Children 4 Tomorrow™

Protect Children ~ Support Parents ~ Train Professionals

A Solution for the Family Courts: Seeing the Unseen Issues of PA

Stephen Lee Morrison, PhD

My Background

Employment

41+ years with the Houston Police Department
- 8 years Patrol
- 33 years as a Sergeant
  - 29 years assigned to the Robbery Division
  - 4 years assigned to Planning and Research

5+ years with Harris County Constable Pct 4 Reserves
- Captain assigned to Training

47 total years in law enforcement

Adjunct (23 years)
- Sam Houston State University
- University of Houston Downtown

My Background

Education

Ph. D., Administration of Justice, University of Southern Mississippi 12/06

Dissertation: Parental Alienation Syndrome - An Inter-rater Reliability Study – Alienating Behaviors – Related Justice System Issues

M. A., Sociology, Criminology, University of Houston Clear Lake 5/01

B. S., Law and the Citizen, University of Houston Clear Lake, 5/78

Publications

Dissertation: Parental Alienation Syndrome - An Inter-rater Reliability Study – Alienating Behaviors – Related Justice System Issues 2006

"The World Trade Center" NSULA National Journal of Criminal Justice, Volume IV, Issue 3, December 2008/January 2009 (Informative Essay)

"Parental Alienation, DSM-V, and ICD-11" The American Journal of Family Therapy, 38:2, 76-187. March 2010. (Co-author)

"Parental Alienation, DSM-V, and ICD-11" Routledge, Publishing ISBN-10 0415574854, May 15, 2010 (Contributing-author).

"Officer Involved Shootings and the Implications of Video Evidence" Major City Chiefs Association, October 2016 (Contributing-author)

Reliability of the Five-Factor Model for Determining Parental Alienation, (2021) The American Journal of Family Therapy, DOI: 10.1080/01926187.2021.2021831 Co-Author

Author of Sam Houston State University CRIJ 2368 **Criminal Investigation** Textbook 2023

Problem High-Conflict Cases

- Parental Alienation Today

- Goal - Reducing High-Conflict Cases
  - Addressing Mental Health through Divorce
  - Reduce the Conflict – MHP attached to the Court

Top 5 Most Stressful Events to Occur in Life

1. **Death of a loved one** **grief counseling – consoling**
2. **Divorce – lawyers utilized to dissolve the marriage – conflict – discord**
   - **An adversarial process - add scorn**
   - **Court – is a competitive arena - expensive – add an amicus and mediator**
   - **Since 2008 985 Children have been murdered by a divorcing/separating parent ***
   - **Since 1970 684 School shooting deaths ****
3. **Moving**
4. **Major illness or injury**
5. **Job loss**

* U.S. Child Murder & Divorce: A Snapshot – Center for Judicial Excellence

**K-12 School Shooting Statistics: 52 Years of Data - Campus Safety (campussafetymagazine.com)

Family Court Origin

1500s Early Western Civilization The Church was the primary manager of marriage and divorce. Divorce was Forbidden (Annulment)

1910 In the US, established the first domestic relations court to address support and resolution of shared assets. Legal issues. Very specific violations had to occur for the granting of a divorce. Had to prove fault.

1969 No-Fault Divorce (suicide rate dropped)

Today Family Court works under the rules of The Family Code Lawyers and Judges – apply the law, it is their area of expertise.

Members of the court are educated on legal matters - process

Not educated on mental health management

Family Court Functions

1. Division of marital assets
2. Address child custody
   - Judges
     - Elected
     - No criteria to be judge – just a lawyer
   - Lawyers – study law

Divorce is the second most stressful life event,

Why don't we have mental health practitioners to assist the court?

Discussing Parental Alienation

Schools of Thought – Criminology

Biological

Psychological

Sociological

Different Names

- Parental Alienation Syndrome
- Parental Alienation
- Attachment Based Parental Alienation
- Parental Estrangement
- Hostile Aggressive Parenting

Definition of Parental Alienation

“a mental condition in a child usually whose parents are engaged in a high-conflict separation or divorce, in which the child allies strongly with one parent and rejects a relationship with the other parent without legitimate justification” (Bernet, 2020, p.5).

Parent/Guardian

Romania - New Law – April 9, 2024

As per the definition of the law,

the parental estrangement is that form of psychological violence by which one of the parents [or other people] intentionally, through pursued or assumed actions, generates, accepts or takes advantage of a situation in which the child ends up showing unjustified or disproportionate restraint or hostility towards any of the parents;

Parental Alienation

It is an "induced" rejection of a once-loved parent

The alienating parent induces rejection via

the 17 strategies,

relocation, **(Dr. Ira Turkat and Dr. Richard Gardner)**

reporting false abuse,

requires CPS to remove the child until the investigation is complete – the goal of the alienating parent is to create separation.

Origins of PAS - Today it is PA
Opponent Augments

- Parental Alienation Syndrome – coined by Dr. Richard Gardner mid 1980s
- Some Claim PAS is Junk Science
  - Grounded Theory
- PA is not in the DSM
  - Emotional abuse is in the DSM
  - Semantics – syndrome medical def vs. academic def
  - Politics – Egos and Naming Rights

Attorney Arguments Re: Parental Alienation

The attorney argues no such thing as Parental Alienation one day in court.

The same attorney argues the next day that parental alienation does occur and is occurring.

Their position on the existence PA depends on the client they represent.

Judges have the authority to address this - intervene.

