

You Stay a Father.

The 7-Step Compass Against Parental Alienation.

A guide for fathers whose children live in Germany
and whose access is being denied.

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Foreword

If you have opened this guide, a lot has probably already happened.

The last visitation arrangement has collapsed. Messages are getting shorter. Your child goes silent on the phone. Perhaps the mother has announced a move. Perhaps she has brought in a therapist. Perhaps there is already a letter from the Youth Welfare Office on your kitchen table.

You sleep badly. You replay conversations in your head — wondering when you made the crucial mistake. The truth is: you haven't made one yet. But you are about to make several at once. That's why this guide exists.

My name is Michael Bonn. I am not a lawyer. I am a communications advisor and case manager in German family law — for over twenty years, standing alongside fathers who refuse to lose their children. What I offer you here is not a recipe. It is a compass.

Seven steps. Each step has a clear goal, a clear tool, a concrete next move. And above everything, one golden rule:

You must never be the one who escalates. You must be the one who remains willing to cooperate until the very end.

This is not weakness. This is strategy.

Michael Bonn, Freiburg

What Parental Alienation Really Is

Parental alienation is not a parenting style. It is not a character trait. It is not an unfortunate side effect of a failed relationship.

Parental alienation is a form of emotional child abuse.

That sounds harsh. But it is the position consistently held by the German Federal Constitutional Court, the Federal Court of Justice, and the leading voices in forensic family psychology. The courts define "Bindungstoleranz" (tolerance for the child's bonds) as the ability and willingness of a parent to preserve a positive image of the other parent and to facilitate contact without tension — ideally to actively promote it. Where this ability is persistently absent, parenting competence is considered impaired.

OLG Celle, Decision of 02.01.2018 – 10 UF 126/16, juris para. 2a; BGH, Decision of 16.03.2011 – XII ZB 407/10, FamRZ 2011, 796 para. 54.

Forensic family psychology goes further. Temizürek distinguishes three parental attitudes in his model: Bindungsfürsorge (active bond promotion) — actively fostering the child's relationship with the other parent. Bindungstoleranz (bond tolerance) — mere acceptance. And Bindungsblockade (bond blocking) — active obstruction. Kindler and Salzgeber confirm: mere tolerance is not enough. What courts and experts expect is active promotion. The strongest empirical indicators of absent bond tolerance are violence against the other parent and pressure on the child to take sides.

Temizürek, The Stepped Model of Bond Promotion, ZKJ 6/2014, p. 228; Kindler/Salzgeber, Parental Cooperation and Bond Tolerance, Praxis der Rechtspsychologie 33(1), 2023, p. 41.

Rainer Balloff describes the profound consequences in his standard work: loyalty conflicts, alienation dynamics, identity ruptures. Children who are systematically denied a parent lose a part of their biography.

Balloff, Children Before the Family Court, 4th ed. 2022, Nomos, p. 182 f.

German law is on your side. Section 1626(3)(1) of the German Civil Code (BGB) states: The welfare of the child normally includes contact with both parents. The Federal Constitutional Court has recently confirmed that restricting contact requires concrete grounds related to child welfare. The mother's wishes alone do not justify restricting visitation.

BVerfG, Decision of 28.08.2025 – 1 BvR 810/25, NJW 2026, 383, para. 44; BVerfG, Decision of 27.08.2025 – 1 BvR 1473/25, para. 22.

You have more than a moral case. You have a legal right. The question is how you enforce it without damaging it.

Willingness to Promote — The Underestimated Weapon

Willingness to promote means a parent's readiness to actively encourage the child's relationship with the other parent. No criterion is so often underestimated by fathers — and so often violated by mothers.

When the mother obstructs, sabotages, or refuses contact, that is a serious breach of the duty to promote. But be careful: if you respond by attacking the mother, demeaning her, or instrumentalising the child, you violate the same criterion. The court assesses both sides.

Willingness to promote means: I support my child's relationship with the other parent — even when it costs me an effort.

Bonn, Fathers in Family Law, Freiburg 2026, Ch. 2.3.

The Child's Will — And Its Limits

From a certain age, the child's will is taken into account. But not every expressed wish constitutes a legally relevant child's will. Courts and experts distinguish between an autonomous will that arises from the child's own experience, and an induced will that has been shaped by the influence of one parent.

