

Sect loses fight for boy's custody.

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A father who was shut out of the **Exclusive Brethren** religious sect has won a legal battle for the right to take his nine-year-old son with him into the world outside its rigid doctrine.

The Court of Appeal yesterday rejected an attempt by two members of the sect - a couple regarded by the boy as his grandparents - to overturn a judge's order that he should live with his father.

The boy, referred to as "D", has lived most of his life under the Brethren's separatist regime, which bans all social contact with non-members.

Children must eat separately from their schoolmates and cannot watch TV outside the classroom, listen to records or the radio, or use computers.

Any adult who offends against the rules is at first "shut up" - temporarily excluded from the fellowship. If there is no repentance, he or she is "withdrawn from" - sent into the outside world and banned from socialising with family and loved ones in the sect. Lord Justice Purchas, sitting with Lord Justice Balcombe, said D's father, aged 47, had been "withdrawn from", cutting off contact with his son, because of his behaviour while seeking a new partner after his wife's death.

D's mother died in 1988. Nearly three years later, his father asked another member of the sect in their Suffolk community to marry him.

She refused and he then harassed her and her family. He was then "shut up" by the Brethren. He then signed a letter giving care of his son to the "grandparents". Next day he was told he had been "withdrawn from".

The father later won county court orders that his son should live with him.

Lord Justice Purchas agreed with the judge at Ipswich county court that it was in the boy's best interests to be with his father.

The appeal judges banned reporting of any material which could lead to disclosure of the boy's identity.

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