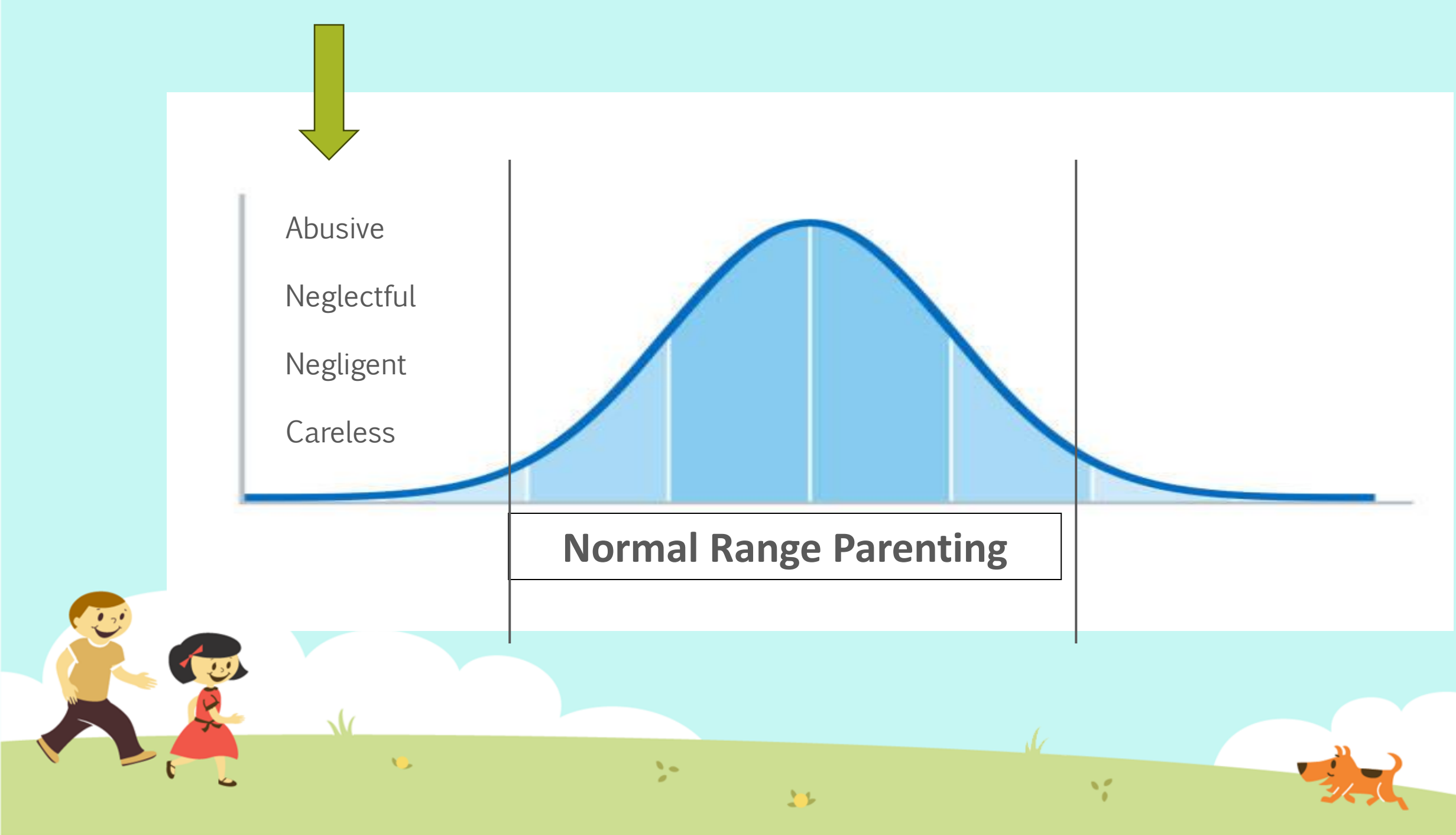
Parental Alienation Today

Childress	Gardner	
Savior	**Alienating Parent**	**17 Strategies** **Amy Baker**
		Creating an Abuse Delusion
Villain	**Target Parent**	
Victim	**Child/Children**	**8 Manifest Behaviors** **Richard Gardner**

Joins in on the abuse delusion. Folie à deux also known as shared psychosis or shared delusional disorder (SDD), is a rare psychiatric syndrome in which symptoms of a delusional belief, and sometimes hallucinations are transmitted from one individual to another.

Attachment and Family Systems Theories

Dr. Craig Childress Clinical Psychologist Attachment-Based Parental Alienation
Dr. Richard Gardner Psychiatrist Parental Alienation Syndrome
Dr. William Bernet, M.D. Dr. Amy Baker, Psychologist Parental Alienation


Abusive
Neglectful
Negligent
Careless
Normal Range Parenting

Three Diagnostic Indicators by Dr Craig Childress

1. **Attachment System Suppression**
    1. Child calls parent by first name and not dad
    2. Child rejects a normal range parent
2. **Set of five narcissistic personality traits in the child. Children are not born narcissistic – these behaviors are induced by the alienating parent.**
    1. Grandiose judging of the parent
    2. A sense of entitlement
    3. Lack of empathy for the parent
    4. Haughty and arrogant attitude towards the parent
    5. Splitting – a demonization of the parent
3. **Victimization – trauma reenactment – fixed and false belief, a delusion**
4. **Not seen in authentic child abuse**

Fingerprints of the Narcissistic Parent Are All Over the Alienated Child/We Are Not Born Narcissistic

PA is Emotional Abuse

Child

- **Attachment system suppression**
- **Creating narcissistic personality traits – Personality Disorder**
- **Psychiatric Delusion – the false belief that they are a victim**

Dr. Craig Childress

Target Parent is under ATTACK

- **Stress – parenting skills are under attack**
- **Parent/child relationship under attack**
- **Walking on eggshells**

Collaborative Divorce Project

Reporting Child Abuse

- **Texas Family Code § 261.101 mandates that any professional who suspects a case of child abuse or neglect must report the case to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) or a local law enforcement agency within 48 hours of when the professional first suspects that the child has been or may be abused or neglected. A professional may not delegate to or rely on another person to make the report. Failure to report suspected child abuse is a Class A misdemeanor subject to up to one year in jail and/or a fine of up to $4,000.**
- **Reports may be made 24/7 to the Texas Abuse Hotline at 800-252-5400 or reported online.**
- **According to the Texas Attorney General, everyone—not just professionals—must report suspected child abuse and neglect.**
- **Mental Health Practitioners, Lawyers, and Judges. Duty to report**
- **Reporting suspected child abuse and neglect is not a privacy violation or a violation of the federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)**

Guide for Reporting Abuse to CPS (texas.gov)

Psychologist on PA

- Can't treat if they don’t recognize PA, can’t see it.
  - Might cause additional MH problems – make things worse
- They must be educated on PA
  - 17 strategies and
  - 8 manifest behaviors
- Forensic interviewing skills
- Know what the “garden path” is – what the answer should be
- If they don’t know or recognize PA – they can perpetuate the abuse – they can hinder resolution.

Boundaries

- Life Boundaries
- Court Orders – not following – demonstrates noncompliance
  - Kids then are noncompliant
  - Noncompliant adults can become our incarcerated.

How Can We Determine if PA is Occurring?

Five Factor Model - Now – Baker Model

Amy Baker coined the Four Factor Model – William Bernet added one more requirement for determining PA, which became the Five Factor Model and then it was renamed the Baker Model for determining PA

"The Five-Factor Model for the Identification of Parental Alienation" Dr. William Bernet - YouTube

Five-Factor Model or Baker Model

- **Factor 1: A breach in the relationship**
- **Factor 2: A prior positive relationship between the child and the parent whom the child is currently rejecting.**
- **Factor 3: Absence of abuse or neglect or seriously deficient parenting on the part of the now rejected parent.**
- **Factor 4: Evidence that the favored parent has engaged in many of the 17 primary parental alienation strategies.**
- **Factor 5: Evidence that the child is exhibiting the 8 behavioral manifestations of alienation.**

- **Source - About Parental Alienation | My Site (amyjlbaker.com)**

Five-Factor Model or Baker Model Inter-rater Reliability Study

- Mental health practitioners (MHPs) need a reliable assessment tool for parental alienation (PA).
- A study was conducted to assess the reliability of the Five-Factor Model (FFM) asserted to test for PA. The FFM contains five criteria; Yes, responses to each of the five criteria is asserted to indicate PA is occurring. Six vignettes were presented to respondents, who provided a response for each of the five criteria.
- The Intraclass Correlation Coefficient indicated reliability with an average of 0.923 for all vignettes. Very high agreement value
- The Cronbach Alpha values indicate consistency, with an average of 0.926.
- FFM was determined to be a reliable assessment tool for PA.

