Interviewer:** Oh, I wasn't really paying attention to whether she had already said a number. Did you say anything from one to seven?

**Test person:** Nope. I, I had now asked who is meant, i.e. whether the children's attachment to the father or to me is meant. Because it's very different. So at least the attachment behaviour is different.

**Interviewer:** So mainly people, I think, who are considered a reference person for the children. So if they count themselves among them, then definitely them and if not then maybe not.

**Interviewer:** It's difficult to say from my perspective, of course, but I can see that they have a really, really strong bond with their father. Then I would give the highest value. No, because they have an attachment behaviour.

**Interviewer:** Yes, and what about your current contact with your carers?

**Test person:** You live with him. So it...

**Interviewer:** The highest?

**Test person:** The highest yes.

**Interviewer:** As a mother, do you have or have you had contact with courts, family courts and youth welfare offices, lawyers, experts, etc.?

**Test person:** Youth welfare office yes, so we had family support for a year.

**Interviewer:** And how would you describe this relationship? So there are values like helpful or not helpful, supportive, friendly, uncaring, cold, that kind of thing.

#### **Minute 20**

**Test person:** Not helpful. Not at all. It actually escalated because of it. I have to say, I was a full-time mum for ten years until the separation happened and. After the separation, the children were mostly with me, so at least during the week and then they went to their father at the weekend. There was a lot of conflict because the older child in particular was extremely antagonistic towards me. Yes, in the end it led to a slap in the face. I slapped the child once when he was calling me extreme names and I couldn't stop it any other way. And then I went to the youth welfare office and said I needed help with my child's upbringing. And I actually really hoped for help and I was actually promised it, but in the end I was actually blamed for it. So I also realised that slapping my child is not the solution and I'm not proud of it at all. I'm also very ashamed. I also apologised for it. But it, it just became yes. My child then turned it into my mum hitting me. As if I hit him every day and. The family help was then not. So the father and the children didn't see it as a support measure. Which is what it was supposed to be for me, but as an instrument of control. So it wasn't perceived positively.(...) Not at all. And the talks didn't change much either, they didn't help at all. Yes, it widened the gap, yes.

**Interviewer:** (...) Would you use or recommend the professionals again or not and why?

**Test person:** No, I wouldn't. For the reasons I said, because it wasn't helpful at all. It fuelled the conflict even more. Yes, well. I can't recommend it for the youth welfare office where I live. It may be different today, something has changed in the meantime, but back then, that was 2016/17, I can't recommend it. So from my experience.

**Interviewer:** What worked in your relationship? And would you have any advice?

**Respondent:** Which relationship is meant now?

**Interviewer:** I think the relationship with the children's father.

**Test person:** After the separation?

**Interviewer:** I think just in general.

**Test person:** So the question is, what worked in the relationship?

**Interviewer:** Yes, and would you have any advice?

**Test person:** Advice for other parents, right? So what worked, yes, everyday life worked, yes. But I just didn't work anymore. I was in pretty bad health and I also had suicidal thoughts. I just didn't feel anything anymore and at the time I thought the

separation was actually over. I definitely didn't want to have a marriage like my parents. And I didn't feel supported by him, so I left the relationship.(...) Recommendation for other parents? Do couples therapy in time, i.e. separation, is not the solution. It actually made my life and that of my children even worse.(...) That would be my advice. So before you separate. First take advantage of all possible support measures, including therapeutic help. Well, I regretted it.

**Interviewer:** Now comes a new section with questions about the separation. And the first question is, are you currently in a new committed relationship? If so, would you rate this relationship as a supportive relationship? From one to seven, depending on how helpful one or supportive.

**Test person:** So no, I'm not in a relationship.

### **Minute 25**

**Interviewer:** Ok. How stressful is or was the separation for you? One is very low and seven is the highest and why?

**Test person:** The seven, of course. Yes, I was incredibly disappointed in my husband and also in myself.

**Interviewer:** How stressful do you think the separation is or was for your children from one to seven and why?

**Test person:** So for the eldest child... who was under 10, it was extremely stressful, he also had an adjustment disorder. So we also took the child to see a child psychiatrist. And the younger one was over 5, he didn't really understand it, I don't think, but it was very difficult for the child when the older sibling left. Yes, it was very stressful for both of them. I would say so, yes. (...) A six.

**Interviewer:** Ok. Now comes the, I think this must be the last section with questions. And this is about alienation, i.e. your bond with your child or children has been disturbed or cut off by the other parent. In your opinion, what are the motives of the other parent?

**Test person:** Of course sadness about the loss of the partnership. And fear. So those are the main reasons.

**Interviewer:** How did this situation come about or what other or general factors influenced it?

**Test person:** The separation now?

**Interviewer:** The alienation situation.

**Test person:** Ahh, the alienation situation. Can you say the question again, please.

**Interviewer:** Exactly how did this situation come about or what factors influenced the situation?

**Test person:** Well, the situation actually started in the acute separation phase, when we were still living here together. So the conversations I had with my husband about the separation were passed on to the eldest child one-to-one, unfiltered, straight away. Well, I remember one conversation. We were already in couples therapy. And the couple's therapist said to us at the time that if you open up any more issues here, then I'd say you'd better separate straight away. And I know something... I, I can't remember exactly what it was, but I know we had an argument here at home, the children were playing outside and I said to him, so if this goes on, then you can forget about us staying together and our child came in playing. He walks past the father and the father says to him: "Tell me, [name of child 1], what do you think about this? Mum wants me to move out, yes. And of course the child was completely panicked and I was incredibly angry with him that he just passed it on like that, yes, unfiltered. Even when the child was so emotional, so conspicuous. And that the family helpers had then also suggested or I was in counselling with one, with one from the youth welfare office, an organisation where you go for counselling during the separation. It's called ZKJF

Zentrale-Kinder-Jugend-Familienbildungsstätte, something like that. And at the time they recommended that the older child go to a separation group, i.e. a group for separated children. And at first he didn't want to go and then I agreed with the child that you would have a look at it, go at least once and if you don't like it, then you don't have to

go any more. Ok, he went. And I picked him up afterwards and he said: "Oh mum, it wasn't so bad, we drew something and there were jelly babies, the child liked that. And then on the same day he went to his father's house in the evening with his sibling. We had an arrangement that he would stay with him [the father] on Wednesday evenings during the week with an overnight stay until Thursday and then from Friday onwards he would stay with him [the father] again at the weekend. And I know the child came back from school on Thursdays and said: Dad said I don't have to go there if I don't want to and I don't want to go there any more. And then I said, yes, but you said yesterday that it wasn't so bad. Well, and then... I know that I then made the mistake, I wouldn't do that today either. I then rang the father. And he came round. We then spoke and I said, "Why?". It's a help for our children. No, why? Why doesn't the child want that now after the visit with you? And then the father said to the child: "[Child's name 1], for God's sake go, otherwise I'll get into trouble with the mum again!" And then I said: No. The child isn't doing it for me and it's not doing it for you, it should do it for itself. So it's a help for the child, not for us. And yes, there were always discussions in front of the children where I just thought that a child didn't need to hear that in such breadth and depth. So it was mainly about words and I can't say how they spoke about me, what their facial expressions were like, or whether he [the father] spoke about me with his eyes rolled up. At the time, everything I did was ridiculed anyway, even professionally. How I wanted to reorientate myself and the children took it out on me one-to-one. "You only have Waldorf school on your mind." [Statements from the father] I was committed to a Waldorf school back then. "Family isn't important to you. You don't give a shit about us." [statements from father]. And yes, that was extremely hard. It's still hard today.

### **Minute 33**

**Interviewer:** You have already partially answered the next question. How old were the children and how long did the process take?

