



# Parent Alienation



# Parent Alienation

It's a process that arises frequently in the contexts of separation and divorce, characterized as the unjustified rejection of children towards one of the parents with whom the child previously enjoyed a healthy relationship in the absence of any form of child abuse, which is usually induced by manipulation strategies from the other parent.



# Estrangement

The child is rejecting the targeted parent due to legitimate concern about that parent to include substance abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, or major mental illness.

False allegations in high conflict cases occur so documentation and results of assessments are critical to sift through estrangement vs. parent alienation. False allegations are a huge red flag of parent alienation.



# Bernet's Five Factors of Parent Alienation

1. Child rejects/avoids a relationship with the other parent
2. Child previously had a good relationship with the protected parent (target parent)
3. No history of abuse, neglect, or serious parenting issues such as addiction of a parent. The child's reaction is far more reactive (out of proportion) than it should be such as a spanking. (Fact Check)



## Bernet's Five Factors of Parent Alienation-Continued

4. Presence of Alienating Behaviors: 17 are on the list (Amy Baker).

5. Signs of Alienation of the child (8 signs (not symptoms) are noted by Dr. Bernet)



## 8 Signs of Alienation of a Child

1. Denigration: Child repeatedly complains about the parent over and over again.
2. Frivolous rationalization for the complaint: child will give a silly reason for not wanting to ever see the targeted parent again.
3. Lack of ambivalence: there are some good and some bad points to parents which are normal. Alienated kids identify parents as an Angel or Devil.



## 8 Signs of Alienation of a Child-Continued

4. Independent thinker phenomenon: The child says they are saying they are an independent thinker but is not.

5. Automatic Support/Reflexive Support: Child always is choosing the side of the alienating/favored parent even when it does not make sense.

6. Absence of Guilt: Kids are disrespectful with no regard to parents' feelings and emotions. The children view themselves as having more power than the parent and has been parentified.



## 8 Signs of Alienation of a Child-Continued

7. Borrowed Scenarios: Kids report stories that alienated parent has provided to the child and the child gives the exact same account as the alienating parent however, the child cannot answer further questions because all they are doing is repeating what they have been told.

8. Spread Animosity: Child's hate spreads from the targeted parent to his family members (aunts/uncles, cousins, grandparents, targeted parents' pets)





## 17 Primary Parental Alienation Strategies (A. Baker)

1. Badmouthing
2. Limiting Contact
3. Interfering with Communication
4. Interfering with symbolic Communication (Examples: Pictures, photos)
5. Withdrawal of Love
6. Telling the child the targeted parent is dangerous (may include false charges with Child Protective Agency)
7. Forcing the child to choose between parents



## 17 Primary Parental Alienation Strategies (A. Baker)-Cont.

- 8. Telling the child the targeted parent does not love the child
- 9. Confiding in the child
- 10. Forcing the child to reject the targeted parent
- 11. Asking the child to spy on the targeted parent
- 12. Asking the child to keep secrets from the targeted parent
- 13. Referring to the targeted parent by first name and encouraging the child to do the same



## 17 Primary Parental Alienation Strategies (A. Baker)-Cont.

- 14. Referring to a step-parent as “mom” or “dad” and encouraging the child to do the same
- 15. Withholding medical, academic, and other important information from the targeted parent
- 16. Changing the child’s name to remove association with the targeted parent
- 17. Cultivating dependency/undermining the authority of the targeted parent (may include overly permissive parenting by the alienating parent)



# DSM-V


Parent Alienation Syndrome no longer exists.

