

A FAMILY'S HEARTBREAK

A Parent's Introduction to Parental Alienation



Chapter Synopses

One: Normalcy

Even before the onset of alienating behavior, a person's damaged object relations cause unhealthy behavior. Object relations are how people see themselves in relationship to other people and how they define themselves and their place in the world. A child's damaged object relations are carried into adulthood. Damaged object relations indicate a potential for alienating behavior in the future.

Defining Quote – "People with unhealthy object relations are unable to maintain close, healthy, long-term relationships."

Two: The Foundation

Poor boundaries and dependency issues are the cornerstones of parental alienation. Yet parents are often unable to see these destructive elements within the context of the family dynamics.

Defining Quote – "Parental alienation does not exist when there is healthy parenting and co-parenting."

Three: The Blame Game

The alienating parent's real or perceived fear of abandonment is a key characteristic in all parental alienation families.

Defining Quote – "To keep from feeling abandoned, the alienating parent will do whatever it takes to regain control and balance in his or her life."

Four: Heartbreak

During a divorce when a child needs both parents to provide reassurance that they will continue loving him or her and meet his or her needs, one parent sends the message that the child must take care of that parent. There is generally emotional blackmail in these situations.

Defining Quote – "You saw an adult coming face to face with her darkest demons. You saw total panic, anxiety and a loss of control."

Five: Bad to Worse in 30 Days

The child is vulnerable and wants security. The alienating parent makes the child feel secure and also raises the child's status from that of a child to that of an equal - with all the privileges that go with the elevated status.

Defining Quote – "He doesn't see you as his father anymore. He had to make the distinction from the father that once was to the father who caused him and his mother all this pain."

Six: Pressure to Conform

A child's ability to resist an alienating parent's pressure to conform is directly related to his stage of development.

Defining Quote – "A child who refuses to be alienated declares his neutrality and never wavers. He has a good sense of self, good boundaries, and the ability to stay objective and emotionally distant from the chaos swirling around him."

Seven: Living with Alienation

An alienated parent must go through the same stages of denial/disbelief, anger, bargaining and grief that all emotionally healthy people go through when dealing with loss in order to reach the final stage — acceptance.

Defining Quote – "Acceptance is particularly hard for an alienated parent. A loving, caring, sensitive child is now an angry, bitter extension of the alienating parent. The love the alienated parent and child shared is gone."

Eight: Looking for Help

An alienated parent will go to any length to reconnect with his or her child. Let's face it — an alienated parent is a desperate parent. If the parent thinks a psychic and magician could help reunite the parent and child the parent would call them. In reality, an alienated parent must work within the legal and mental health systems.

Defining Quote – "Quite often an alienated parent expects psychologists to have special powers and expertise. But in reality these professionals are handicapped by a couple of factors - including the limitations of the mental health and legal systems."

Nine: Potholes on the Road to Therapy

In a parental alienation family the parents and children do not share the same therapy goals. When the alienating parent realizes the psychologist is no longer a passive participant, the alienating parent stops cooperating with the psychologist.

10: Game, Set, Match

The courts do not recognize severe alienation and emotional child abuse as a valid reason for drastic action. Most judges can't even identify emotional abuse. Even mental health professionals have a hard time identifying emotional abuse.

Defining Quote – "Judges look at parental alienation as nothing more than a domestic dispute between two angry, bitter people, who, given enough time, will eventually calm down and work things out. Unless the judge sees obvious signs of physical or sexual abuse, he or she won't take drastic action."

11: Why They Do the Things They Do

Intellectually understanding parental alienation is little consolation to an alienated parent after living it. However, professionals experienced in dealing with alienation situations provide some comfort with their explanations on why alienating parents and children do the things they do.

Defining Quote – "Intellectually understanding parental alienation gives the parent emotional distance from a very personal and painful situation. An alienating parent needs the intellectual context for what is happening in his or her life. This perspective helps the parent avoid emotional reactions."

12: Three Levels of Parental Alienation

There are different types of parental alienation. One size rarely fits all. However, most professionals focus on three distinct categories.

Defining Quote – “The high-level alienator feels such an intense level of betrayal and abandonment that his or her main mission becomes revenge and the destruction of a relationship that was loved and cherished by the other parent.”

13: The Attorneys’ Role

An alienated parent must understand each attorney’s motivation, role and responsibilities if the parent has any chance of regaining a relationship with the child. Understanding the attorneys, even the soon-to-be ex-spouse’s attorney, is the key to making good decisions.

Defining Quote – “An alienated parent wants to throw away the normal timeline for resolving divorce and child custody issues in favor of a calendar where hours become minutes, days become hours and weeks become days.”

14: How Courts Botch Parental Alienation Cases

Judges may dismiss accusations of alienating behavior as just normal posturing on the part of the litigant. In today’s courtrooms, judges are unlikely to spend the time it takes to really understand parental alienation.

Defining Quote – “Instead of holding the alienating parent and child accountable for their actions, most judges just talk tough, issue orders without consequences, and continue the case until a later date — all the while hoping that the parents will get tired of spending their money on attorney fees and reach an agreement before they’re due back in court again”

15: Solution

In the most severe cases, the judge must take custody away from the alienating parent and ban contact with the parent for as long as necessary so the child can re-establish a sound bond with the alienated parent.

Defining Quote – “The first step is to remove the child completely from the influence of the severe alienator. This is not the typical family therapy approach of, ‘How do you feel? Let’s work through your issues.’ This approach is more like, ‘This is happening. I know it is unpleasant for you and we’ll help you get through it. But that doesn’t mean the process is any less unpleasant.’”

16: Coping

Move on emotionally. Don’t concentrate on the relationship you once shared with the child. Get past the anger. Don’t beat yourself up. Alienated parents have heard it all. But how does an alienated parent cope with constant daily reminders of a relationship he or she feels was wrongfully taken away?

Defining Quote – “Alienated parents must remember that there is no correlation between being a good parent and being an alienated parent.”

17 and 18: Epilogues

Defining Quote – “One common element bonds all alienated parents together. We love our alienated children unconditionally. Our lives, our hearts and our doors are always open to them. Even after 30 years. We just hope they don’t take that long to come around.”

19: The Final Entry

Defining Quote – “He asked me to stop calling him. He didn’t yell. He didn’t curse. He didn’t threaten to call the police or beat me up. He simply asked, softly and with a tired resignation in his voice.”