**Test person:** So when we separated, the children were under 10 and over 6. Yes, yes, and the process is still going on today. So it's been going on for nine years now. And now, my younger child no longer comes to me either. It's actually been seven years of alternating between me and the father. I've spent more time with the father recently. Which is okay, but now the child just doesn't want to come to me any more.

**Interviewer:** The next question is, what were the consequences? So the process for you, for the children, for the alienating parent and for the family?

**Test person:** I say, there are only losers. Everyone loses. So even if the father now outwardly has the love and affection of the children. But I think... Although I don't know if I'll live to see it. But just like I got to the point where I couldn't believe everything my mum said about my father. (...) I don't know. So whether the children will realise at some point that I'm not the monster I'm portrayed as. I didn't leave my children or I didn't want to separate from my children or abandon them. I just didn't want to continue the marriage and that was my biggest offence. Yes, and you, you were simply the father's comforter, the poor dad who was abandoned. That's... And never mind. So I, we've been talking to each other more again in the last two years because I've simply, yes, observed how the alienation process has progressed further and further with my younger child. And you always say that if you talk, then somehow you can still turn things around. But it didn't get better, it got worse and worse. So I had the feeling that the more I actually talked about how [name of child 2] behaved at home, the more confirmation the child got from the father that it was right to behave like that towards me. And the behaviour went beyond the normal level of adolescent defiance. So complete refusal of contact in the room, barricading himself in, refusing to eat or refusing to eat meals together, no. So not wanting to sit at the table with me and eat. Not accepting anything from me, so no good word, no pocket money, no presents. It was... you stand there as a mother or I stood there as a mother and you can feel how the child slips away from you more and more and there's nothing you can do to stop it. So you couldn't reach the child with words at all. Again and again, when I said, "[Name of child 2] you know how bad it is for me that things have developed like this with [name of child 1] and I don't want us to lose each

other like this!" and then I was told for a long time that it wasn't, it wasn't child 1, it wasn't the sibling, that's clear, but also that I would make a mountain out of every molehill and now to find out after the fact via the father that [child 2] hadn't felt comfortable with me for several years. And even though I've tried to clarify this several times, I find it extremely stressful that it couldn't be openly discussed and clarified. So I, because I've always been deceived in my perception, right. So I asked what was going on? We can talk about anything, no matter what it is. Even if you want something that might hurt me, but we have to talk about it and then they always just said, it's nothing, leave me alone. (...) Does that answer the question or? Maybe I've already gone from stick to stick again.

**Interviewer:** Yes, definitely. So the question was, what consequences did the process have and I think that became quite clear.

**Test person:** Loss of relationship, it was a loss of relationship and now also a loss of contact, so that I no longer see child 2 at all.

**Interviewer:** The next question is, did you receive any support in this regard? If yes, in what way and if no, what would you have liked and from whom?

### **Minute 39**

**Test person:** Well, at the time, I turned to the youth welfare office because I was hoping for help. To maintain the relationship with my children or to maintain contact. Because I also felt powerless in the face of the emotional superiority of the father, who was quite sure that the children would stick by him. And, well, I didn't find it helpful at all, because of course. So A was harping on about this slap, as if I had systematically hit my child and it really was an exceptional situation. And then also the fact that I was also depressed, no. Even though it had only just started back then. But it was just presented in such a way, yes, that they were depressed also had an impact on their parenting behaviour and. Yes, well, me. I would just, well, I didn't, I didn't feel that way, it may not have been meant, but it came across to me at the time as if I was completely incapable as a mother. So I (...) And, and it was like that. It was the family support worker himself who said to me at the time that the way [child 1] behaved towards me was like something out of a picture book, he said. Or like in a textbook. He was alienated and I didn't even know that back then. Parent-child alienation, I first had to read up on what he actually meant by that. In the end, he was allowed to, so he withdrew it again. So he also confronted his father about it. Or the father was confronted by a therapist from the play therapist, so it's a bit complicated. Exactly when [child 1] left, two years after the separation, [child 2] was extremely sad about the sibling. And I was in contact with a child psychotherapist at the time, so I actually called her every now and then in parallel to the family support and talked to her or got advice from her on how I could protect the children or how I should behave towards the children if they were so derogatory, for example. Then there was also a conversation with the father. And in this conversation, exactly, I also asked them, Mrs XY, what was it like? The family support worker spoke of parent-child alienation with [child 1]. What do you think of that? And she didn't think anything of it at all, she said it was junk science, that it wasn't proven and that there was no syndrome in the child. So she completely dismissed it. And that was the end of it for me for the time being. But in the conversation with the father about the second child's play therapy, she confronted him and asked: Mr [father's surname], what do you think of the fact that your wife and the family worker believe that you have alienated [child 1]? And so the father completely lost it and then called the family support worker and asked him what this was all about and whose side he was on. And the family support worker then wanted to hand over our case. But that wasn't possible in terms of personnel. And then you solved it that way at the ZKJF. Then a second family support worker joined us. And she basically managed the case and he was only allowed to take minutes. And when I then, well I know, I also said again in a moderated parent-teacher conference, what's the deal with parent-child alienation anyway? And then I was no longer allowed to mention it. So I was also forbidden to use the term. So they simply said it didn't exist and that was that and it didn't matter what happened before or what happened with the



children two years ago when they separated. It's now about the here and now and we have to work with the resources that are available to us today and then it wouldn't matter. So they didn't want to investigate the causes. Yes, and that was the end of it. And they didn't talk to child 1 either. So on the one hand, it was still too young. And on the other hand, they said, well, the child is already over 10 and can decide on its own. So whether the child wants to see mum or not. I just thought it was. I just didn't understand it at the time. I still don't understand it today, because a child over 10 doesn't yet have the foresight and the wealth of experience to know what a decision like that means. So we had a good relationship until the separation.

**Interviewer:** And would you have liked support from other sides?

#### **Minute 45**

**Test person:** Who is supposed to help? So? I was afraid. I was afraid. Oh, maybe I should say something else. We still haven't divorced. Because the father said at the time that he didn't want to separate, he wasn't going to file for divorce either, he had religious reasons. And I was then afraid to file for divorce because I was also afraid that he would then file for access or custody proceedings and then have custody taken away from me. That a lot of dirty laundry would then be washed. I also didn't want our children to be questioned in any way, to have to decide. But in the end, although I still have custody of our second child on paper, it's ultimately worth nothing. That's perhaps a speciality compared to other cases.

**Interviewer:** Yes, yes, you have already partially answered the next question. Do you have contact with the alienating parent? Do you have contact with your children? If no, is a reunion with the child possible from your point of view?