Five-Factor Model or Baker Model - Global

- Thirty-seven percent of those who responded to Case 1 live outside of North America. The results support knowledge of PA as a global phenomenon. Six vignettes (cases) were presented. Demographics only apply to Case 1 and are as follows:
- 38 from the USA, 7 from Canada,
- 2 from South America, 8 from Europe, 4 from Asia, 1 from Africa
- "Are you familiar with parental alienation?"
  - Ninety-five percent or 58 said Yes, with 3 stating No.

Research on PA

The Parental Alienation Study Group webpage (PASG, 2024) maintains a database of publications related to PA.

937 qualitative publications

262 quantitative publications

#1 alienating strategy is badmouthing – how do you measure this?

- **Researchers are not able to put themselves in the observational position to measure.**
  - **Your dad didn't come to your program for school tonight – guess he doesn't care about you.**
  - **If your mom cared about you, she would have taken you to the doctor.**
  - **Your dad called and said he can't pick you up this week. (work has held him over) Guess he doesn't care about you. If I were you I would be mad at him.**
  - **Your mom is sick and going to die. God doesn't like mean people.**

- **We can see the results of badmouthing 8 manifest behaviors – Qualitative Reports**

Conducting Research on PA

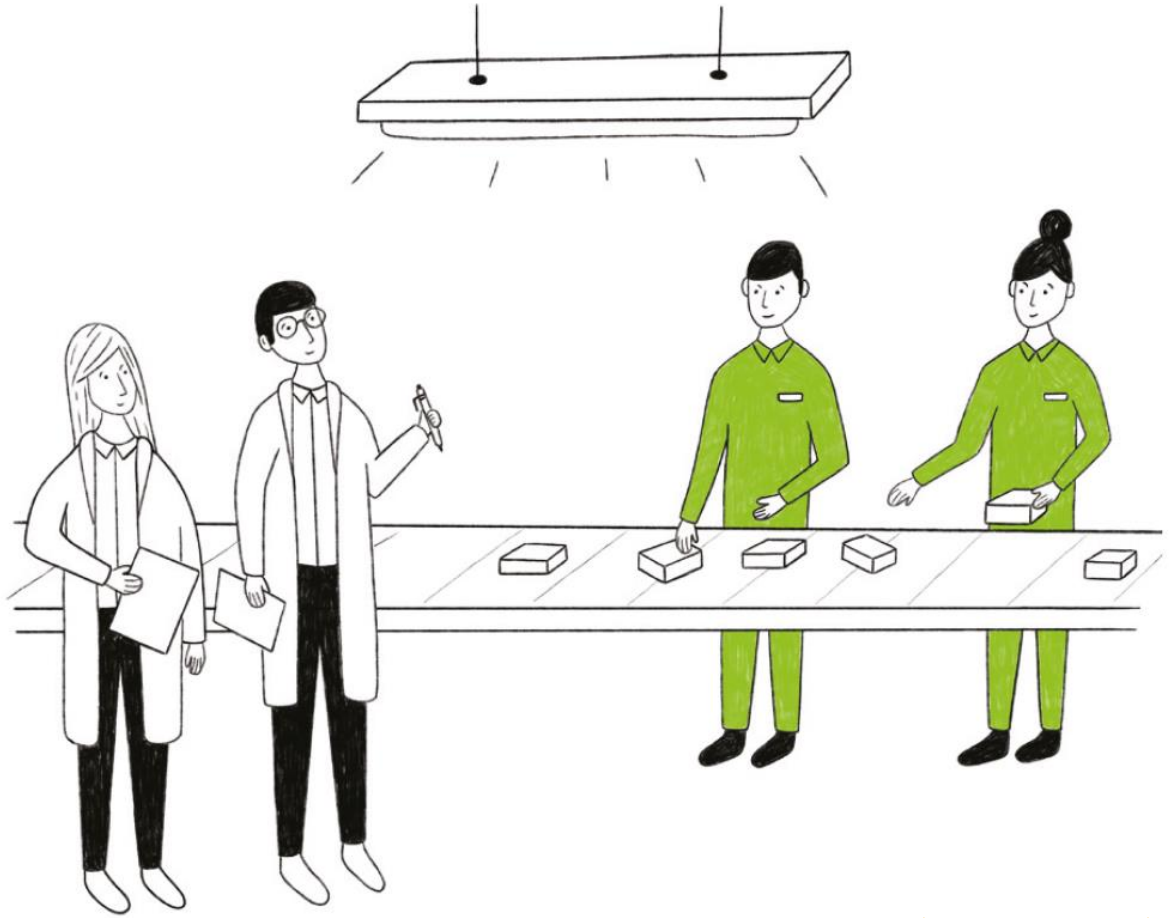
Difficult – Can't observe when it is occurring.

- Only see the results – unless the target parent can capture the moment – by video or audio

Measuring Abstracts

- Before PA occurs both parents are on a pedestal in the eyes of their children. Worshiped.
- Loyalty
- Respect
- Defiance
- Rebellious
- Affirmation

Hawthorne Effect



What is the Hawthorne Effect? – IXD@Pratt (prattsi.org)

The Collaborative Divorce Project – A court-based intervention for separating parents with young children – 2005 - Connecticut

- **The Collaborative Divorce Project was a cooperative endeavor by the Connecticut judiciary, the Court Support Services Division of the Connecticut Superior Court, and the Yale University School of Medicine.**

- **161 Divorcing families with children participated in the project**

The Collaborative Divorce Project – A court-based intervention for separating parents with young children - 2005

- **Each family was assigned two co-parenting counselors (Co-parenting team) whose role was to support positive family development by assisting parents in resolving their legal conflict. The counselors provided information and advocacy on the children's behalf, consulted on mental health and financial issues germane to the case, and helped manage the case if it got bogged down in the legal system.**
  - **One counselor was a doctoral-level private clinician specializing in young children;**
  - **the other counselor was an experienced court-based Family Services counselor.**

The Collaborative Divorce Project – A court-based intervention for separating parents with young children - 2005

- **(1) Divorce Orientation; A two-hour introduction to the legal system was offered to parents in a group meeting with a judge, attorney, mediator, and the co-parenting team (the project's parent counselor and Family Services counselor).**
- **(2) Psycho-educational Parenting Classes; The orientation was followed by "Families After Divorce," a two-session educational series with an option for higher conflict couples to meet for four additional weeks.**

(Continued on next slide)

The Collaborative Divorce Project – A court-based intervention for separating parents with young children - 2005

- **(3) Feedback Session; Following the completion of the classes, couples met privately with the parenting co-counselors to hear individualized feedback about their child's particular developmental needs given the context of their unique family situation**

- **(4) Therapeutic Resolution Sessions (mediation-focused); Mediations conducted by the co-parenting team focused on clarifying key points of controversy, helping both parents focus on the well-being of their child, and facilitating a detailed parenting plan regarding the child's residence and contact with both parents.**

The Collaborative Divorce Project – A court-based intervention for separating parents with young children - 2005

- **(5) Status/Settlement Conference; and for families who did not reach an agreement, a status conference was arranged by the Co-parenting Counselors to include both parents, their lawyers, and a judge. If the settlement was not reached and did not appear imminent at the conclusion of that meeting, additional mediation was offered to the couple.**

- **(6) Follow-up; A follow-up meeting was offered by phone or in person eighteen months after the beginning of the intervention, which averaged between nine and eleven months postdivorce for most families. The follow-up was initiated by the private Co-parenting Counselor**

The Collaborative Divorce Project – A court-based intervention for separating parents with young children – 2005

Study Results - evaluation and outcome data were collected from 161 couples, their attorneys, teachers, and court records.

