

Yale SCHOOL OF MEDICINE  
*Child Study Center*



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Attorney Jocelyn B. Hurwitz  
Cohen and Wolf, P.C.  
1115 Broad Street  
Bridgeport, CT 06604

Re: Matthew Ambrose  
DOB: 2/20/2007

Dear Attorney Hurwitz:

I am a child and adolescent psychiatrist at the Yale Child Study Center, and Matthew Ambrose (DOB: 2/20/2007), for whom you are Guardian Ad Litem, is a patient in my care. I provided psychiatric care and medication treatment from 2016 to 9/2019. I have been treating Matthew in psychotherapy as well as psychopharmacotherapy since 9/2019 to the present.

I am writing to you as Matthew's psychiatrist, and with his input. I want to be clear that I have not completed, nor have I been asked to complete, a custody evaluation for the family. I have not seen, nor read, nor have the results of the custody assessment by Biren Caverly, Ph.D. been shared with me. I am not being compensated, nor am I seeking compensation, for writing this letter. Rather, I am writing as a physician caring for Matthew Ambrose. I am writing as an advocate for his psychological best interest.

Matthew and his two siblings were adopted as infants, and have been cared for continuously by their parents. I believe both parents care deeply about their children. Their mother has been the primary caregiver for all the children. My observations over the years have suggested that Matthew and his siblings have demonstrated an appropriate attachment to their mother. Mr. Ambrose has become more involved with the children in the past several years, his work requirements decreased so as to allow more family time.

I have evaluated Matthew for psychiatric disorders, as well as psychiatric resilience. He is a terrific adolescent who is bright, very sensitive, empathic, and has a well-grounded sense of morality. He often has difficulty expressing his emotions in words and can become quite anxious and frustrated when he is under stress. As he has become an adolescent, this has displayed as oppositionality or anger, at times. I have diagnosed Matthew with Generalized



Anxiety Disorder, as well as ADHD, Predominantly Inattentive Type. He takes the medications Duloxetine for anxiety and Concerta for ADHD.

Throughout the past eight months during which the divorce and custody determination has been pending, Matthew and his siblings have had many life disruptions. They have moved homes from Westport to Branford, then Guilford. Their father lives in Madison. Matthew has acknowledged the tension between his parents and how difficult this has been. During the course of the custody evaluation, Matthew has clearly stated during our psychotherapy sessions, that he does not feel that his experience, point of view, needs and preferences have been acknowledged and considered. He described the experience of the professionals “taking my dad’s side.” He recounted being told that he was “rude to your father,” without further exploration about why. He complained of having difficulty sleeping the night before his visitation with his father, due to anxiety. He described spending several hours writing a letter to Dr. Caverly about his experiences and feeling that this was not taken seriously. His psychological experience has been one of feeling helpless in having any venue in which his wishes and needs were explored and validated.

As a child and adolescent psychiatrist, my primary consideration is the child’s psychological needs in custody disputes—in this case, Matthew’s. The paper, “The Psychological Best Interest of the Child Is Not the Legal Best Interest,” summarizes the role of the psychiatrist. “The psychiatrist’s expertise is limited to psychiatric and psychological matters. Most authorities agree that best interest is satisfied by an adult who wants the child, who has had a continuous and affectionate relationship with her/him, and who is capable of raising her/him. That is, the best interest is focused on the emotional well-being of the child.” In Matthew’s case, he is a 13-year-old adolescent, who has his own needs, opinions, and desires. He should have a role in deciding with whom he lives.

Over the past six months, Matthew’s therapy has focused on helping him put his feelings into words. He has worked to develop skills at advocating appropriately for his needs. However, Matthew has grown very frustrated. He has reported that he has clearly advocated for his wishes, but that “no one listens to me.” Matthew has reported that he feels that his father does not listen or validate his or his siblings’ wishes. He has been very upset that his father was tape recording him and his siblings at the house. He described feeling that he has no privacy at his father’s house. His father removed the door knobs from the bedrooms so that the children could not lock the doors.

I understand that the issue of parental alienation is being contested. Parental alienation is a very controversial diagnosis and one that has not been well validated. It is also an adult-centric argument, in which a child’s best interest and wishes are at risk of being overshadowed by the lens of potential influence by the alienating parent. In my experience, children always feel “caught between” their parents in bitter custody battles. I believe this is the case for Matthew.



