

## PARENTAL ALIENATION

### WHAT IS PARENTAL ALIENATION?

Is a recurring problem that affects many families whom are experiencing high conflict, separation and divorce.

It is the situation where a parent (the alienating parent) teaches the child to reject the other parent (the target parent), fear that parent and to avoid having contact with that parent. It is the process whereby the one parent undermines the child's previously intact relationship with their other parent.

This rejection and fear appears to be wholly unfounded based on the child's actual experience of that parent. The aforementioned runs hand in hand with the child's strong alignment and enmeshment with the alienating parent.

The defining feature of parental alienation is contact refusal by the children.

### WHAT ARE SOME OF THE CRITERIA OF PARENTAL ALIENATION?

1. The alienating parent conducts an active campaign of criticism and denigration against the target parent. The alienated child will have a litany of complaints against the target parent, most being false, irrational or trivial;
2. The alienated child denies ever having experienced having good times with the target parent;
3. The alienated child will avoid the potential for reconciliation;
4. Frivolous rationalisations by the child of their criticism of the target parent;
5. A total disproportion and unjustified reaction of hatred and scorn by the child towards the target parent;

6. The child claims to be fearful but when examined rational reasons for such fear does not exist.

Additionally, two or more of the following factors may be found:

- a. The child idealises the alienating parent and devalues the target parent;
- b. Independent thinking phenomenon: the child self-righteously declares that their decision to reject the target parent is their own and denies influence by the alienating parent;
- c. Reflexive / automatic support for the target parent in any disagreement between the parents;
- d. Total absence of guilt over the exploitation and mistreatment of the target parent. The children are often rude, disrespectful, oppositional and even violent towards the target parent with scant remorse;
- e. Borrowed scenarios, in that the child makes rehearsed statements often involving alleged incidents that they have no direct memory of;
- f. Extended hatred, the child's hatred in respect of the target parent may extend to the target parent's extended family

#### THE THREE LEVELS OF PARENTAL ALIENATION:

1. Mild cases: The child spends time with the target parent but has occasional outbursts of rudeness and of becoming rude and surly. They want to frequently be in contact with the alienating parent and will challenge the authority of the target parent.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>. Woodall & Woodall 2013

2. Moderate cases: The child will start to resist contact with the target parent and miss contact times. They are stubborn, rude and objectionable and confrontational with the target parent during contact sessions.
3. Severe cases: They will actively refuse and even flee contact with the target parent. They will justify their behaviour with often false or hugely exaggerated stories of neglect or abuse by the target parent. <sup>2</sup>

#### WHAT ARE THE IMMEDIATE CONSEQUENCES OF PARENTAL ALIENATION:

The destruction of the child's relationship with the target parent. The negative and long lasting effect on the psychological development of the child is enduring. They in time lose trust in both parents and are left alone, insecure and defenceless against many of life's challenges. Alienated children are at risk of emotional adjustment difficulties<sup>3</sup> such as

1. Poor reality testing;
2. Illogical cognitive operations;
3. Inaccurate and distorted interpersonal perception;
4. Low self-esteem;
5. Gender identity problems.

#### CONCLUSION:

Parental alienation is a profound loss for a child and akin with the death of a parent. That such a loss is imposed only makes matters worse. This fact on its own can

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<sup>2</sup> Woodall 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Fiddler 2013.

cause severe psychological harm to a child and cause major feelings of guilt.

Parental alienation seriously harms children, period.

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