1. **Positive evaluations from both parents,**

2. **Intervention families benefited through lower conflict,**

3. **Greater father involvement, and**

4. **Better outcomes for children than the control group.**

The Collaborative Divorce Project – A court-based intervention for separating parents with young children - 2005

Attorneys and court records indicate that intervention families were more cooperative

Less likely to need custody evaluations and other court-ordered services.

The CDP illustrates how prevention programs

- **Can be located within the courts,**
- **Can be systematically evaluated,**
- **Can aid in helping the legal system function optimally for families with young children.**

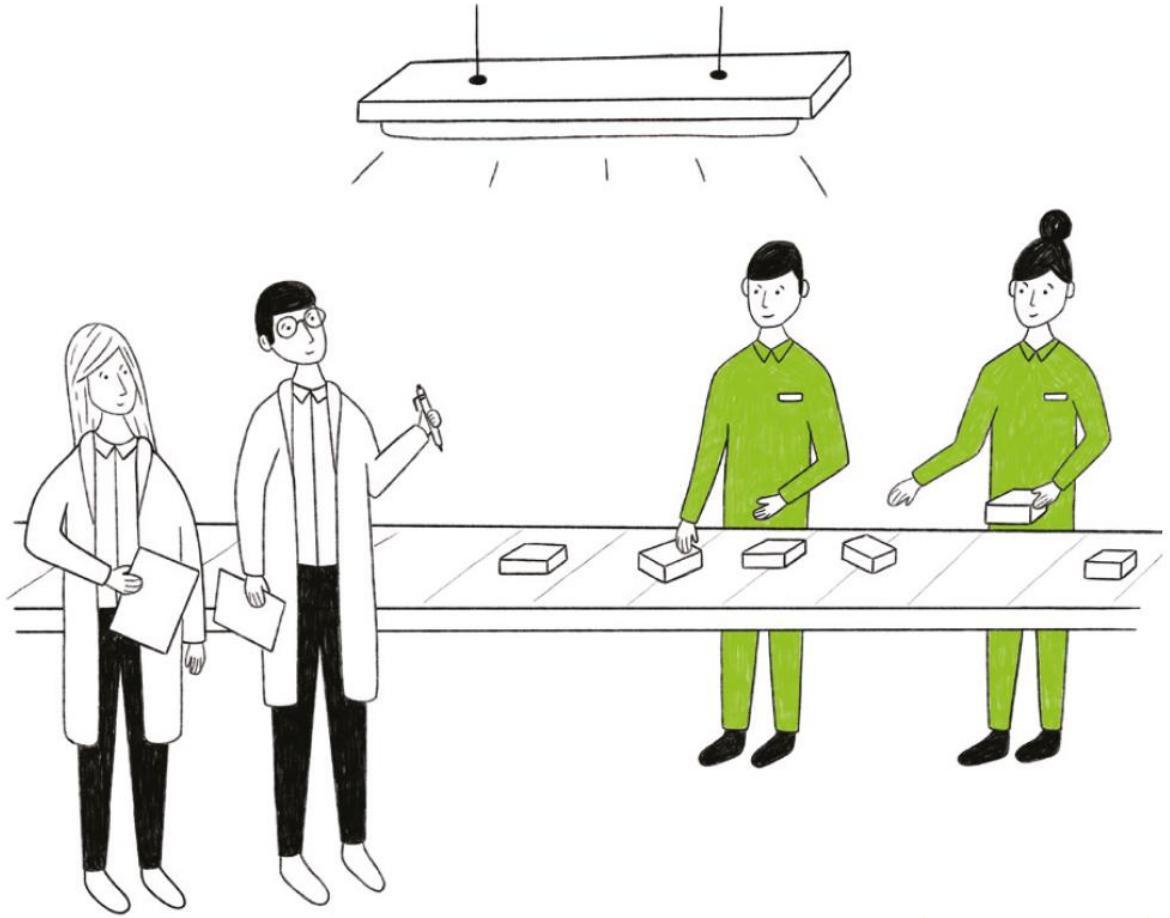
The Collaborative Divorce Project – A court-based intervention for separating parents with young children – 2005 - Connecticut

- While researchers have made significant gains over the past 25 years in understanding the reactions of and outcomes for children of divorce we have barely scratched the surface in our exploration of the role that the legal process of separation and divorce plays in affecting family outcomes.
- Almost 40 years later what has occurred to improve the process – how have we addressed the mental health issues?
- How have we addressed the education of the decision-makers?
  - Legislative members, Judges and Lawyers, MHPs

Anonymous Case

- Alienating Parent repeatedly violated the custody orders – keeping the children from the Target Parent.
- She was summoned and appeared before the judge several times for the violations.
- The judge gave the Alienating Parent 30 days in jail for contempt.
- Children 4 Tomorrow supervised Alienating Parent post-release from jail.
  - Alienating Parent now has to report to Children 4 Tomorrow
  - Alienating Parent is complying with the court orders regarding custody – he/she knows he/she is being monitored and reported to the court.

Hawthorne Effect



What is the Hawthorne Effect? – IXD@Pratt (prattsi.org)

Collaborative Divorce Today - Connecticut

- Reduce Conflict through Case Management
- Triage Each Case
  - Family Court Services – Includes Mental Health Practitioner
    - Process Videos – Training Videos Utilized
    - Create a Parenting Plan
    - "Help" Parties Reach Agreement
  - Three Tracks Pathways Approach
    - Assigned to A Track, B Track or C Track
    - **Family Counselors Utilized Throughout The Process**
    - Focuses on the Needs of Children

Collaborative Divorce Today

- A Track Cases
  - Non-Adversarial Divorce Less than 8 years and under $35K
    - Waive statutory waiting period 60 days in Texas 30 days in Connecticut
      - Unclutters the Calendar
  - Waiver of the Statutory Waiting Period (90 days)
    - For those in agreement – they may dissolve the marriage

Collaborative Divorce Today – Connecticut Family Services

Track B and Track C (Triage has determined path – case needs)

Family Services addresses concerns such as:

Child custody, child access, financial matters, property disputes, and Temporary Restraining Orders.

