Guide to Understanding Parental Alienation

"psychological abuse"
-DSM-5 of APA
code V995.51

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WHAT IS PARENTAL ALIENATION?

The intentional and strategic indoctrination of hate and/or guilt by one parent against the other, with the sole purpose of severing the bond spiritually, mentally, emotionally and physically with the other parent, thus gaining total power over the child, and ultimately the alienated parent.

(Mefferd, 2018)

*the word "parent" can be substituted for caregiver or family member

Parental Alienation Facts

- Parental Alienation (PA) is a form of psychological abuse
- Approximately 22 million parents are affected
- Both mothers & fathers alienate
- 25% of children from high conflict break-ups will become alienated
- Over half of all PA cases are reported as severe
- Poor psychological adjustment occurs as a result of PA

(multiple citations)
Is It Parental Alienation?

According to research, ALL of the following 4 factors **must be present** in order for parental alienation to exist:

1. A prior positive relationship between the child & the now rejected parent
2. Absence of maltreatment by the rejected parent
3. Use of alienating behaviors by the favored parent
4. Presence of behavioral manifestations of alienation in the child

*When one or no factors are present, it is NOT alienation*  
(Baker, 2020)

Because of the damage a child's brain endures as a result of parental alienation, a child may...

1. Live in a persistent state of fear
2. No longer have the ability to regulate emotions & stress
3. No longer reach developmental milestones
4. Lack the ability to receive love & positive stimuli
5. No longer have the ability to develop normal social interactions

(Understanding the effects of maltreatment on brain development, 2015)

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The alienating behaviors that contribute to the rejection of a target parent are...

1. Denigrating the other parent to the child to create the impression that the other parent is unsafe, unloving & unavailable
2. Limiting the child's contact w the other parent such that the parent & child cannot share meaningfully in each other's lives
3. Interfering w the child's communication w the other parent such that the parent & child cannot emotionally connect during periods of separation
4. Making it difficult for the child to think about, talk about & look at photos of the other parent & thereby attenuating the attachment between them
5. Withholding love & affection when the child exhibits interest & affection towards the other parent
6. Allowing the child to choose to spend time w the other parent & then creating the impression that time w the other parent is optional & undesirable
7. Forcing the child to reject the other parent
8. Telling the child that the other parent does not love him/her
9. Creating the impression that the other parent is dangerous
10. Confiding in the child about personal & legal matters in order to induce the child to be hurt & angry w the other parent
11. Asking the child to spy on the other parent
12. Asking the child to keep secrets from the other parent
13. Referring to the other parent by first name rather than 'mom' or 'dad'
14. Referring to a new significant other as 'mom' or 'dad'
15. Changing the child's name to remove the association w the other parent
16. Withholding information from the other parent
17. Undermining the other parent's authority

(Baker, 2020)
The 17 alienating behaviors fall into 5 main categories...

#1. ISOLATION
limiting contact & communication between the child & the targeted parent

#2. FEAR
poisonous messages to the child about the targeted parent in which he or she is portrayed as unloving, unsafe & unavailable

#3. UNDERMINING AUTHORITY
undermining the authority of the targeted parent

#4. ERASING & FALSE MEMORY IMPLANTATION
erasing & replacing the targeted parent in the heart and mind of the child

#5. ENCOURAGING BETRAYAL
encouraging the child to betray the targeted parent's trust  
(Baker, 2020)
Only children who are victims of parental alienation exhibit these specific behavioral manifestations...

1. There is a campaign of denigration against the target parent, the child becomes obsessed with hatred of him/her
2. There are weak, frivolous & absurd reasons for the rejection of the target parent
3. Lack of ambivalence towards alienating parent—one parent becomes all good while the other is all bad
4. Child strongly asserts the decision to reject the target parent is his/her "own will"
5. Absence of guilt about how target parent is treated
6. Reflexive support for the alienating parent w/no interest in hearing target parent's point of view
7. Use of borrowed scenarios and ideas adopted from the alienating parent to make accusations against target parent
8. Rejection spreads to target parent's entire family including grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.

(Baker, 2020)
The 3 Levels of Severity in Parental Alienation Are...

SEVERE  
child refuses contact b/c of a false belief parent is bad

MODERATE  
child stubbornly refuses contact but will re-engage once alienating parent is absent

MILD  
child refuses contact but enjoys it when contact is made

(Boch-Galhau, 2018)

How Severely a Child Becomes Alienated from a Target Parent is Determined By...

✓ the types of tactics used
✓ groups of tactics used together
✓ period of time over which tactics are used

(Harman et al., 2019)
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"a serious form of family violence"
(Harman, Bernet & Harman, 2019)

"caregiver child relation problem"
-WHO, 2018
ICD-11 code QE52

"psychological maltreatment"
(Baker, Asayan, & LaCheen-Baker, 2016)

"psychological abuse"
-DSM-5 of APA code V995.51

"...no longer a custody issue but a child protection issue"
(Boch-Galhau 2018)

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