V-Codes to address parent alienation:

- Child affect by parent relationship and stress

- Parent-Child relational problem

- Child psychological abuse



## PA is being considered a form of emotional child abuse

Expert opinion agrees in defining parental alienation as a form of child abuse (Bernet, 2010; Gomide, 2016; Harman, 2016; Loredó, 2010 & 2011; Salles, 2012; Summers, 2006; von Boch-Galhau, 2018; Warshak, 2015a & 2015b)



# No-Contact Orders in PA Cases

-Meadows v. Meadows, the Michigan Court of Appeals focused on the behaviors of an alienating parent: “The process of one parent trying to undermine and destroy to a varying degrees the relationship that the child with the other parent.” Meadows v. Meadows/Henderson, 2010 WL 3814352 (Mich. Ct. App. 2010)



## No-Contact Orders in PA Cases

-McClain v. McClain, the Tennessee Court of Appeals focused on the mental condition of the child: “The essential feature of parental alienation is that a child...allies himself or herself strongly with one parent (preferred parent) and rejects a relationship with the other parent (alienated parent) and rejects a relationship with the other parent (alienated parent) without legitimate justification.” McClain v. McClain. 539 S.W.3d 170, 182 (Tenn. Ct. App. 2017).



# No Contact Orders in PA Cases


In *J.F. v D.F.*, the New York Supreme Court attempted to define parental alienation by borrowing a chapter from the elements of the tort of intentional infliction of emotional distress. *J.F. v D.F.*, 61 Misc. 3d 1226(A), 2018 N.Y. Slip Op. 51829 (U) (N.Y. Sup. Ct. 2018)





# Assessments to determine Parent Alienation

- Intakes with each party and children separately.
  - Collect collateral information from other resources including therapists, schools, medical doctors, neighbors, clergy, extended family members.
  - Collect and review any assessments completed on both parties and all children.
- Use parent alienation assessment tools such as MMPI-2, Parenting scales, Achenbach for Children, Bricklin Perceptual Scales (BPS) , PARQ (Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire, Baker Alienation Questionnaire (BAQ)



## Assessments to determine Parent Alienation-Cont.

Lindenberg-Vesell Surveys and Interview tools to gather pertinent information.

Observations of each parent with children



## Mild Parent Alienation behaviors

Children may say they don't want to see the other parent but once they are with that parent, they can demonstrate love, respect, and active engagement with that parent.



# Treatment for mild Parent Alienation behaviors

Reunification therapy to include

- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

- Informative psychoeducational intervention

- Teaching Therapeutic Communication

- Reality Discussions

- Focus on how the child is impacted and not on the adult feelings



## Moderate Parent Alienation Behaviors

Child says they don't want to see the parent and most of the time is unpleasant and does not participate and often will not be communicating with the other parent but there are times that the old, healthy relationship is present for short moments.



# Moderate Parent Alienation

Reunification therapy to include

- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

- Informative psychoeducational intervention

- Teaching Therapeutic Communication

- Reality Discussions

- Focus on how the child is impacted and not on the adult feelings

- Paradoxical Technique application (reverse psychology)

- Assigning alienating parent, target parent, and children to specialized therapy for parent alienation.



# Severe Parent Alienation

Child refuses to get in the car and go with other parent. The child may go but is extremely negative and the alienating parent brings food and alienating parent provides strategies to the children so that they don't have to engage such as ear buds, ipad, lots of homework that needs to be completed.



# Severe Parent Alienation

90% of cases do not respond to therapy while the child(ren) are in the alienating parents home.

Remove child from alienating parents care for 3-6 months and place in target parents care, a third party, residential program, boarding school, military school with no contact with alienating parent for the entire 3-6 months.

If removal of child is not recommended, use team of therapists/mental health workers that specialize in parent alienation to include: for alienating parent, target parent, children, a GAL, Parent Coordinator.

Alienating parent's attorney may also be helpful in the process to include sharing legal consequences to alienating parent and encouraging that the alienating parent curtail alienating behaviors and encourage the relationship between the targeted parent and child.

Family Bridges: A workshop for working on fragile parent-child relationship.

Parental Alienation Anonymous: 12 step non religious support group for family and friends of alienators.





# Treatment for Severe Parent Alienation

Clinicians knowledgeable and experienced in Parent Alienation recommend:

1. 3-6 month period without contact with the alienating parent.
2. Place the child with the targeted parent during this time if possible.
3. Place the child with a third party which can include a relative, treatment facility, boarding school, military school with treatment time with the target parent.
4. All options involved a specialized reunification program.
5. Slowly re-introduce the child with the alienating parent with monitoring.
6. In some cases, parent chooses to terminate attempts to re-build relationship due to severity of alienation and lack of progress.