Alternative Dispute Resolution services, such as:

Early Intervention Program, General Case Management, Pre-trial Settlement Negotiation, Conciliation, Mediation, and Conflict Resolution Conferences,

Family Services Counselors Available Throughout Process

Utilize a Case Evaluation Docket

Collaborative Divorce Today – Connecticut Family Services

- **There are situations when parents cannot reach an agreement regarding their parenting dispute.**
- **Family Services conducts:**
  - **Issue-Focused Evaluations, Comprehensive Evaluations and Intensive Case Management Service.**
  - **Parenting plans that are focused on the best interests of the children are then recommended to the parents and the court.**

Connecticut
Family Court Services Judicial Branch

- **COURT BASED EMPLOYEES**
  - **Family Services Supervisors**
  - **Lead Family Relations Counselors ***
  - **Family Relations Counselors ***
  - **Family Intake Assistants and Support Staff**

- **Tarrant County Texas – Has family service program**

Tarrant County Texas & Harris County Texas

- **DOMESTIC RELATIONS OFFICE**
  - **FAMILY COURT SERVICES**
- **MISSION STATEMENT:**
  Family Court Services assists parents in minimizing conflict during litigation, provides tools for co-parenting after the case is resolved, and offers neutral assessment and fact-finding for the family law courts.
- **Difference**
  - **Counselors are not assigned to cases from the beginning**
  - **No Triage**

Judges and Enforcement

- **Decision Dilemma - Don't want to penalize order violations.**
  - **Sometimes hard to sort out the Villain and Savior**
    - **Who is being attacked – the target parent is – often angry**
    - **Target parent is often painted as being an unfit parent.**
  - **Educated on PA should help – should be required – Know 17 strategies**
- **It's not enforceable. Heard this on several occasions.**

(Continued)

Judges and Enforcement Texas

- Contempt is enforceable
  - $500 dollar fine or 6 months in jail
- Defer to mediation
  - Still leaves Mental Health issues unresolved
  - Allows for the continuance of Parental Alienation – Child Abuse – Emotional Abuse

Court Enforcement Officer

- For Order Violators - interference with custody
- Needs absolute knowledge of PA – 17 strategies
- Monitors for conflict - report obtained via email
- Notice given to the violator
- Second violation of interference with parenting time – The court sends out a notice to appear and answer.

(Continued)

Court Enforcement Officer

- **Appearance occurs within 30 days of the violation. Eliminate the practice of a lawyer having to file a motion for enforcement.**
  - **The judge is enforcing his orders. Initiates the enforcement action.**
  - **Judge is stopping abuse**
    - **When you're being monitored, most respond by staying within the boundaries. Most abide by the rules.**
  - **Extreme cases will likely still occur – but at a reduced rate**
    - **Require Mental Health Practitioners' intervention**
      - **Anger**
      - **Scorn**
      - **Hostilities**

Mental Health Practitioner – Assigned to Court

- **Assign a Mental Health Practitioner upon filing for divorce – especially when children are involved.**
  - **Divorce is categorized as the second most stressful life event to occur**
  - **Require parents' education**
  - **Monitors for conflict**
  - **Provide notice of order violation penalties**

One Violation

Deterrence – Written Warning

Second Occurrence

Must Appear In Court Before the Judge

Third Violation

Face Incapacitation – being locked up

Punitive action must be taken

For Interference with Parenting Time

For making false reports

Most Recent New Story

- San Antonio Texas
- March 19, 2024
- Murder Suicide 32/3 age
- Custody Battle
- Since 2008 985 Children have been murdered by a divorcing/separating parent

Educate Yourself - Some Resources

Books

YouTube

PA is Child Abuse

Need MHPs, judges and lawyers educated to recognize PA and take action to stop it.

Hawthorne Effect

When we are being watched we alter our behavior

Parental Alienation – Child Abuse – Emotional Abuse

2015 **Family Reflections: A Promising Therapeutic Program Designed to Treat Severely Alienated Children and Their Family System** Kathleen M. Reay, Ph.D.

2018 **Parental Alienation as a Form of Emotional Child Abuse: Current State of Knowledge and Future Directions for Research**, Edward Kruk, Ph.D. University of British Columbia **(Canada)**

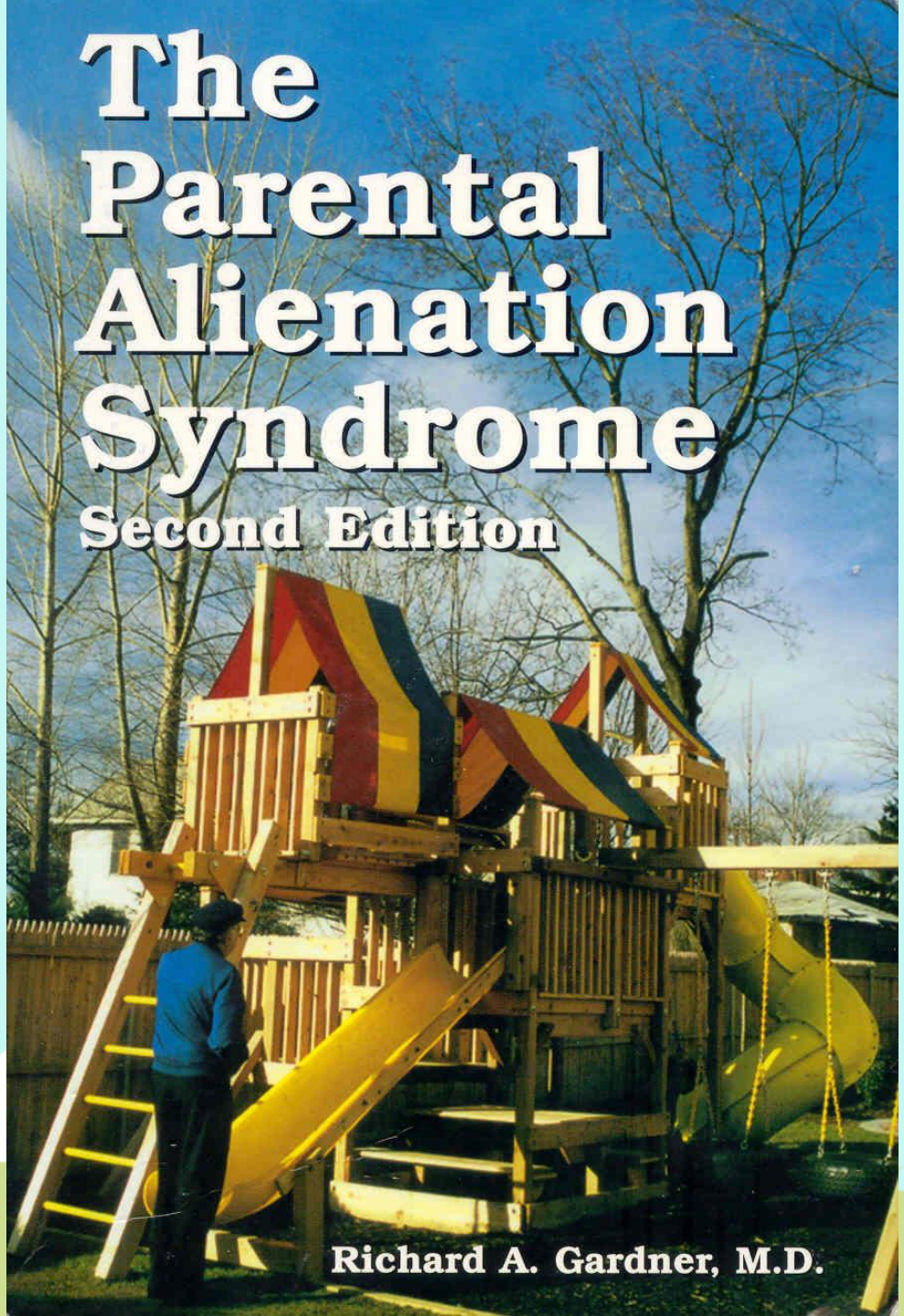
2020 **Parental Alienation: A Serious Form of Child Psychological Abuse - A Worldwide Health Problem** Wilfrid von Boch-Galhau **(Germany)**