When I asked Matthew if he would like me to write to you regarding his point of view, he said that he would. When asked what he wanted me to say, his answer was three-fold: 1) He feels that his father has made false allegations toward him and his siblings. He feels that his father is trying to prove that he and his siblings are mean to him, and that he has used secret tape recordings “against us.” 2) He said that he feels safer and closer to his mother. “She takes my feelings more seriously.” When asked how, he said that if he was with his mother and wanted to see his father, his mother wouldn’t stop him from going. But if he is with his father and wants to see his mother, he is forbidden. He said that he feels comfortable talking openly with his mother, but he fears that he will be made fun of by his father; 3) He feels closer to his mother. He noted that his father worked a lot when he was younger and he has always been closer to his mother. He also worries about his youngest brother, whom he described as quite frightened by the sudden decision by the Court to have the children go live at his father’s house, without even being able to contact his mother to say goodnight.

In my work with Matthew and his family, I have continuously noted that Matthew feels more connected and bonded with his mother. He has expressed that he feels that his mother takes his feelings and wishes more seriously. I believe that it is in his best interest psychologically to have a say in his custody arrangement. He is 13-years of age—an adolescent who is beginning to differentiate and try to find his own sense of identity. Being forced into a living situation that he feels is invalidating will be detrimental and, I believe, rather than facilitating a closer relationship, will only cause more animosity towards his father. I have had no reason to believe that Ms. Riordan, Matthew’s mother, is not “an adult who wants the child, who has had a continuous and affectionate relationship with him, and who is capable of raising him.” I urge us to consider the point of view of the child. Matthew is confused about why he “needs to stay with his dad” for another five days. He is waiting for those five days to be over to “go back home.” I believe that the lack of transparency is quite confusing and anxiety-provoking. Matthew has reported panic attacks. When he calls or texts his mother, and she doesn’t respond because of the Court order, Matthew feels frightened. He said that his younger brother is even more frightened. His feelings of helplessness are demonstrated by his anger and rudeness. The less validated and acknowledged Matthew feels, the more I believe that he “acts out” in an inappropriate manner.

As evidence of this, I quote in part from a letter Matthew sent to me that he had written to his father and sent to Dr. Caverly. I received the e-mail on February 6, 2020.

Hello Dr. Caverly,

I am writing to my father because I do not want to go to his house tomorrow (it is the 4th and tomorrow is the 5). He said that I was “uncaring, unkind and rude.” This was my response:

And I can’t believe that the father that I used to know is a liar, scares his children, and now



your own daughter is afraid of you. Does that sound like a normal father? Do you think (friend's name) is afraid of his father? No, he is not, because he (friend's father) is not like you. I'm not going tomorrow don't even start saying that I'm uncaring, unkind and rude, because when I'm NOT with you, I'm the total opposite. I have had ENOUGH of your lies, and I changed. So what? I am 13 in 16 days. I am going to change, do you get that? I'm not going and you can't make me.

He then said that there is "someone putting information in my head that is making him look bad." This was my response:

It's not information, it's what I have experienced. Mia and SAWYER have experienced it. So don't tell me about "information" that is making you look bad, because you don't look bad, you ARE bad.

Mia, Sawyer and I tried to tell him what he has been doing, and he said that our facts were fake. He also ridiculed Sawyer when Sawyer didn't want him to keep following him up the stairs.  
Matthew

In summary, in my medical opinion, it is in the best interest of my patient, Matthew Ambrose, that he be afforded substantial input into decisions regarding his custody arrangements. As a sensitive and thoughtful adolescent, I believe that a decision in which he is forbidden contact with either parent would be detrimental to his psychological well-being. He deserves to have a close relationship with his parents in a manner that is developmentally appropriate and which validates his adolescent needs. I also believe that Matthew will form a closer and more mutually-caring relationship with his father if he feels a sense of control and agency. There is no scientific evidence base that separating a child, even from an alienating parent, is in the child's best interest if that parent is caring and the child has a strong attachment. It would be seriously detrimental, and I believe would result in higher levels of anxiety, frustration, anger, and ultimately depression for Matthew, if he is forced to become estranged from a beloved parent.

Thank you in advance for your serious consideration of Matthew Ambrose's psychological and developmental needs.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Dorothy Stubbe MD

Dorothy Stubbe, M.D

**Reference:** Glenn H. Miller, MD. The Psychological Best Interest of the Child Is Not the Legal Best Interest. J Am Acad Psychiatry Law 30:196–200, 2002.