**Test person:** Mhm (...). So I felt. So I've been trying since 2017, when I realised we weren't getting any help from the youth welfare office. I've actually been focussing on doing it myself, talking to the father again. And to keep making the children offers. Also joint activities. So I invited my eldest child again and again. I gave them vouchers, so once a cinema voucher with mum and child 2 and child 1. I always asked when we went to the swimming pool. I also asked if they would like to go camping with us for a week. The child didn't accept anything. My parents live next door in the house next door and for a few years he always went to my parents' house on Monday afternoons after school. And ate lunch there, did his homework, but the child never actually came over to our house. In the old home, in the old room. Yes, I tried to make it voluntary and. But it wasn't accepted. And the father was available for private conversations. But the private conversations became more and more stressful for me because I was always told: "You wanted the separation! You've ruined the family, now live with the consequences!" and the father presented the alienation of the children as a natural consequence of the separation. And I also offered him this year, because I kept saying, you know, you keep blaming me for the same things and at the same time he keeps saying he doesn't want to talk about the past. But we keep coming back to this point. You realise that he hasn't actually processed or dealt with the break-up. And it feels like I'm the only one in therapy. So I, I have to work through everything, I have to tweak everything and change my behaviour. I've done that too, but it's no good. So the door is closed. [...] But that, but what I just don't understand is this absolute thinking in black and white, so it's either all or nothing. So when child 2 went to his father and I wasn't in the day clinic yet, I went to his father twice. For a cup of tea. And we sat in the kitchen or the father didn't sit at the table with me, he cleaned something or did something in the kitchen and my children just stood around. So I'm sitting alone at the table and that's extremely depressing. So the father says himself that he would do anything to get the child to keep in touch with me, because I am the mother. But he couldn't force the children and he wouldn't bring them to me against their will. And it would be old enough now. And I also spoke to child 1 on the phone. It didn't tell me that it didn't want to come to me, the father told me that. And when I asked the child, yes, why did you never say anything when I asked you what was going on with you? I sensed that you weren't feeling well. And then she said on the phone that she'd tried to talk to me several times, but I wouldn't have listened. And I

can't remember that at all. And that burdens me too. So(...). And, and I also say that I scolded him once when the child was at primary school, he probably wanted to see his sibling or his dad somehow, and it wasn't possible at the time. And then he would have locked himself in the bathroom crying and I would have stood outside the door and scolded him. And I wouldn't have comforted my child. And I just can't remember that either. So I, I was always very concerned about that. For my second child, because I had learnt from my mistakes with my first child. Yes, and I didn't want that. But maybe something else. So what helped me a lot during that time was a self-help group. A virtual self-help group, a mums' group. It was just women, 15 women, who either had no contact at all or, like me, one child was still there, the other was gone or both were there but were still somehow estranged. So yes, that was actually one of the things that helped the most. Because my siblings, for example, who I spoke to about it, often told me that they couldn't understand it at all. So they couldn't explain it at all, because when I was at a family party with my child, for example, and we ate something together, my child was very polite and courteous and friendly and not at all like this, this alienating behaviour, which he only ever showed when we were alone. So when we were together, not in front of others. And that, that made it really difficult and I know I have a conversation with my first child, for example, where he insulted me like that. I was sitting at the table. And he was running around here in the living room, throwing objects down and swearing at me, and I made a tape recording of it because I just, well, not to hold it up to my nose. I never played it back, but simply to... Yes, for a reality check. So to really believe that it really happened. So that, that was the most stressful thing, that almost nobody could imagine that children would behave like that (...). Yes. And on the outside you wouldn't even realise it. So my child, my second child, was confirmed in the summer. And then the whole family went to church together and we also celebrated together in the restaurant. So to the outside world, yes, well, I don't want to say it's a perfect world, everyone knows that we're separated, but this kind of behaviour is put on display so that nobody can take offence. But I know how the children are to me individually and I know how the father is to me when we're alone. And that... Yes. (...) Now I've forgotten the question. Oh, God. ( laughs )

### **Minute 55**

**Interviewer:** That was. So whether they still have contact with the parent and the children?

**Test person:** Well, I had regular contact with the father for the last nine years until September, because we always made arrangements. He lives not far from me, so he drives the child back and forth or we meet up at a handover. On Saturdays, for example, usually after my piano lessons, we just met in the car park outside a supermarket. And now there's actually no more contact. So he keeps me informed about(...) What else does he keep me informed about? Oh, me, I'm still allowed to do driving duties when the father isn't there. Well, [child 2] is currently doing a school placement and the father was away on business the other day. The older child, who already has a driving licence and a car, couldn't do it and then I was contacted and asked if I could drive him there. I've done that two or three times now, but it's just not a good contact.(...) I know, I don't know, so. It's retraumatising for me. I've also developed a stress disorder as a result of my child's behaviour. This life in constant fear that this child will also turn away, and the mothers in the self-help group who had lost all their children predicted this to me years ago. They said that if one child goes and the father is like that, then the second and third child will go too and I never wanted to believe it. Yes, and everyone always said you have to think positively and I mean I was dealing with depression, because I'm dealing with depression again now. You actually want to believe in the positive. But you have, so I, I didn't stand a chance. I didn't have a chance. And every time I would contact my father and ask if I could come and see you, wouldn't I? So that, I'm just kept completely at a distance as if I'm the last toxic, sick mum and I'm also the one with the F diagnoses, so it's difficult. I also don't know who can help or what can help. (...) There just needs to be an awareness in the professions of the fact that the will of the child, the expressed will of

the child, is not always in the child's best interests. Especially when there is a complete refusal of contact and. At the time, I was also prepared to have myself completely investigated. So they could really read all the hospital reports I have or therapy reports. I know I didn't abuse my children apart from the slap in the face. Yes, and I didn't want to drag them into this conflict. I would have liked the father to have called me names and (...) Well, he did, but he just let it go through the children.

**Interviewer:** Would you like to say something else about this and whether reunification would be possible?

**Test person:** With the children?

**Interviewer:** Yes, you've already said a lot about that.

#### **Minute 60**

**Test person:** So my first child is an adult, has a steady relationship and will soon be leaving school. The child has no more time at all. So even if he wanted to. He wouldn't have any time at all. So he has his own life with his father. And with [child 2]... Everyone always says, look after yourself, make sure that when you're better, the child will want to have contact with you again, but that's not the case. I think that's a misconception. So (...) reunification, there were even phases where I actively tried to return to the father. Because I just couldn't stand it any more. But that's not possible, so (...) reunification? No, I don't believe in it anymore. I would like it, but I don't think it's realistic.

**Interviewer:** The next question is. How stressful is or was the alienation for them? We've already said a lot about that. One is very low and seven is the highest. And why, if you want to say something about that again?

**Test person:** Well, I would go to seven because it really put me in a life-threatening situation. So I had suicidal thoughts and when you're constantly devalued and rejected.(...) Maybe I should also say that our first child was born dead. So my, our, my first child was a girl and she was born dead and it was such a terrible experience for me. And the biggest fear I had was that I would lose another child and lose it in that sense, but I was still afraid of another miscarriage or stillbirth. And then to see the children turn away. That was extremely stressful. And I have to say, I really have to say, it's more stressful than a death. Because it just doesn't stop. It doesn't stop, there's no closure, I mean they live not far from me. We could easily meet up, but they don't want to. And some people like that too, they say it's narcissistic, a narcissistic offence.(...) So it would hurt my ego that they reject me. But I think I have my children, I still love my children. I breastfed both children for almost three years. I simply have a strong biological bond with them. I just can't imagine giving them up. So giving them up or giving up the bond with them would be tantamount to a betrayal. That's how I feel. And that's also, in principle, a piece of advice or a recommendation that I've heard again and again in therapy. I should look after myself, I should look after myself, I should just leave the children alone. They just don't understand that. So when you. So that's my inner value. I love my children and I want to be there for them. And it wasn't my decision to have no contact with them and. I find it extremely damaging or stressful to live against my own values every day (...) Yes. So some people might cope better with it, but I don't cope with it very well.

#### **Minute 65**

**Interviewer:** The penultimate question is how stressful do you think the alienation is or was for your children? One is again very low and seven is the highest level of stress. And why?