The Higher Regional Court of Brandenburg confirmed a three-year exclusion of contact in a case where a six-year-old child vehemently rejected the father. The guardian ad litem found that the child could not sufficiently distance itself from the mother's alienating behaviour due to its age. The court emphasised: contact forced against the child's serious resistance can cause more harm than good — even when the will is based on manipulation.

OLG Brandenburg, Decision of 13.10.2023 – 9 UF 115/23, juris; BVerfG, FamRZ 2016, 1917.

For you this means: every week without contact solidifies the rejection. Time works against you. That is why swift but measured action is decisive.

Bonn, Fathers in Family Law, Freiburg 2026, Ch. 2.4.

Why Most Fathers Take the Wrong Steps

Over the years I have accompanied hundreds of cases. The mistakes fathers make at this stage are remarkably similar. They happen out of desperation, out of anger, out of love. And they are still mistakes.

The first mistake: Waiting too long.

Many fathers hope for months that "things will sort themselves out." They underestimate how quickly a small child forgets a parent. Every week without contact weighs double — it changes the child's bond, and it builds a new habit for the other side.

The second mistake: Escalating too early.

Courts react allergically to fathers who come in guns blazing. Anyone who sends in a lawyer with an aggressive brief on day one looks aggressive — and hands the other side the narrative of "violent father" on a silver platter.

The third mistake: Getting emotionally entangled.

Every WhatsApp message you write from the gut will one day lie as a screenshot in the court file. The other side collects. You should too.

The fourth mistake: Wanting to argue on equal terms.

The mother provokes. You react. She provokes again. This game is always lost by the one who starts playing it. Your task is not to answer her. Your task is to reach your child.

The fifth mistake: Giving the child a mission.

"Tell your mother that..." is the surest way to lose your child emotionally. Children are not messengers.

The Seven Steps

The seven steps form a cascade. Each step builds on the previous one. Each step documents that you took the milder path first. Do not be tempted to skip steps.

Step 1 — Document, Don't Discuss

The principle.

Without evidence, parental alienation remains an accusation. With evidence, it becomes proof.

The concrete step.

Start a chronological file today. For every cancelled handover, every refused pick-up, every manipulatively worded message, you record: date, time, wording, witnesses. The duty of good conduct under § 1684(2) BGB applies to both parents. Every violation is actionable — but only if it is on record.

The mistake you avoid.

Don't only document the mother's misconduct. Also document your own cooperative behaviour. This record of your willingness to cooperate will be at least as valuable as the evidence of her obstruction.

Step 2 — Win the Youth Welfare Office as a Partner

The principle.

The Youth Welfare Office (Jugendamt) is an institution with a statutory mandate — and that mandate plays into your hands if you address it correctly.

The concrete step.

Assert your rights under § 18(3) SGB VIII in writing. Simultaneously apply for separation and parenting counselling under § 17 SGB VIII. In writing, politely, concisely. On record.

The mistake you avoid.

Don't publicly complain about the Youth Welfare Office. Stay friendly, stay persistent, stay documented.

Step 3 — The Court-Ordered Contact Arrangement

The principle.

As long as there is no enforceable contact order, you have nothing in hand that you could enforce.

The concrete step.

Have your lawyer file an application for a court-ordered contact arrangement pursuant to § 1684(3) BGB. The application must be specific. The decisive standard is solely the child's welfare under § 1697a BGB. Ensure the court commissions a psychological expert report — for existential questions such as the child's residence, this is constitutionally required. The Higher Regional Court of Karlsruhe overturned a lower court custody decision because no expert report had been obtained.

BVerfG, Decision of 28.08.2025 – 1 BvR 810/25, para. 44; OLG Karlsruhe, Decision of 30.10.2024 – 20 UF 63/24, para. 44 f.; BGH, Decision of 28.04.2010 – XII ZB 81/09, para. 34.

The mistake you avoid.

Never file a maximum demand you don't actually intend to enforce. Anyone who demands shared residence from the start, when no contact has taken place for months, weakens their position.

Step 4 — Enforcement Measures

The principle.

§ 89 FamFG provides the tools: fines up to €25,000, custodial penalties up to six months. These instruments are real. In the Anette W. case at the Higher Regional Court of Celle, the mother was sentenced first to 30 days, later to 150 days of custodial penalty because she refused to hand over her daughter to the father.