2021 **Allegations of Family Violence in Court: How Parental Alienation Affects Judicial Outcomes** Jennifer J. Harman and Demosthenes Lorandos

2021 **Long-term emotional consequences of Parental Alienation Exposure in children of divorced parents: A systematic review** Paloma Miralles, Carmen Godoy and Maria Hildalgo **(Spain)**

2022 **The Impact of Parental Alienating Behaviours on the Mental Health of Adults Alienated in Childhood** Suzanne Verhaar, Mandy Louise Matthewson, and Caitlin Bentley **(Australia)**

2022 **Medical–Legal and Psychosocial Considerations on Parental Alienation as a Form of Child Abuse: A Brief Review** Oana-Maria Isaila and Sorin Hostiuc **(Romania) 41 References**


The Parental Alienation Syndrome
Second Edition
Richard A. Gardner, M.D.

"Dr. Darnall does a brilliant job of diagnosing the dynamics of this problem. A great resource…"

—Dr. Archibald D. Hart
author of *Helping Children Survive Divorce*

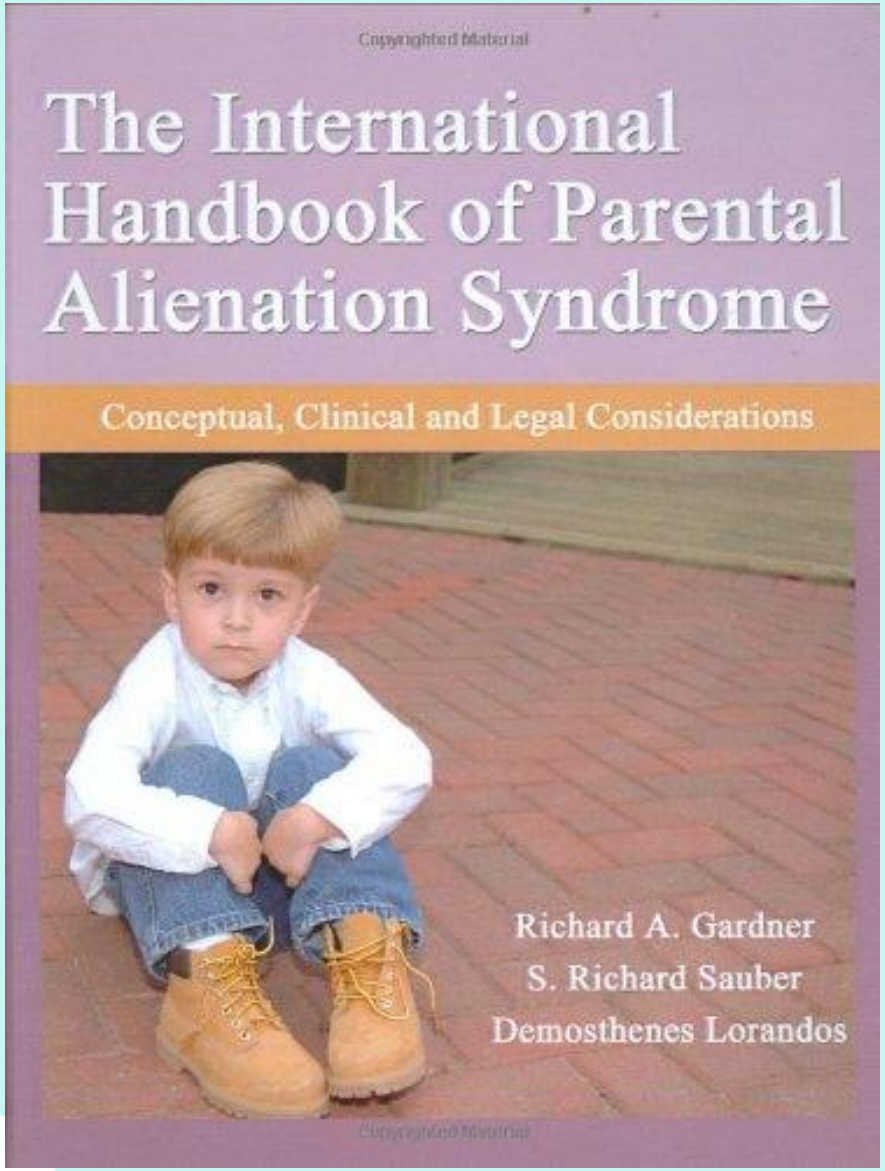
Divorce Casualties

Protecting Your Children from Parental Alienation

"*Parental alienation* is long overdue as a term and a concept to be understood by all divorcing parents and the professionals involved. Children have a right to a loving relationship with both parents, and this book teaches us all how to ensure that this basic need is met."

—Charlene C. Giannetti and Margaret Sagarese
authors of *The Roller-Coaster Years: Raising Your Child Through the Maddening Yet Magical Middle School Years*

