

PA presentation for Children 4 Tomorrow October 26, 2021, by Stephen Morrison, Ph.D.

First – thanks to Children 4 Tomorrow and asking me to participate in this educational forum.

I am speaking from my own personal notes. However, I am providing some information to you that I believe will be useful as you try to expand your knowledge on PA.

Most of us are here today to expand our knowledge on parental alienation (PA), which is the destruction of the parent child relationship at the hands of usually a divorcing spouse.

Some of the following has been researched and is established accepted knowledge. Some of what follows is me theorizing as we try to build our knowledge of parental alienation.

When a divorce occurs what is it that changes?

1. The relationship between two once loving spouses is the primary location where change occurs.
2. But another location of where change occurs is between the child/children and one of the divorcing spouses. We have labeled a form of this change – parental alienation. Among us are those that state PA does not exist, I see these persons as in denial. There is so much information on PA - numerous independent reporting of similar observations.

I think that to better see the change that occurs when PA is introduced, we must look at a healthy family and the dynamics of a healthy family. Below are the traits of a healthy family that comes from the work of Delores Curran. (See her book to expand your knowledge of a healthy family)

Traits of a Health Family - Delores Curran

1. Communicates and Listens
2. **Affirms** and supports one another
3. Teaches respect for others
4. Develops a sense of trust
5. Has a sense of play and humor
6. Exhibits a sense of shared responsibility
7. Teaches a sense of right and wrong
8. Has a strong sense of family in which rituals and traditions abound
9. Has a balance of interaction among members
10. Has a shared religious core
11. Respects the privacy of others
12. Fosters family table time conversation
13. Shares leisure time
14. Admits to and seeks help with problems.

Take each of these traits and contrast it against a divorcing family in which PA has been introduced.

Dr. Richard Gardner, a psychiatrist in NY was called upon to conduct child custody evaluations. While conducting the evaluations, he observed several reoccurring patterns of behavior. He classified these behaviors into 8 groups and named the rejection of a once loved parent – Parental Alienation Syndrome.

There are those that make the claim that his publications on PAS was based on pseudoscience and ask where is the data to support his claims. Those that make this claim do not understand the Grounded Theory method of research and that all of his evaluations were what is called qualitative data. PA has been so observed by so many that it is not a theory – it is a concept.

Below are the 8 behavioral manifestations of PA. They represent the change that occurs in children who are inflicted with PA.

Eight Manifestations of Parental Alienation Syndrome (behaviors observed in the children)

These originated from the work of Dr. Richard Gardner. He has 22 peer reviewed articles and a few books on PA. Read the work of Gardner and these will be explained in more detail. Examples are given to provide clarity.

1. A Campaign of Denigration

Alienated children are consumed with hatred of the targeted parent. They deny any positive past experiences and reject all contact and communication. Parents who were once loved and valued seemingly overnight become hated and feared.

2. Weak, Frivolous, and Absurd Rationalizations

When alienated children are questioned about the reasons for their intense hostility toward the targeted parent, the explanations offered are not of the magnitude that typically would lead a child to reject a parent. These children may complain about the parent's eating habits, food preparation, or appearance. They may also make wild accusations that could not possibly be true.

3. Lack of Ambivalence About the Alienating Parent

Alienated children exhibit a lack of ambivalence about the alienating parent, demonstrating an automatic, reflexive, idealized support. That parent is perceived as perfect, while the other is perceived as wholly flawed. If an alienated child is asked to identify just one negative aspect of the alienating parent, he or she will probably draw a complete blank. This presentation contrasts with the fact that most children have mixed feelings about even the best of parents and can usually talk about each parent as having both good and bad qualities.

4. The "Independent Thinker" Phenomenon

Even though alienated children appear to be unduly influenced by the alienating parent, they will adamantly insist that the decision to reject the targeted parent is theirs alone. They deny that their feelings about the targeted parent are in any way influenced by the alienating parent and often invoke the concept of free will to describe their decision.

5. Absence of Guilt About the Treatment of the Targeted Parent

Alienated children typically appear rude, ungrateful, spiteful, and cold toward the targeted parent, and they appear to be impervious to feelings of guilt about their harsh treatment. Gratitude for gifts, favors, or child support provided by the targeted parent is nonexistent. Children with parental alienation syndrome will try to get whatever they can from that parent, declaring that it is owed to them.