**Test person:** (...) Well, I think it was certainly a very painful process for my, for my two children. Which in the end could only be solved by cutting me off completely. So I don't think it was an act of strength to say no to me, it was born out of desperation, out of an inner conflict. And they just don't feel it yet, no, because it's just what Freud always says? It's, well, he always talked about avoiding pleasure and gaining pleasure. So I think it's, it's a short-term avoidance of pain, no. My mum annoys me or my mum is exhausting, maybe my mum is also depressed sometimes. My mum doesn't have that much money, she can't buy me everything. My father is wealthy and he provides me with all the

material things I would like to have. And children are also very corruptible to a certain extent. It's the path of least resistance, apparently the least resistance. But I believe that painful processes have been going on inside and I made my older child a photo album for Christmas two years ago. Photos from his childhood, from the baby years, from kindergarten and primary school. And of course there were also photos of me. And it was the father who then told me that it had made the child very sad. So to see: It was actually all great. So that's what it did to me at some point. But my child told me that too. Then later it did, but the father said it first. Everything was fine and great with mum until the separation came. Yes, that made it very sad. (...) But I can't do anything for my children. I can't do anything for my children, that's actually the greatest powerlessness. So I can't reach them and I can't do anything and I can't reach anyone. It's too late, yes, but it was actually too late from the start. There was no one there to intervene or perhaps to tell my husband or the father that what was happening to the children was not good. At least that has an impact. Yes, long-term effects and risk factors. And I have, I have always pointed this out in conversations with the father, i.e. the long-term consequences. Not just to my stress, but also to the potential stress on the children and he kept telling me to stop trying to make the children ill. I would talk the children sick, the only one who would be sick would be me.

### **Minute 70**

**Interviewer:** And the last question is, have you experienced a process of alienation in your own children as adults and to what extent?

**Test person:** Yes, of course. I mean, that's what we talk about all the time. So I'm a bit surprised by the question. Of course, and it is for me too. I also notice an alienation in myself. Because at Christmas, for example. I don't know what my eldest child likes. I don't even realise that any more, well, to some extent, he used to do special sports for a while. I once gave him a book or he had a motorbike, a small one, so I knew that he did a lot of handicrafts. I once gave them a toolbox. But now this year? Of course they mostly want money, but that's where I just realise I don't know anymore (...) So my first child is completely alien to me. So it's a process of alienation for me too (...) It left when it was a child and now it's grown up. And I have no access to it at all. So it's really alien to me and that's (...) an extremely oppressive feeling. (...) And with the younger child? Well, I can still pick up a few things now, because (...). But also how it speaks. So when I asked the child, do you want to come back after school, or I also asked, do you need anything? The father was in New York with them for a week during the autumn holidays. And he [the father] came here on a Friday evening, I had to sign a consent form because the Americans are very sensitive when one parent is travelling alone with the child without the consent of the other parent. So I guess there are often cases of child abduction. So I had to sign this declaration of consent that I agree to this trip. And while I was reading and signing it downstairs with the father, the child went up to the room. He got the last of his clothes out of the wardrobe and a few books. And he came down the stairs and almost dropped his clothes and I just said: Would you like a bag? And the child says no. No, it doesn't want a bag. And then, well then, you're standing there inside, or I was already standing there inside, like, aha, this is the moment when the child gets the last things out of the room that are still important. It's actually (...) unbearable, so it's a nightmare. (...) Yes. (...) Don't wish it on anyone, I wouldn't wish it on my worst enemy. And I don't wish it on the father of my children either, that the children will one day say, what was it like with mum back then? Was it really like that? But ultimately, what remains of the memories from early childhood or from the first ten years? If there's a shadow over it, yes. (...) Well, unfortunately I have to say that my children aren't at all susceptible to any kind of behavioural problems, I'd say they're not conspicuous at school, they're highly intelligent children. The eldest is also highly gifted and they perform really well. No, they're not problem children. I'm just the only sick one in the system or the only loser. I just lose out.

[...]

**Minute 77**

**Test person:** No, so when you become a parent, that's such a change in your life, in your identity too, yes. So that's, I would say, that's one of, one of the biggest, how should I put it. (...) Well, I feel closer to my children than my parents, for example. So children are just so, so important and you really do everything for them so that they're well. And yes. I think the worst thing is just this powerlessness and I also have these feelings of guilt. No, because today, looking back, I would say that I separated hastily, but it wasn't as if the father had given me that feeling. So it's so contradictory to say that afterwards. Yes, I hoped that we wouldn't separate, but at the same time I wanted to keep the children close to me. And, and he and I mean, of course, he's a great father for the children, but I think. A good father or a good mother would never make the children feel bad about their mother or father. Yes, if the child gets into a situation like that and has to make a decision. And so if he were sitting next to me now, he would probably tell him a completely different story. And the truth is probably somewhere in between. But I mean, the children were with me for two years. I didn't have anything. I didn't deny them access to their father, but I didn't want to. Of course they have their father, they should have contact with their father. But I, I just, I didn't, so for me it's unimaginable. Yes, so to have the other parent out like that. So somehow, there must also be research or studies about it. That many also take revenge or out of feelings of revenge. So I can't say that, I can't say that, but perhaps it also plays a role in that he also gains pleasure from seeing me suffer now, because he knows exactly that it hurts me. [...] I think you just have to deal with the issues from your childhood. And that's what I reproach myself for today, that I didn't realise that I was actually an alienated child myself, within a marriage that was still intact, but it didn't work out. They were together, but it wasn't loving. And? I think it's important to sort that out before you become parents yourself. Because children really trigger things in you, or what you actually experienced as a child, so the children activate a lot of things from your own childhood. And I didn't realise that.

**Farewell****Minute 83**

## 10.16. Anonymised transcript of respondent 21 - estranged mothers

**Greeting**

**Interviewer:** Yes, the first question is: How old are you?

**Test person:** I am over 40.

**Interviewer:** And which gender do you feel you belong to?

**Test person:** Woman (laughs)

**Interviewer:** Did you grow up in Germany and do you have a migration background?

**Test person:** I grew up in Germany and have no migration background.

**Interviewer:** OK, how would you describe or categorise the socio-economic status of your parental home?

**Test person:** Can you repeat that again, that (...) I sometimes don't understand her very well.

**Interviewer:** Okay. How would you categorise the socio-economic status of your parents' home? Considering education, income and occupation, 1 would be very low status and 7 would be the highest status.

**Minute 5**

**Test person:** You mean in relation to me, in relation to my parents?

**Interviewer:** Yes, exactly, from the parents.

**Test person:** My parents, I would say, a middle with, so middle class like that.

**Interviewer:** Okay, so if we were to describe it with a number like that.

**Test person:** What did they say? 7 was the highest.

**Interviewer:** Exactly, yes.

**Test person:** Then I would say 5.

**Interviewer:** OK. (...) And how would you say that for your own socio-economic status? Again, 7 is the highest.

**Test person:** With me?

**Interviewer:** Mhm

**Respondent:** Yes, 6 7, so from education et cetera. Yes, mhm and studies, mhm.

**Interviewer:** What is the highest qualification you have achieved so far?

**Test person:** Oh well.

**Interviewer:** So yes, 0 would be no school leaving certificate, 1 secondary school leaving certificate 2, secondary school leaving certificate, 3 A-levels, 4 bachelor's degree or entrance qualification for universities of applied sciences, 5 master's degree or diploma and 6 doctorate.

**Test person:** 5

**Interviewer:** Okay (...) Do you have siblings or half-siblings?

**Test person:** I have siblings.

[...]

**Interviewer:** Did your parents stay together until you were of age?

**Test person:** No.

**Interviewer:** If no, how old were you when you separated?

**Test person:** So my sibling and I were [under 5], I think? I can't say exactly, but very young.

**Interviewer:** And did your parents' parents stay together?

**Test person:** My parents' parents, no, they didn't live together at the end. [...]

**Interviewer:** How is or was your relationship with your mother 1 extremely poor and up to 7 excellent?

**Test person:** It's always up and down. 4, 5 So, well, that, that has always fluctuated. Yes (...) I can say that, but let's say 4, 5, if that's okay.

**Interviewer:** OK, yes, and can you say why?

**Test person:** Because I (laughs) Yes, I can say that. Because as a daughter (...) I have different views and I think I've seen through our family system a bit. My mum used to have a lot of problems with her mother and. I'm a daughter who opens her mouth when she has something and talks about her wishes and needs. And she didn't learn to do that. (...) To be honest, I have to say, yes, mum.

