

Parental Alienation

Southern England Psychological Services

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Signs of Parental Alienation Syndrome And How to Counteract Its Effects

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Abstract

Parental alienation or its syndrome as some prefer to call it has numerous signs, chief of which begins with a question: "Why should children who were initially close to both parents suddenly seek to reject one of them?" This tends to occur following an acrimonious separation or divorce. There is a tendency to rely too much on what a child says it wants rather than looking behind the obvious remarks. They are often 'programmed' by the alienating parent and this leads to false, frivolous exaggerated criticisms against the other parent. 28 signs of alienation which are not always simultaneously apparent are presented as well as 24 suggestions for remediation.

Signs of Parental Alienation Syndrome And How to Counteract Its Effects

Introduction

What follows will be in two parts. The first part will deal with the signs of parental alienation or what one should look out for when dealing with children, alienators, and the victims of alienation. The second part will concern itself with remedies in dealing with the alienation process.

It must be understood that what the child wants is important but one must be absolutely certain that what the child wants is truly being reflected by what the child says. It must be understood that children who state that they do not want to see a parent, unless there has been proven sexual, physical or emotional abuse, that child should still strongly be encouraged to have contact with the other parent.

Children may state they do not wish to see a parent and those who deal with children in the legal profession and as psychologists and psychiatrists often feel they must listen to the child and concede that what the child wants is right for that child. This is a very wrong way of looking at things. Children often want things for themselves that are not good in the short term as well as the long term. While a major consideration when dealing with the alienation process is to do what is best for the child, we must be careful to understand that children will have reacted in a certain way after a period of alienation by one parent. This then leads to information solely on the basis of what the child feels and thinks should happen. Children who have been alienated or programmed against a parent will often state things that are untrue, exaggerated or frivolous despite having had a good earlier relationship with that parent.

The approach of the therapist in dealing with alienation cases is very different from the

psychologist or psychiatrist dealing with a variety of neuroses or psychoses. What is required is to understand that the alienating parent can be, but not necessarily, mentally ill, or evil, or both in the manner in which she deals with the child in order to seek vengeance on a parent who had been close at some point in time. What such parents fail to realise is that they are harming the child both in the short and the long term by depriving that child of a good parent merely because they are angry and wish to get back in a vengeful way against their ex partner. The child is used as a tool in this process. The alienator is not concerned for the welfare of the child but is concerned with their own desire for vengeance against the alienated individual.

Signs of Parental Alienation (PA)

A number of signs or indicators of alienation can be identified. It should be recognised that not all these signs appear in all cases, they are numerous but many will in fact apply to those who alienate children against the non-custodial parent. This unfortunately tends to be the father rather than the mother although increasingly fathers are employing such techniques against mothers also. Whoever uses alienation procedures or brainwashing to get the child to hate the other parent is clearly in the wrong and is guilty of causing harm to the child in the present and the future. There is considerable research indicating the harm that is done to children who are alienated against a parent when they are young. Increasing research has also shown that when they become adults such individuals suffer retrospectively from the damage done by an alienating parent.

What follows will be a number of signs some of which interact with other items and should be viewed not in isolation but in combination in this complex problem of the alienation process:

1. Lack of independent thinking from the child imitating the alienator's thoughts and feelings.
2. Destroying mail or even presents from the alienated parent.
3. The alienating parent tends to seek to curtail all communication between the child and the alienated parent.
4. The alienated parent is seen as the scapegoat. He or she is blamed for everything that has gone wrong with the child. There is no sense of ambivalence.
5. The child calls the alienated parent a liar and other abusive names similar to the alienating parent.
6. The child insults, shows disrespect, and humiliates the alienated parent often on front of the alienator.
7. Alienated parents are viewed as being despicable, faulty and deserving of being rejected permanently.
8. Parents who alienate children are seducing the child emotionally and will continue to do this while in control of the child, yet they deny that they are doing anything but encouraging the child to make contact with the alienated parent.
9. The child is made to feel guilty for any love shown towards the alienated parent. The child will deny any involvement with the alienated parent, fearful of what the alienator would do to him or her.
10. The child fears rejection by the programmer in case he or she wishes to say good thing about the alienated parent or wishing to be with him or her.
11. The child is owned, controlled, and indoctrinated by the alienating parent. That parent is viewed as all good, all wise, and all powerful by the child who becomes dependent, manipulated by them. There is never questioning that what the parent says or does is always right.
12. The child tends to paraphrase statements used by the alienating parent. The

words used are often untypical of words likely to be used by a child. It is very similar to a cult type of indoctrination.

13. The child suffers from paranoia (hatred) inculcated by the alienating parent who promotes attitudes, intentions, and behaviours of a negative nature to the alienated parent.
14. The child will speak about exaggerated or contrived abuse that has been experienced from the alienated parent.
15. The child or alienating parent makes statements insinuating quasi or actual sexual, emotional, and physical abuse suffered by the child.
16. The language comes indirectly from the alienator such as, "he touches me inappropriately," or "he has penetrated me," These are all borrowed scenarios from the alienating parent.
17. Children who are alienated no longer know truth from lies.
18. The child who is alienated against the parent will often be alienated against the parent's family also.
19. The alienator will also poison the child against the therapist unless the therapist supports the alienator. Hence the therapist is seen as an enemy in the same light as the alienated parent.
20. It is not what alienator says but how it is said. For example when telling a child "father would like to take you out," it can be said with joy and enthusiasm indicating positive expectations or it can be said with venom indicating negative feelings. This is what is predominantly communicated to the child rather than the verbal message.
21. The alienated child tends to see themselves in a very powerful position, especially in the severity of their antagonism shown to the alienated parent. This is all done following the programming by the alienator.
22. Female alienators will often choose female solicitors as they assume they will be able to identify with them better.
23. Female alienators are often angry due to the fact that the alienated individual ahs a new relationship, while she has not.
24. Some alienators move away from where their ex partner resides in order to make visits difficult or impossible.
25.) Sometimes the name of the child is changed to that of the alienator or the next partner to which the alienator has attached him or herself.
26. Frivolous reasons are often given for not wanting to be with the alienated parent. Even when told that if these frivolous reasons were removed the child will often claim they do not wish to be with that parent under any circumstances.
27. The child is encouraged to be with friends or play on video games in preference to being with the alienated parent.
28. A child who had a history of a good, happy and warm relationship with the now alienated parent before separation or divorce will fail to remember events in the past that made them happy. They may be suffering from amnesia of any good events due to the alienation process.

