

A FAMILY'S HEARTBREAK

A Parent's Introduction to Parental Alienation



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Media Fact Sheet

- WHAT:** Parental alienation is a destructive family dynamic in which one parent damages, and in some cases destroys, the healthy, loving relationship between a child and his or her other parent. The alienating parent will diminish, and often exclude, the targeted parent from the child's life through a campaign designed to destroy the previously loved Mom or Dad's position as a respected parent and responsible adult. In severe cases, the alienating parent and child form an unhealthy emotional alliance and embark on a relentless campaign of denigration against the other parent. This campaign often involves false alcohol, substance, sexual, or physical abuse allegations.
- WHY:** Unresolved psychological and emotional issues are the basis of the alienating parent's behavior. These issues may lie dormant for years, but when divorce, the ultimate adult abandonment, becomes real, the alienating parent becomes symptomatic. In this state, the parent becomes more interested in meeting his or her own unhealthy emotional needs than in the best interests of the child.
- ORIGINS:** The focus on the child during divorce and child custody proceedings has evolved dramatically over the last 30 years. It is no longer assumed that a child will live with Mom and visit Dad. Today's high divorce rate, combined with a corresponding increase in contested custody hearings, has created child custody battlegrounds in courtrooms across the country. The courtroom environment and adversarial justice system only magnifies an alienating parent's unresolved psychological issues and his or her emotional need to alienate the child from the other parent.
- COURTS:** The U.S. judicial system has traditionally paid little, if any, attention to this growing family dynamic. Parental alienation is often mistakenly dismissed as the typical rancor associated with high conflict divorce and child custody cases. Family courts that give children input into their own futures can unwittingly further inflame these situations.
- STATISTICS:** According to U.S. Census Bureau, nearly 20 million children (27%) live in single-parent homes due to divorce. With approximately one out of two marriages ending in divorce, and approximately 60% of divorcing couples having children, approximately one million children per year join the ranks of single-parent home children.
- IMPACT:** Parental alienation exists in most divorces involving children. In mild alienation, a parent's unwitting words and actions may negatively affect the child's relationship with the other parent. In severe alienation, one parent deliberately destroys a previously normal, loving and healthy parent/child relationship.