**Interviewer:** And the same again for your father, from 1 to 7. What was the relationship like?

**Test person:** Yes, I have to say that. I'm also a mum who is trying to alienate my child. And in the course of this, I realised that my parents divorced early on. And I personally think that my mother also alienated our father, even if that word didn't exist back then. So towards us, because my sibling and I were always with my father every fortnight. And from a certain age, we supposedly no longer wanted to see our father. And that's why I couldn't build up a relationship with him at all during puberty. I know that he often called and didn't say anything on the phone. I then tried to get in touch with him when I was 28 and I still had contact with him before he died. (...) That's why I can only say that I didn't really have a relationship with him. No, that was ages ago. (...) So we got closer before he died, but there just wasn't enough time.

**Minute 10**

**Interviewer:** Yes, the next question is: Due to your experiences at home, you feel emotionally 1 extremely badly, 2 very badly, 3 badly, 4 moderately, 5 well, 6 very well and 7 excellently equipped or prepared for adult life.

**Test person:** So at this point in time, do you mean, or (...) does that depend on age?

**Interviewer:** So the question says, do you feel emotionally prepared? So I think that-

**Test person:** So at the moment (...) So at the moment I'm very stable and very well prepared. So I would say yes, but I don't think it came from my parents. I think it's more the experience I've gained over the last few years and what I've learnt and trained myself with or the experience I've had, unfortunately mhm (laughs).

**Interviewer:** OK, and if you were to say overall how well the parents' home prepared them, from 1 to 7, what would you say?

**Test person:** I would say 2.

**Interviewer:** Okay. Now comes a new section with questions. This is additional information on health. And the first question is how you feel mentally, from 1 extremely poor to 7 excellent.

**Test person:** Between 6 and 7 yes.

**Interviewer:** How do you feel in terms of your physical health?

**Test person:** Great. So I'm fit. (...)

**Interviewer:** Are you or have you been undergoing psychological or psychiatric treatment?

**Test person:** No, when it started with the court order, when my ex then. (...) How should I put it, he tried to alienate our child. I was on sick leave for five weeks, I think. I saw two psychologists for an initial consultation, but they also said that I didn't actually have anything wrong with me in that sense. But that it was simply due to the situation, that at that moment I first had to come to terms with the whole thing, of course, but I don't have any other psychological complaints, depression or anything, no.(...) So I did get help because of the whole issue, but that was just a need to talk, right?

**Interviewer:** Do you have any severe physical complaints?

**Test person:** No, not at all.

**Interviewer:** OK, now comes a new section of questions about your family of origin. How would you categorise the conflict situation in your parental home? From 1 very low conflict situations to 7 highest conflict situations.

**Test person:** Well, I would say almost to the extreme, because I simply.... When I look back now, everyone was at odds at some point since my parents split up. I can remember that everything used to be harmonious and there were lots of family celebrations, but when my mum said at some point that she was splitting up, everything fell apart and she didn't have any contact with her siblings for a long time, and I think that was a burden for her. So she realised that very early on and was thrown out by her mother at the age of 15 and I'm just going to go into it now because I've been dealing with it for a long time because I know that she never learned that and of course she couldn't pass it on to us somewhere. Right, because as I said, she had problems with her mum. Her mum kicked her out. She didn't have any contact with her mother until she died and her father died when my mother was pregnant with me and my sister. And her father was everything to her. He always made everything possible for her and was always there for her. Even when she somehow got her own flat when she was 15 and he stood surety for her or when she was 16, that was somehow because of that. So no, it wasn't good, I don't think.

**Interviewer:** Mhm. And if you say almost the highest, you would give a number like that, so.

**Test person:** Yes, the highest.

**Interviewer:** So 7? OK. Yes, did your parents involve you or your children in the parental conflict? If so, how much from 1 practically not at all or only unconsciously to 7 extremely and in what form.

### **Minute 15**

**Test person:** Well, as things stand today, I would say that my mother dragged us into the conflict, I think, because even today, after the death of our father, she still can't forgive and still says. Well, you didn't want to go to him back then or say things where I, personally, as a daughter, say, 'Oh dear, he's no longer with us, now at some point it's good not to have to somehow forget the old things or forgive them or whatever. So I do believe that we were involved as children. But it's only now, since basically what happened with my child, with my ex-husband, that these things have come up and

through all these meetings that you have with like-minded people, of course. That yes, I've thought about what my family situation was like back then. And in the end, I have the feeling that it repeats itself a bit. (...) As stupid as that is.

**Interviewer:** Yes and (...) exactly if you have another number.

**Test person:** Well, I would say 7, because my sibling and I have seen the fights, but I think we also hid when we were small children, I know that and we clung to each other, I remember that.

**Interviewer:** And so you are, how much conflict protection would you say you experienced overall as a child, so 1 would be the highest level of conflict protection.

**Test person:** No. Well, what is (...) Wait a minute (...) what, what, what, what do you mean by conflict protection? Because I would say that in the past people didn't think about it at all, just like they used to smoke in the car when the children were sitting in the car without thinking about the health risks or consequential damage. So I don't think that you, well, I think about it today when you look back. That we were used a bit. Yes, yes, conflict protection, no, I wouldn't say that. We didn't talk about it either.

**Interviewer:** Yes OK, so again 7 is the lowest.

**Test person:** Yes

**Interviewer:** How much attention did you receive overall as a child from 1 highest level of attention is 7 very low.

**Test person:** Yes, I wouldn't say that it was necessarily bad. So attention in any case, quite clearly, but I have a sibling, so you had to share it, so I'll just say in the middle. So 4, 5 and (...) it's always your own feeling, a bit like that. I think as a child, my mum is sometimes very cool, but I also know that she built a wall around herself, so I spoke to her about it once. And I asked her about it directly. I don't think she was able to do that because she never really learnt it herself, I have to say, but I would say the affection was definitely there and yes, let's say 5.

**Interviewer:** OK, how strong is your current attachment to your attachment figures? From 1 highest attachment level to 7 low attachment levels.

**Test person:** To whom to whom to the reference person?

**Interviewer:** Mhm, yes.

**Test person:** But who is meant to be the reference person?

**Interviewer:** Well, I think that refers to the person you are caring for at the moment. So at the moment, I don't know, it could be anyone, not necessarily the parents, but...

**Test person:** Well, because I'm single (laughs). No, I have very good girlfriends, I have good friends, the bond is definitely really good, we stick together. I've met a lot of new people through this whole dilemma, I'm a very open, communicative person and I've always asked for help. I always say that when I have my child, the bond is there again when the father is not around. That has diminished and suffered a lot. But of course, when he's not there, for example, it's not. But otherwise. Yes, so what number do I have to give again? 6, is it 6, 7.

**Interviewer:** Oh, yes, well, I think that would be something like 1 or 2, i.e. the highest attachment level or above average.

**Test person:** Yes, yes, exactly, yes.

#### **Minute 19**

**Interviewer:** And how much contact do you currently have with your attachment figures from 1 to 7? 1 is again the highest.

**Test person:** So I have very, very close contact with them. So yes.

**Interviewer:** OK. Do you have or did you have contact as a child with family courts, youth welfare offices, lawyers, experts, etc.?

**Test person:** Not that I know of. My mum once told me that a lady from the youth welfare office was there, but I can't remember and I can't say whether we had to say anything, whether it's the same now as it was then as it is now. No, I definitely wasn't in court. My mum was a single parent after the divorce.