Douglas Darnall, Ph.D.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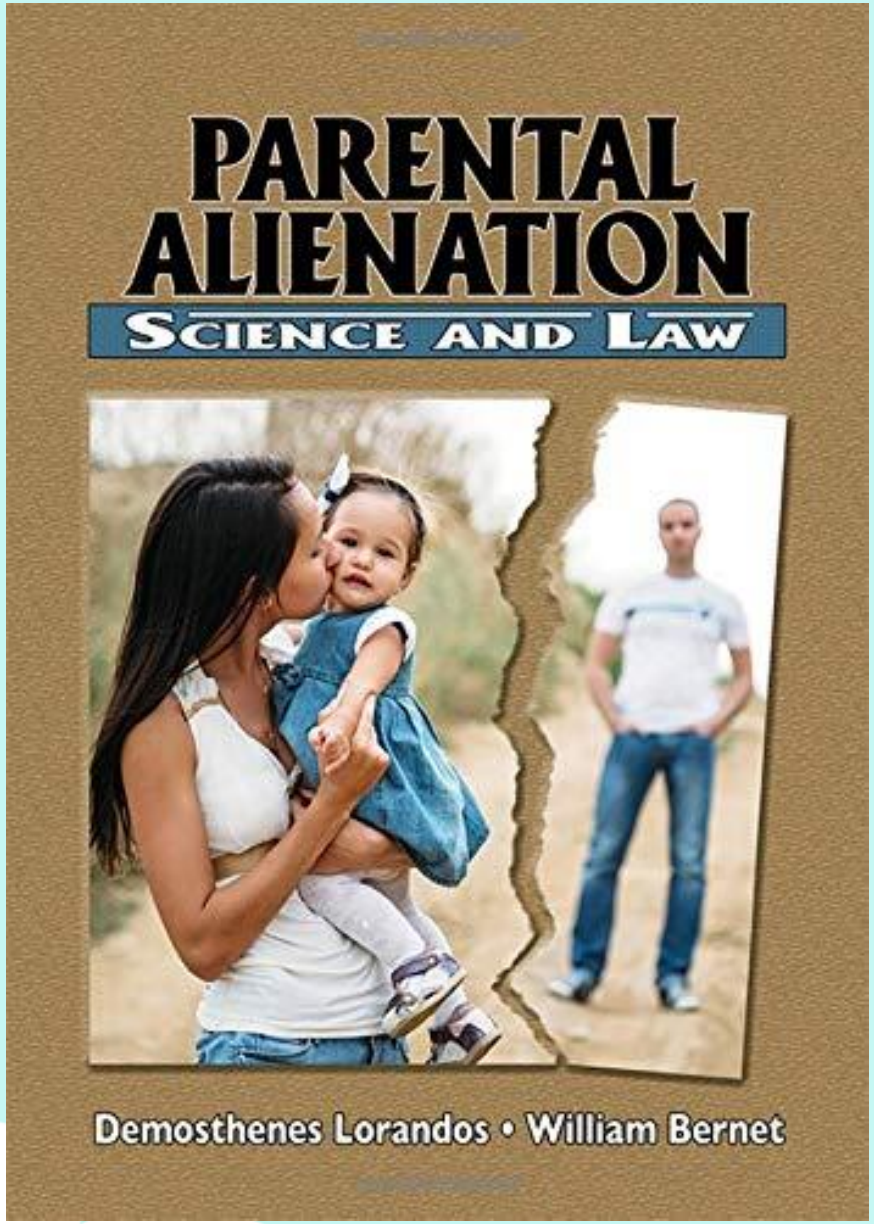
The International Handbook of Parental Alienation Syndrome
Conceptual, Clinical and Legal Considerations
Richard A. Gardner
S. Richard Sauber
Demosthenes Lorandos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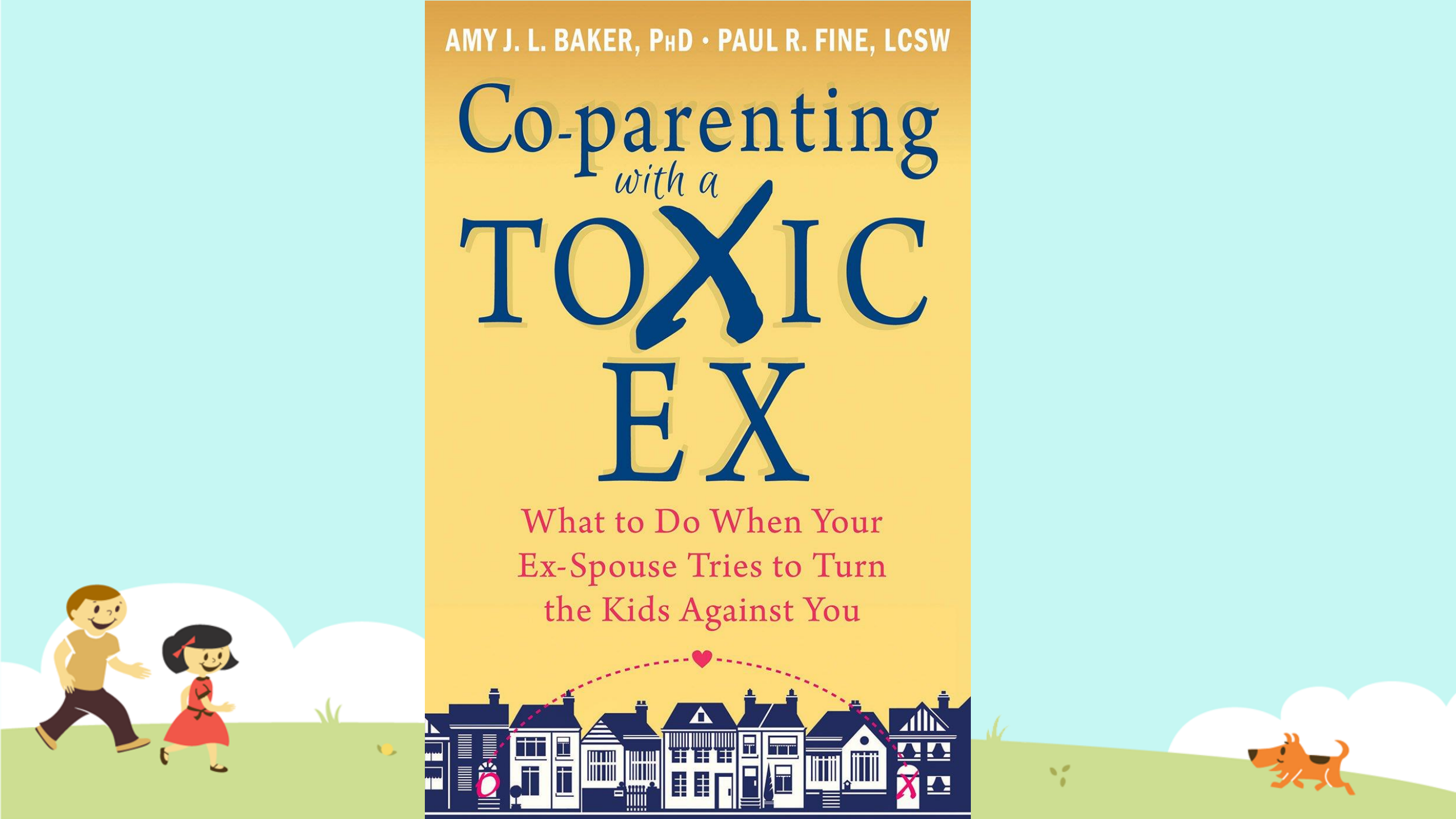
SCIENCE AND LAW
Demosthenes Lorandos • William Bernet


AMY J. L. BAKER, PhD • PAUL R. FINE, LCSW
Co-parenting
with a
TOXIC
EX
What to Do When Your
Ex-Spouse Tries to Turn
the Kids Against You