Ways to Combat Parental Alienation During Mediation and Treatment

There is no easy way to combat alienation especially if it has taken place for a long period of time and the alienated parent has had little contact with the child. One might say the

alienator has won and has the complete control of the child in this scenario. The two (the alienator and the child) then are a 'team' who work totally against the alienated parent for the purpose of humiliating and rejecting that parent from having contact with the victimised child.

Some of the methods that are recommended for dealing with the process of alienation may seem extreme but it is an extreme situation that one is facing when dealing with the overwhelming power of the alienator. Typical therapeutic methods are ineffective when dealing with such problems. Very firm approaches are required and these must be backed unequivocally by the court in order for them to have an effect in debriefing the victim of the alienation (the child). This sometimes places the therapist in a dangerous situation for he or she may be accused of being too firm in seeking to reverse the alienation effects. A combination of both reason and emotion but most of all firmness must be shown to the child to make them aware of the damage that has and is being done by continuing to live with such a negative attitude towards one parent. This is of course assuming that the alienated parent is innocent of all physical, sexual or emotional abuse.

Again there will be overlap in the suggestions made to reduce the effects of alienation:

1. Destroy the effects of denigration by one parent towards the other by making the child aware of the happy history before the acrimony and separation between the parents occurred.
2. Get the child to see the good points about the denigrated parent.
3. Be firm and proactive in changing attitudes and behaviour that have caused the parental alienation.
4. Try to get the alienating parent to cooperate in stopping the alienation. This is easier said than done, and many alienators will refuse to cooperate in this although claiming otherwise. This is even the case when it is highlighted that such actions are actually harmful to the child's development.
5. Appeal to the child's conscience that he or she is rejecting, hurting, and humiliating an innocent party who cares for that child.
6. Have the child together with the alienated parent in due course while seeking to change both attitudes and behaviour via rational emotive therapy. There is a need in this process for very firm communications.
7. Make the child aware of what a blood relative might sacrifice for that child which is not the case for strangers.
8. Warn the parent who alienates the child of the harm that they are doing to the child not just in the present time but in the future also.
9. Appeal to the child's critical thinking (intelligence and emotions) and make the child aware of the unfairness and cruelty in rejecting a loving parent.
10. Make the child aware that they need both parents without endangering the relationship with the alienating parent.
11. Make the child aware that they may lose a good parent if the process of alienation continues.
12. The child should be made aware that the extended family of the alienated parent is also being unfairly rejected.
13. Encourage the child not only to engage with the alienated parent but with the alienated parent's extended family, i.e. grandmother, grandfather, aunts, uncles, etc. This will serve to reverse the alienation process.
14. Curtail or eliminate telephone calls and other communications from the programming parent while the child is with the non-custodial parent.

15. It is important for children who have been alienated to spend as much time as is possible with the alienated parent alone so that a relationship can re-develop between them. The longer this individual contact occurs, the greater the likelihood that the alienation process will be depleted.
16. Curtail the child being used as a spy against the alienated parent.
17. In the extreme case the child should be removed from the influences of the alienating parent and be given in custody to the alienated parent or another body including a family member. This is to protect the child from further alienation.
18. Passivity and tolerance are ineffective when dealing with parental alienation. What is required is confrontation of a very powerful type in order to counteract the effects of the alienation and to reverse it.
19. The power of the court must back the mediator who is seeking to remove the alienation effects
20. The child may often need to be removed to a neutral setting such as a hospital to prevent further alienation. This is only in very extreme cases where severe psychological damage has been done to such a degree that the child suffers from delusions about the alienated parent.
21. In the case of severe alienation it is best for the alienated parents never to approach the home of the alienator but rather to use an intermediary for the transfer of contact with the child.
22. It should be remembered that the child who has been the victim of brain washing needs to know that it is safe to be with the alienated parent without this reducing their loyalty and commitment to the other parent. Hence the alienated parent should do as much as possible to reassure the child that there is no desire to separate the child from their other parent.
23. Alienated parents once they have contacted their children should concentrate on talking about the past and the happy times together supplemented with pictures or videos. Initially a child could be very offhand and even fail to have eye contact but this can be reduced through reminders of happier times in the past and how this can continue in the future.
24. Alienated parents should not give up easily but should persevere in their efforts to make and maintain contact with their child. Constant rejection from the child is likely to be humiliating and demoralising, but persistence sometimes leads to success with the help of an expert and the support of the courts.

Both aspects involved in dealing with parental alienation are important but the details are certainly incomplete as there are many other ways of dealing with alienated children as well as their parents. It is important to realise that there is a great difference between therapeutic approaches in the normal sense and those that are required with parents who are alienating a child against another parent. It can not be emphasised too strongly that without the backing of the courts the efforts of the expert involved are unlikely to be effective.