**Interviewer:** Okay, yes, now comes another section with questions. And that is: Information about your own or biological family. And the first question is, how would



you categorise the conflict situation in your own biological family? From 1 very low conflict situation to 7 the highest.

**Test person:** Well, I would also say between 4 and 5. So there are always conflicts. That's also something I've been working through all these years because I'm human. If something isn't going so well, I address it in the family. I always wanted to do family therapy with my mum and my sibling. Let's put it this way, many years ago I had no contact with either of them for several years, yes. (...) But the point is: I'm someone who would like to talk about it and try to look at the whole thing from different perspectives and try to resolve it or say what's bothering me. And on the other hand, it's more like pulling the rug up and just not talking about it and just getting on with life. That's why I would say 4, 5. So there are always conflicts, but then it's good again and then everything is quite harmonious, but then there are also things, yes, if something doesn't suit one person on the other. If he had, then he likes to bitch a bit, I'm quite open and I mean, you want to have that for your study. So yes, then you're also a bit stubborn.

**Interviewer:** Mhm, did you or the other parent involve the children in the parental conflict? If so, to what extent, practically not at all or only unconsciously to 7 extremely.

**Test person:** That's what I said, I think today that my mother did that. I can't say for sure whether she did it consciously or unconsciously because, as I said, she still talks badly about our father today and I've always said, I don't know what happened between you, so I would say that it was included, so that one.

**Interviewer:** But that doesn't refer to you as a child, but to you as a parent, i.e. how involved are you or the other parent, the child or children?

**Test person:** I didn't involve our child at all, that's why I think I'm in this situation, because I listened to the youth welfare office and the youth welfare office asked us to keep our child out of it and yes, I did that. Today I think that if I had spoken to my child earlier, I might have been able to avert it.

**Interviewer:** And did that happen from the other side?

**Test person:** From the other side, our child was involved by the father, the grandparents, the new girlfriend, everything we had heard. The father also had a second mobile phone, so in principle it was our child. Everything from the court files about what I would do was discussed with our child and there was a second mobile phone and there was also incitement to lie, so the child was extremely involved, yes.

**Interviewer:** So 7, extremely yes. Okay (...) and how much conflict protection would you say your children, i.e. your child as a whole, experienced, from 1 the highest to 7 very low or not at all.

**Test person:** Well, I don't think he got conflict protection, that is, the 7, exactly, because neither in court nor through any institutions could our child have been kept out of it, which I asked for and they didn't do that. (...) And exactly.

**Interviewer:** How much attention would you say your child received overall?

**Minute 24**

**Test person:** So affection from all family members. In any case, from my father, grandmother, grandfather, from my side, from my sibling, from my mother. Sure, it's an only child, of course it has everything and still gets it today. Maybe even a bit too much sometimes. (laughs)

**Interviewer:** How strong is the current bond between your children and their carers? 1 the highest and 7 very low.

[...]

**Test person:** I would, I would say very high, yes.

**Interviewer:** So 1 is the highest. How much contact do your children currently have with their carers?

**Test person:** Yes, also very high. So the attachment figures, the attachment figures are now the mother and father. And the child now lives with the father. Of course very high and with his parents too, so from my ex-husband to my family, the contact is not quite as great, because of course there is not so much time left and yes(...) Because my child has

also isolated himself a bit due to our situation, no, of course. So that's always difficult, no, for me it's a bit too generalised, you actually have to define which contact he has with which caregivers, so you have to differentiate somewhere. In general, I would say, yes, of course, very high. With those he spends most of his time with. But I also see myself as a caregiver, even if I don't have that much contact at the moment.

**Interviewer:** Do you have or have you had contact as a mother with courts, family courts, youth welfare offices, lawyers, experts, etc.?

**Test person:** Yes, I did.

**Interviewer:** In what form?

**Test person:** Well, extremely no. Well, I was dragged to court (...) by my ex.

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Test person:** And I had to deal with all the institutions.

**Interviewer:** Mhm. And how would you describe this relationship with these institutions? So with adjectives. So here it says something like helpful or supportive, harassing, friendly, uncaring, cold, just something like that.

**Test person:** At the beginning I thought that they were helping us. But then it turned around completely. So I don't know how to describe it, my situation is that, in principle, the youth welfare office and the guardian ad litem are there. (...) Positive or pro I'll say for me or our location. [...] And have also tried to get the mother and father to reach a consensus in principle, but unfortunately nothing has been done. So they pretended to help us, but in the end they didn't help us and then I was suddenly made the perpetrator. Because that was the easy way and I'm very disappointed in the institutions and that they make it very, very easy for themselves and that they don't have the child in mind at all and yes, that they actually support people who alienate and leave the other person hanging. So I didn't get any support, when I turned to the guardian ad litem or the youth welfare office for help, they told me that they hadn't received an email and that there are paragraphs in the legal code where they would have been obliged to help. They didn't and no, so I'm not at all convinced by the institutions, I have to say quite honestly, there are certainly some who would help, no. Not at all. Not at all. I think the judge realised something with us, but she didn't really turn the whole thing around and she could have done that. You just make it a bit easy for yourself.(...) Yes, my opinion.

**Interviewer:** Yes, thank you. And would you use the professionals again if necessary or recommend them to others?

**Minute 29**

**Test person:** No, I would generally advise against children being dragged into court at all, let alone having to choose between their parents. That alone, there is always so much talk about children's rights. Of course children have rights, but you always have to think about it: When a parent goes to court, they go to court because they want to achieve something. So I'll just say in my case, of course there is violence towards children somewhere and of course you have to protect children, but in my case it really was like this. The father wanted to move away and he did everything he could to influence our child. And ultimately, someone only goes to court if you know that they'll get away with what they're trying to do, otherwise I personally wouldn't go to court. If I didn't know, ah, that's what matters and if I'd got my child to say, yes, I want to go with dad and I didn't know that the judge would say, oh okay, then we'll go with the child's will. Then I wouldn't go to court either. So (...) no, I wouldn't recommend anyone to anyone else, but I would wish everyone involved that they would get into this situation themselves. And because many of them are mothers themselves and I would really like them to experience such a fate so that they realise what they have actually done themselves. Because in my case, I have to be honest, the conflict between me and my ex was actually exacerbated. And we turned to the institution or to educational counselling or the youth welfare office to get help and perhaps resolve the conflict together. Yes, and not so that one person suddenly gains power over the other and uses the child to do so, and that's what happened in my case and will continue to happen because my ex wasn't shown any consequences. (...) So, sorry, now I've gone on a bit.

[...]

**Interviewer:** What has worked in your relationship? Would you have any advice?

**Test person:** In my relationship with my ex-husband?

**Interviewer:** Well, I can't really tell whether this refers to your relationship with your husband or with the youth welfare office, the institutions or the youth welfare office, can I?

**Test person:** Well, I'll just say to the youth welfare office, for example, that I would have liked (...) to have been offered help. But I think we were left very much on our own. And of course, a year and a half ago we certainly weren't at the same level as we are today, because we've been through a lot, gained experience, been able to exchange ideas, read, etc. or reflect on things ourselves. But I think you should take people seriously. And if someone goes somewhere looking for help, then it's important to look at both sides. I've always had the feeling that people have suddenly chosen what was easier by saying, OK, let's take sides and because the mother has opened her mouth, she's suddenly the troublemaker. Just because I didn't want to put up with being told that I'm no longer allowed to bring up my child, even though there are basic rights or laws that say I have a right to bring up my child. You have to look at it this way, we had the alternating model, my ex-husband and I were in agreement, and then to suddenly experience that, that's really hard, so the relationship, it wasn't really good, yes.

**Interviewer:** And so can you relate that again to the relationship with your ex-husband, i.e. whether, i.e. what worked there and whether you have any advice?