The concrete step.

If the court-ordered contact arrangement is not complied with, have your lawyer file an application for enforcement measures. The application requires that the contact order contains a warning of consequences under § 89(2) FamFG.

The mistake you avoid.

Don't file the enforcement application after the first violation. Wait for the second. A father who turns the other cheek twice and only then acts appears composed.

Step 5 — Contact Guardianship (Umgangspflegschaft)

The principle.

Contact guardianship transfers the mother's right to determine contact into the hands of a third party.

The concrete step.

§ 1684(3) sentence 3 BGB provides for contact guardianship in cases where the duty of good conduct is persistently violated. The Federal Court of Justice has positioned it as a milder measure compared to more far-reaching interventions. But caution: it is no cure-all. The Higher Regional Court of Brandenburg found that where the child has developed a sustained and internalised rejection, even a contact guardian lacks the means to overcome the child's resistance.

§ 1684(3) sentence 3 BGB; BGH, Decision of 06.07.2016 – XII ZB 47/15, FamRZ 2016, 1752 para. 28; OLG Brandenburg, Decision of 13.10.2023 – 9 UF 115/23, juris.

The mistake you avoid.

Don't confuse contact guardianship with supervised contact. Contact guardianship is an intervention directed at the mother. Supervised contact is an intervention directed at you.

Step 6 — Withdrawal of the Right to Determine Contact

The principle.

If contact guardianship also fails, you are dealing with a case under § 1666 BGB.

The concrete step.

The application requires that all milder measures have been exhausted. Frame the application so that the mother can regain responsibility as soon as she respects her duty of good conduct.

§ 1666 BGB; Jokisch, in: Handbook of Family Law, 13th ed. 2026, para. 838.

The mistake you avoid.

Don't overload the application with old grievances. Keep your eye on the future.

Step 7 — Transfer of Custody

The principle.

Absent bond tolerance becomes a custody criterion in its own right. The case law is clear.

The concrete step.

An application under § 1671 BGB requires a two-stage welfare test: first the court examines whether dissolving joint custody serves the child's welfare. Then it examines whether transferring custody specifically to you best serves the child's welfare. The criteria: promotion principle, bond principle, continuity, the child's will — and bond tolerance. The Higher Regional Court of Celle transferred custody to the father in a landmark decision after the mother had systematically obstructed contact for years. The expert diagnosed the mother with a personality disorder and chronic endangerment of the child's welfare through manipulative behaviour. The court found: the father demonstrated competence in promoting the child's development and sustained bond tolerance — despite years of insults and provocations by the mother. His willingness to cooperate and his composure tipped the scales.

OLG Celle, Decision of 02.01.2018 – 10 UF 126/16, juris, Section II.2.a; § 1671 BGB; Balloff, Children Before the Family Court, 4th ed. 2022, Nomos, p. 182 f.

The mistake you avoid.

Don't file the application to hurt the mother. The decisive sentence: with me, the children will keep both parents — with her, they will lose one.

The Golden Rule

You must never be the one who escalates. You must be the one who remains willing to cooperate until the very end.

First: Courts, youth welfare offices, and guardians ad litem are professional observers. Anyone who stays systematically calm while the other side escalates shifts the perception in the room.

Second: The duty of good conduct under § 1684(2) BGB is a legal obligation. Anyone who internalises it builds legal capital.

Third: Your child feels it. In five, in ten, in twenty years, your child will look back and understand who searched for a way out and who built the dead end.

Parents are not competitors.

What You Can Do Today

Step one: Set up your file. Create a digital folder today — one single, central location.

Step two: Write the chronology of the last three months. Date, event, evidence.

Step three: Choose your tone. From now on, write every message as if it were being read aloud in court.

These three steps will cost you one evening. They will fundamentally change the dynamics of your case.

About Me

My name is Michael Bonn. For over twenty years I have been guiding fathers through exactly the situation you find yourself in. I am not a lawyer. I turn you into the client your lawyer wishes for.

The Next Step

My model is called Kokokiwo: Communication, Correspondence, Child's Welfare. For a monthly fee of €400, I stand by your side throughout. Your child lives in Germany — but you don't have to navigate this alone.

Free phone consultation every Monday.

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Your child needs you. I will help you not to lose them.

Sources

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Bonn, Fathers in Family Law, Freiburg 2026

Legal Notice

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