6. Reflexive Support for the Alienating Parent in Parental Conflict

Intact families, as well as recently separated and long-divorced couples, will have occasion for disagreement and conflict. In all cases, the alienated child will side with the alienating parent, regardless of how absurd or baseless that parent's position may be. There is no willingness or attempt to be impartial when faced with interparental conflicts. Children with parental alienation syndrome have no interest in hearing the targeted parent's point of view. Nothing the targeted parent could do or say makes any difference to these children.

7. Presence of Borrowed Scenarios

Alienated children often make accusations toward the targeted parent that utilize phrases and ideas adopted from the alienating parent. Indications that a scenario is borrowed include the use of words or ideas that the child does not appear to understand, speaking in a scripted or robotic fashion, as well as making accusations that cannot be supported with detail.

8. Rejection of Extended Family

Finally, the hatred of the targeted parent spreads to his or her extended family. Not only is the targeted parent denigrated, despised, and avoided but so are his or her extended family. Formerly beloved grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins are suddenly and completely avoided and rejected.

What are the behaviors that cause PA. Amy Baker made a list of the behaviors. See her work for examples of the strategies, which are listed below. Examples can also be found in the work of many others.

These are the behaviors of the alienating parent.

Strategy 1: Badmouthing

Strategy 2: Limiting Contact

Strategy 3: Interfering with Communication

Strategy 4: Interfering with Symbolic Communication

Strategy 5: Withdrawal of Love

Strategy 6: Telling Child Targeted Parent Does Not Love Him or Her

Strategy 7: Forcing Child to Choose

Strategy 8: Creating the Impression that the Targeted Parent is Dangerous

Strategy 9: Confiding in Child

Strategy 10: Forcing Child to Reject Targeted Parent

Strategy 11: Asking Child to Spy on Targeted Parent

Strategy 12: Asking Child to Keep Secrets from Targeted Parent

Strategy 13: Referring to Targeted Parent by First Name

Strategy 14: Referring to a Stepparent as "Mom" or "Dad" and Encouraging Child to Do the Same

Strategy 15: Withholding Medical, Academic, and Other Important Information from Targeted Parent/

Keeping Targeted Parent's Name off of Medical, Academic, and Other Relevant Documents

Strategy 16: Changing Child's Name to Remove Association with Targeted Parent

Strategy 17: Cultivating Dependency

During the latter part of the 1990's I was first introduced to the writings of Dr. Ira Turkat and in his work, he referenced the work of Dr. Richard Gardner. Often the references contained in a paper written on any subject will provide you with many more sources of information. I began to read all about PA from articles published by mental health professionals, which were writings about their observations.

Dr. Ira Turkat authored an article called **Malicious Parent Syndrome**. He referenced the work of **Dr. Richard Gardner**.

PA is domestic violence; it includes emotional abuse which is a form of domestic violence.

I believe that we can impact the occurrence of PA through our family courts. However, the family courts are going to have to step up and address PA. In my research I found a study that took place in a Connecticut court in which the court addressed conflict occurring during the divorce. A MHP was assigned to work with each family during the divorce process.

Pruett, M. K., Insabella, G. M., & Gustafson, K., (2005). The Collaborative Divorce Project: A Court-Based

Intervention for Separating Parents with Young Children. *Family Court Review* 43, 38-51.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-1617.2005.00006.x>

Addressing Family Court – Family Law – Issues

We believe that our family court is in place to assist us as we divorce. However, the below video depicts some of the problems with our family court. Do a Google search using Divorce Industry – eye opening.

[Divorce industry worth \\$50B - YouTube](#)

Expense of the divorce process needs to be addressed. Poor people cannot afford a divorce

Resetting of cases needs to be curtailed.

Assign a MHP to assist and reduce conflict.

Enforcement of violations of the orders needs to be addressed.

Interference with custody - citations should be issued – with parties being given 10 days to appear in court to address the issue.

Children should not be a part of the divorce equation. Children should be shared and parented equally.

Divorce should only be about property settlement.

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