**Test person:** I think we had really bad communication and should definitely have got help. There is this wonderful non-violent communication. You get there and I would have liked the institutions to have contributed something like that. If there's a conflict somewhere, there's no point in letting the parents (sighs) go to court so that they can get even more involved. Instead, we would have had to keep the child out of it and first see to it that the parental conflict was resolved. And we didn't have good communication in that relationship, I realise that now. Yes, I personally got myself some books or looked for help. How can you improve communication? I also wanted to have joint conversations with my ex, but he always rejected everything and then of course you can't go down the, yes, good, yes path, because somehow it takes two people, right. You can only work on yourself in the end, everyone can only work on themselves, but yes. (...) (laughs) Yes, always taking yourself back is of course, it's always nice to say, but it's not the real thing either, yes.

### **Minute 35**

**Interviewer:** Now another new phase begins. You have already answered that. Are you currently in a new, stable relationship?

**Test person:** No

**Interviewer:** And the next question is, how stressful is or was the separation for you from 1 very low stress level to 7 highest stress level and why?

**Test person:** Breaking up with my ex-husband was like a liberating blow, but I also broke up because I simply wasn't happy in that relationship and that's exactly what happened. It took me many years before I really dared to take the step. So it was liberating for me.

**Interviewer:** So not stressful at all?

**Test person:** No, no, no. Only, yes, only when the order came from the court, Mhm. And when the whole thing started with the manipulation. That's when I really realised, OK, what is he capable of, Mhm.

**Interviewer:** How stressful do you think the separation was for your child?

**Test person:** For our child, let's put it this way, a separation is always stressful for a child. But we did it this way. I went to see a therapist online at the time and asked her in advance how we should tell our child about it. And my ex and I did it that way. And even the youth welfare office and the guardian ad litem all said that we had a good model. We lived with our child in the same house, each in our own flat. Our child, we had the alternating model, our child had - could switch back and forth and my ex-husband and I

also had a good relationship, so to speak. I personally believe today that my ex-husband had problems after I had a boyfriend. Because before that, we did things together with our child to some extent and we had clear agreements. Exactly, and our child got on well with that. The teachers at school said the same thing. One class teacher kept saying how great she thought it was that he had two rooms and could go up and down. Of course, it's a heavy burden, but I think the burden for our child only came when my ex confronted him with the fact that he wanted to move in with his girlfriend. Because that was the first time I noticed changes in our child, although I didn't even know that my ex wanted to move there. But it must have happened very early on, because then the manipulation gradually started and it became a burden. And teachers saw it, friends saw it, yes, and in the end I saw it too, the youth welfare office, everyone actually saw it, Ne. It's also in many reports, but when we were still living together: No, and I can't say the same today when I had a boyfriend, we lived together in the house for over a year. I don't know whether my ex didn't cling to our child when I had a new partner and we had the alternating model, and of course I don't know whether he tried to talk negatively. No, because the whole dilemma started when he suddenly had a girlfriend. So, yes.

**Interviewer:** OK, and if you were to give a number like that, again on this scale of 1 to 7, how would you rate it overall?

**Test person:** 7 would be very strong now, wouldn't it?

**Interviewer:** Yes

**Test person:** Mhm, well, it just depends on the phase. So I think the separation itself at that time didn't put him under so much strain because we pulled together. But then with all this court crap, it became stressful, so no. You actually have to make the separation dependent on the situation, so I'd say the separation itself, where my ex and I pulled together, was a 2 or a 3. Of course, a separation isn't always great, but we had, we went in and out, we talked to each other, just like you do on a parental level. No, that's just the point. When I got a new partner, it became more difficult, yes.

**Interviewer:** So maybe a 4, average overall.

**Test person:** Yes, yes, as I said, yes. It's difficult to answer at the time of the separation, it was maybe a 3, no.

**Interviewer:** OK. Now comes another section with questions. You have the feeling that your bond with your child has been disrupted or cut off by the other parent. In your opinion, what are the motives of the other parent?

**Minute 40**

**Test person:** The reasons are (...) our child [was born in a town in Lower Saxony], our son had all his social contacts here. I had the social contacts with the mothers of the friends, so as a mother. My ex wanted to move to a neighbouring town. Which wouldn't have been a problem. But I personally believe that he would have been afraid that if he moved in with his girlfriend, he would have lost his bond with his child and that his child, i.e. our child, might no longer want to go there at some point. In my opinion, that's why the manipulation started. I once sought advice from a lady, a coaching lady, and she was of the same opinion, because let me put it this way. If he - we had the alternating model, we had a clear agreement, let me put it this way, if he had been fair, he would have spoken to me as the mother in advance and said: "I'm planning to move to [town], how do we want to do that with [child's name]?" We could, we could have, we could have talked about solutions, there could have been a school in the centre, so we could have continued with the alternating model, so our child would have had the same route from both locations. Yes, that would have been a solution, maybe we weren't quite ready at the time, I don't know, but we didn't, I didn't even know that he was moving. So our child was involved in this move much, much earlier than I even knew that he [the father] was planning it. That's why I think that was the motivation. Yes, I personally believe that he was actually afraid of losing his child if he moved. And maybe it's also a kind of revenge on me, although I just think why? No, because we still have a house here together and he left it all behind. So he left after the decision bam and after me the deluge ne. And that was also our child's home, you don't just do that. So of course it had something to do

with the fact that he wanted to get one over on me and since he couldn't do it any other way, he only had our child to use. Well, I'm quite strong in life, but of course it had to do with our child. Of course that put a strain on me. And it hit me hard at the beginning, of course. (...) So I think he was scared himself.

**Interviewer:** And were there any other factors that influenced this situation?

**Test person:** Well, I don't think it was just fear, but it was also about money for him. So through the separation, divorce then no. That plays a whole - well, if you look at it today, it plays a very big role. Money, power. Yes.

**Interviewer:** How old was your child and how long did the process take in total?

**Test person:** So our child, let's put it this way, he was under 10 when the manipulation started, he was 10 when he had to go to court, and it's been a year and a half now, yes, a year and a half.

**Interviewer:** What consequences did the process have for you, for the children, for the child, for the alienating parent and for the family?

**Test person:** Well, it's just a lot. That's all, what impact does it have? Well, I mean, for me it's a drama, it's bad that you have to see bonds being cut. That you try to kick a parent out of the child's life? So I mean, what is all this sadness? Is that helplessness? I felt powerless, our child was completely conflicted. I mean, it's still sometimes in conflict today and (...) that will have a hundred per cent impact. So I'm an adult, I've been able to deal with it, so I've sought help and spoken to therapists. I've read books, I've looked for self-help groups, like-minded people. I'm doing well in life, but a child of 10 who doesn't have all that maturity yet, who didn't realise what the consequences of what he said would be. I believe that this has a very strong effect on the child and I really hope that I or therapists can help them to work it out at some point (...) and perhaps not as late as I did. That the child comes to this conclusion, so I have to say something really stupid, no. Because maybe some of the things that happened in my youth have accompanied me throughout my life that I didn't even realise and, well... But I still hope that my child (...) will do things differently. So the doctors, the paediatricians have said that the child should actually see a psychologist to process the whole thing and talk about it, but my ex says he doesn't want to. We both have custody and (...) I can understand why, because something could come out of it.

**Interviewer:** Yes, and did you receive support in that respect? In other words, in terms of the process? If yes, to what extent and if no, what would you have liked and from whom?

#### **Minute 45**

**Respondent:** Of the process. What process?

**Interviewer:** So the whole alienation process.

**Test person:** So help, of course, through the self-help groups, through talking therapies, through research on the internet. There are many who, I mean, we have formed mothers' groups. There are many fathers' associations, but there are also many, many mothers to whom this has happened more and more in Germany. Yes, and through the exchange. Of course, it helped to be able to ask questions: Hey, how do you see it, how would you react to the fact that people have supported each other? Exactly, and yes, I also think that I then plucked up the courage myself and listened to my gut feeling. That helped me too.