Amy J. L. Baker
and Paul R. Fine

Surviving Parental Alienation

a journey of hope and healing

An Attachment-Based

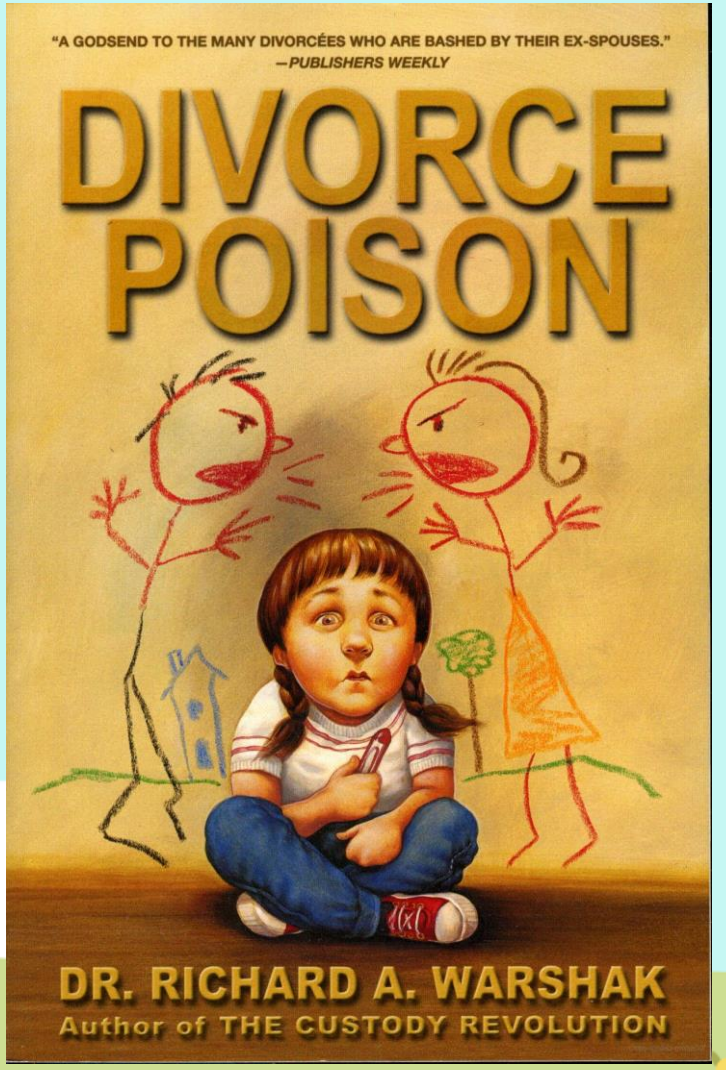
Model of Parental Alienation

C. A. CHILDRESS, Psy.D.

Foundations

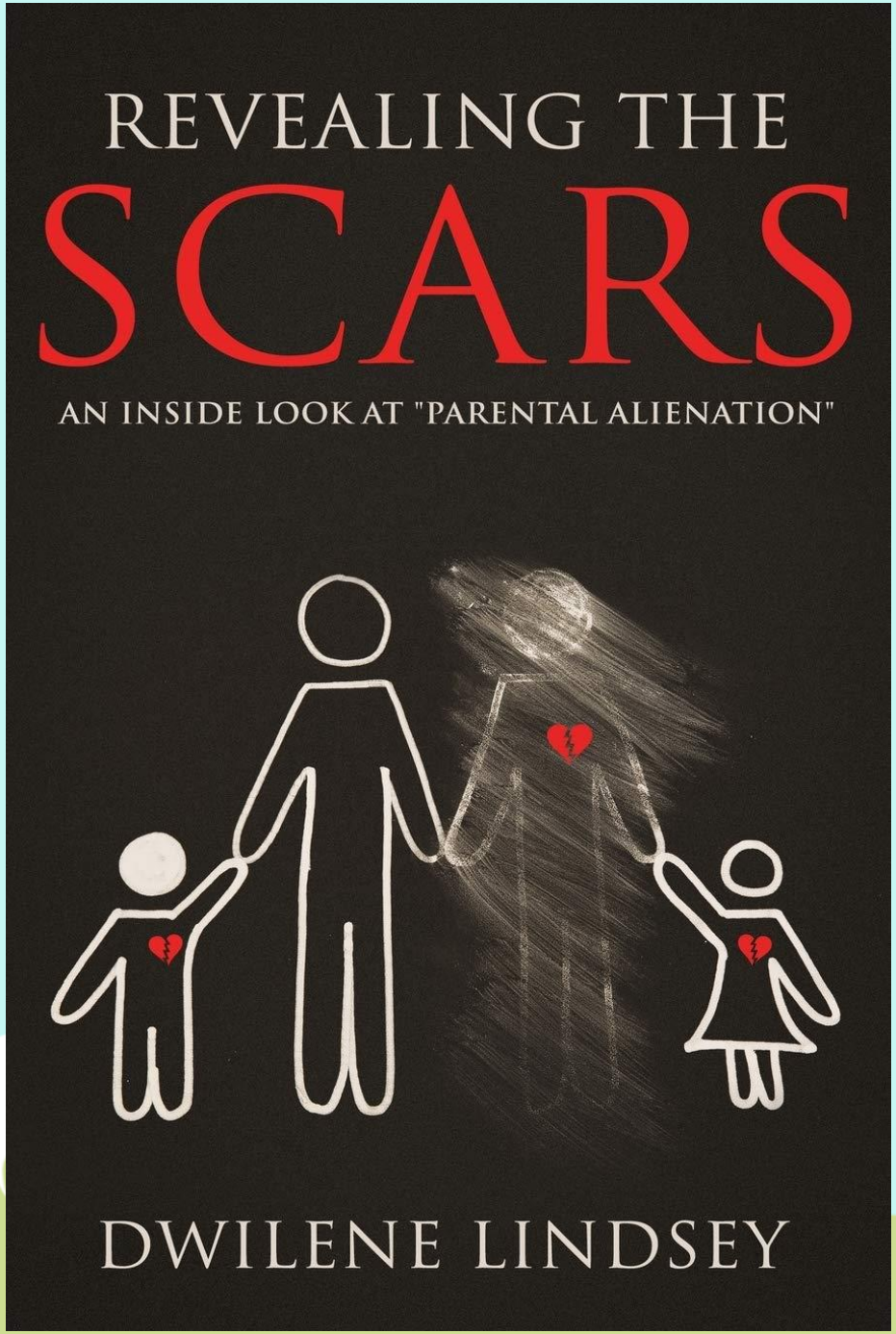
Divorce Poison

by Dr. Richard Warshack



Stop the flow of Poison

- **Address the Alienating Parent**
  - **You're not ending the parent child relationship.**
  - **90 day disconnect to allow for healing (mental health)**
- **Make sure that the mental health professional knows PA**
- **Make sure you know PA**



Cut out the Cancer

Friday, November 1, 2019

11-year-old Parrish Auzenne, 9-year-old Eleanor Auzenne, and 7-year-old Lincoln Auzenne

Source Texas mother kills 3 children, herself in murder-suicide after divorce finalized - ABC7 Los Angeles

Every 6 days a child dies amid custody disputes

Solutions

- **Mental Health Practitioners - Make them a part of the divorce process – belong to the family court**
- **Informative video training for all litigants**
- **Certify MHPs, Lawyers, and Judges on PA**
- **Address the violators of the court orders – custody interference**

Thanks

Questions

Contact Information

smorrisontx@aol.com

Add a Slide Title - 4