**Interviewer:** Do you now have contact with the alienating parent? Do you have contact with your children? If not, is a reunion with the child possible from your point of view?

**Test person:** Well, I have contact with my child. Of course every 2 weeks and once every 2 weeks in the afternoon. But my fear is that my ex will push it so far that at some point my child will say that it doesn't want to come to me any more (...) and unfortunately I'm also - No I don't want to think negatively, so I'm still thinking positively and I'm sticking to the fact that my child enjoys it because I know that it enjoys the time with me. However, I realise that if the child is with my ex or in the family during this time, then I have no contact. Then he doesn't get in touch and the influence, it's also been proven that where the child spends more time, of course he can have much more

influence on the child and this, this (...) yes, however he has managed it. He has this power and that also has a psychological effect on the child. And a child won't oppose the parent when it sees that it has this safe haven, so what? The child is dependent on it. That's the point, isn't it? And I also know that people speak very, very badly about me. Unfortunately, that's what my child often says and he's just so naïve that he sometimes just blurts things out. It's tough and as we're still going through a divorce process, I know that a lot of rubbish is being said, yes.

**Interviewer:** How stressful was the alienation? Or is the alienation still very low for you 1, up to 7 the highest stress level?

**Respondent:** Well, I think that as an estranged parent you never quite come to terms with it, yes of course yes. So it's like that. It's this acceptance process, well, I'm always going on a bit, because you never really want to admit it. Because why is it - why - for me, I'm a very justice-loving person and for me, what happened there, it's not right for me, yes? It's not right to do something like that to a child or a parent and why did it have to be like that? Yes, but personally I'm still in a good position. I continue to live my life. Nevertheless, I have accepted that I no longer try to live so much in the past, yes, because it just doesn't get me anywhere. It's also a learning process, a further development. But really, yes, you have to accept it at some point, but you can't really do it completely. So I don't know how to put it, it's a bit of a middle ground. If it came down to it, I'd want to turn it all back to square one and start again and think, OK, what could we do better now? But I'm still standing firmly on my feet in life. And yes, sometimes it's a burden. There are always phases when I go into the forest and just scream my head off and that's about it. And of course it's stupid, especially when you can't get to your child, so you can't experience everyday life with your child. So (laughs desperately) it's like this, I can't say it's super bad or there are phases, sometimes it's like this, sometimes it's like that. So I think it fluctuates. Well, I couldn't give you a number right now, because it's definitely stressful. And that's also something that you don't realise - I'm still living my life, my child is getting older and older and at some point they'll cut the cord anyway, but it's still something -. You are parents together and of course you want to see your child grow up. Yes, is that enough for you?

#### **Minute 51**

**Interviewer:** Yes, and the same again for your children, so how stressful do you think the alienation is for your child?

**Test person:** I think it's very strong, even if it sometimes seems that it was all your own decision. It wasn't your own decision. The child was faced with the decision. I always say that if it had really wanted to, then it would have said yes, then the child would have had to go to court or it would have had to go to the youth welfare office and say, well, I don't want to live there any more, I want to move there now, but it didn't. So I know that the father and also the parents of my ex-husband spoke to the three of us with our child and (...) they gave him the choice. So they talked about it and the grandparents are also strong carers. And that's also very nice, but of course they also have an immense influence and yes. So as I said, if my child had had to make the decision alone, it would never have come to that, no. But I know that it was very stressful for the child, because before the first hearing, when he had to go to court, he turned to me, I was on holiday with my child and he said, "Mum, I want you and dad to sit down together and sort this out" and that the child was afraid to go to court. And yes, I know he didn't want that and he didn't even know what was coming? And even the guardian ad litem said at the first hearing that she herself believed that the grandparents who took the child there had influenced her. And she also left the hearing with her head hanging down. Unfortunately, nobody recorded this in the minutes, as I learnt afterwards, my lawyer should have recorded it at the time, because the judge didn't record it on her own and nobody could remember it afterwards. Unfortunately, I have to say that so cheekily. That's the way it is, that's the way it is. Those are the tactics that are used.

**Interviewer:** OK, I hadn't realised whether you had already said a number. But can you put a figure on it?

**Test person:** Yes, I would say that the stress level was very high, it had a big impact on the child, he also had behavioural problems at school before the hearing, before the first one. (...) All the teachers, all the children said, his friends.

**Interviewer:** Yes, yes, then we've already come to the last question and that is: As an adult, have you experienced a distancing process with your own children and to what extent?

**Test person:** Once again, whether I have a.

**Interviewer:** Whether you as an adult have experienced an alienation process with your own children and to what extent.

#### **Minute 54**

**Test person:** Well, of course, my child is still trying to incite people against me. So I, I was taken to court myself, I didn't want to go to court either. I had a mediation appointment with my ex-husband, but unfortunately he turned it down like everything else.

**Interviewer:** Okay, yes, that's it with the questions. Is there anything else you want to get off your chest or do you not have to? So.

**Test person:** No, well, I mean, I've already talked a lot, a lot, I'm still involved with the topic, yes. How, how, when should such a study or what is the actual aim of this study (...)? To see how estranged parents themselves experienced childhood, what they experienced, right?

[...]

**Test person:** [...] I think your own resilience and how you are positioned and what you do about it in order to practise self-care and that is the very important thing and that is what we must not forget. We also have to think about ourselves. I've also experienced people accusing me of being selfish. But it's more a case of me saying that I think about myself and I look after myself and protect myself. And that's really important and only then can you come to terms with such a painful experience and move on with your life as normal. And what I meant by this acceptance is also a process. You don't want to accept a lot of things and you're powerless and you no longer understand the world and (...) you try to fight against it and struggle. And I'm still still in favour of making the whole thing public and expressing your opinion and drawing attention to the fact that this doesn't happen to other children. Nevertheless, you have to find a way for yourself to accept the whole thing in such a way that you do the best for your children because if we strengthen ourselves, then we can also be there for our children and I think that also shapes them and the values that you give to the child yourself help the children to deal with this whole process or the whole thing and especially those who have no contact at all should show their children that they are strong and that they are there for them. Yes, they are still always there for their child. And especially when a child does get in touch again, that you've done something for yourself and that you've got both feet firmly on the ground, as hard as it is. I didn't want to believe it at first either, when a social worker or a parenting counsellor told me to write your child a letter, please what? Yes, so I want to have contact with my child, why shouldn't I have contact with my child, I always have and. They say. Well. If it doesn't want that, then write a letter. So as an adult, you don't understand the world any more. But what I find so bad is simply that institutions interfere from the outside, but they don't take the time or make the effort to get to know you, to get to know the child at all. So they follow a standardised approach and all children are the same and everything is always used in the same order and that's what has already been uncovered in various cases. That yes. (...) Yes, almost all children are always the same before the law and before youth welfare offices, although every child is individual and also has different needs and perhaps also wishes just like the parents and in the end I realised that they tried to deny me my needs, that I shouldn't have a need to be together with my child and I find that difficult and I also find that very dramatic to be honest. And if I don't keep my mouth shut, I'm threatened by a youth welfare officer. If I carry on and don't do what they want. That they'll try to take custody away from me, with threats, demotion and things like that. I think that's really tough. And yes, that. The bad thing is that I've seen

that you hardly stand a chance against this system. [...] I find it so dramatic that, in principle, it's not just the children who lose out. They lose a parent, but in any case the parents also lose, so there are always only losers. And yes, I don't think that should be the case. Well, that was my final word.

**Farewell**  
**Minute 65**

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