



**RESEARCH AND RESOURCES**  
**FOR LEGAL AND MENTAL HEALTH PRACTITIONERS**

**Parent-Child Trauma, Coerced Attachment  
and Alienation**

“Let’s hope this is the beginning of it... this is the beginning of us,  
as a society starting to realise... that no matter what happens  
between parents, that children are not weapons that can be used  
against the other.”

(Adult alienated in childhood - Verhaar et al., 2022).

To learn more,  
visit the **Eeny Meeny Miney Mo Foundation**  
[www.emmm.org.au](http://www.emmm.org.au)

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Founder of Eeny Meeny Miney Mo Foundation

## **RECOMMENDED BOOKS**

### **Understanding and Managing Parental Alienation. A Guide to Assessment and Intervention.** J. Haines, M. Matthewson & Judge Marcus Turnbull (2020) **Australia**

In *Understanding and Managing Parental Alienation: A Guide to Assessment and Intervention*, Janet Haines, Mandy Matthewson and Marcus Turnbull offer a comprehensive analysis of contemporary understanding of parental alienation. Grounded in recent scientific advances, this is the first book of its kind providing resources on how to identify parental alienation and a guide to evidence-based intervention.

Parental alienation is a process in which one parent manipulates their child to negatively perceive and reject the other parent. Recognising this phenomenon and knowing when to intervene is often the biggest challenge faced by practitioners and this book provides a guide to this process. Divided into six parts, it examines what parental alienation is and how it is caused, how it affects each family member as a mental health concern and form of violence, and how to assess, identify and intervene successfully from a legal and therapy standpoint. Taking on a gender-neutral approach, the book is filled with contemporary case examples from male and female perspectives, cutting-edge research, practitioner-client dialogues, and practitioners' reflections to show the difficult realities of parental alienation.

Practical and accessible, this is an essential resource for mental health professionals working with families experiencing parental alienation, as well as postgraduate students of clinical psychology, counselling, family therapy, social work, and child and family psychology. This book will also be of immense interest to family lawyers and mediators due to its multidisciplinary approach.

### **Litigating Parental Alienation: Evaluating & Presenting an Effective Case in Court.** A. Joshi (2021)

There is no doubt that parental alienation exists and that U.S. courts have acknowledged the concept, although the theory can sometimes be misused. This practitioner's manual provides an overview of the concept of parental alienation and explains how to correctly handle it in court. "Hands-on" practice pointers and sample materials on litigating parental alienation make this an essential resource for the family lawyer.

### **Parental Alienation - Science and Law.** D. Lorandos & W. Bernet (2020)

*Parental Alienation – Science and Law* explains the research that creates the foundation for the assessment, identification, and intervention in cases of parental alienation (PA). For attorneys, judges, and family law professionals, this book explains in detail the scientific basis for testimony and legal decisions that relate to PA. There are two complementary features for most of the chapters. First, the chapter authors address how evidence regarding PA meets the criteria of the Frye, Daubert, and Mohan cases as well as the Federal Rules of Evidence for testimony by experts. The second feature is to refute common misinformation. There is debate and disagreement about some aspects of PA theory. The editors of this book are concerned that some of the discourse regarding PA has spun out of control, into pervasive misinformation. This book provides plenty of evidence for overcoming that hurdle. The editors of this book and the chapter authors have extensive experience with both clinical and legal aspects of divorce, child custody, parenting time evaluations, PA, and related topics. The editors and chapter authors include six psychologists, three physicians, two social workers, four attorneys, and one judge. Collectively, these mental health professionals have testified as expert witnesses hundreds of times regarding family law topics. As an additional feature, the book contains four appendices and three indexes. Appendix A defines the concepts used in this book, so that the chapter authors and readers will use terminology in a consistent manner. Appendix B lists more than one thousand trial and appellate cases in the U.S. involving PA, organized by state. Appendix C presents twenty rather dramatic vignettes involving PA. Finally, Appendix D, "Sample Motion and Brief for Extended Voir Dire," provides a motion and supporting brief asking the court to allow extended time to examine the competency of a proposed expert.

## **Parental Alienation: An Evidence-Based Approach.** D. McCartan (2022).

This book provides a comprehensive overview of established evidence-based interventions for the problems inherent in parental alienation. The book focuses on helping families and ensuring the needs of the child are met. Increasing attention has been given to the subject of parental alienation in recent years, as divorce rates have increased and more children are being brought up in the context of ongoing parental conflict, risking significant emotional harm. Chapters point to the application of numerous evidence-based interventions that are already available and detail how to identify, assess and intervene effectively with families where parental alienation has been identified. This text will be of interest to those working in the family courts, particularly expert witnesses, clinical psychologists, therapists, social workers, guardians and other legal professionals, in addition to researchers with an interest in parental alienation.

## **The Litigator's Handbook of Forensic Medicine, Psychiatry and Psychology.**

Demosthenes Lorandos. (2023) **43 contributors from five countries.** Forensic medicine, psychiatry and psychology.

The Litigator's Handbook of Forensic Medicine, Psychiatry, and Psychology is a comprehensive resource tailored for litigators and experts who handle expert evidence in forensic medicine, psychiatry and psychology.

## **Post Graduate Certificates in Parental Alienation Studies**

- <https://parentalalienation.eu/post-graduate-award-in-parental-alienation-studies/>
- <https://ift-malta.com/courses/>

## **Spectrum: Specialising in Personality Disorder and Complex Trauma**

Website: <https://www.spectrumbpd.com.au/>

Research: <https://www.spectrumbpd.com.au/research/journal-articles>

Education and Training: <https://www.spectrumbpd.com.au/events>

Carers (Family and Friends): <https://www.spectrumbpd.com.au/information-resources/information-for-families-friends-carers>

Eventbrite (to Follow) <https://www.eventbrite.com.au/o/spectrum-personality-disorder-and-complex-trauma-12815647934>

## **Australian BPD Foundation**

<https://bpdfoundation.org.au/resources.php>

Nearly 40% of the Parental Alienation literature has been published since 2016.

Parental Alienation research has moved beyond an early stage of scientific development and has produced a scientifically trustworthy knowledge base.

The current state of Parental Alienation scholarship meets three criteria of a maturing field of scientific inquiry: an expanding literature, a shift toward quantitative studies, and a growing body of research that tests theory-generated hypotheses ([Harman et al., 2022](#)).

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- Exposing Woozles: The Detractors & Deniers of Parental Alienation. Do Not Fall for The Straw Man Fallacy <https://emmm.org.au/emmm-newsletter/f/exposing-woozles-the-detractors-deniers-of-parental-alienation>
- Through the eyes of Alienated Children <https://emmm.org.au/emmm-newsletter/f/through-the-eyes-of-alienated-children>
- Is the Family Court Gaslighting Families <https://amandasillars.com/blog/f/is-the-family-court-system-gaslighting-parents>
- Parental manipulation: Turning a child against the loved one <https://amandasillars.com/blog/f/parental-manipulation-turning-a-child-against-a-loved-one>



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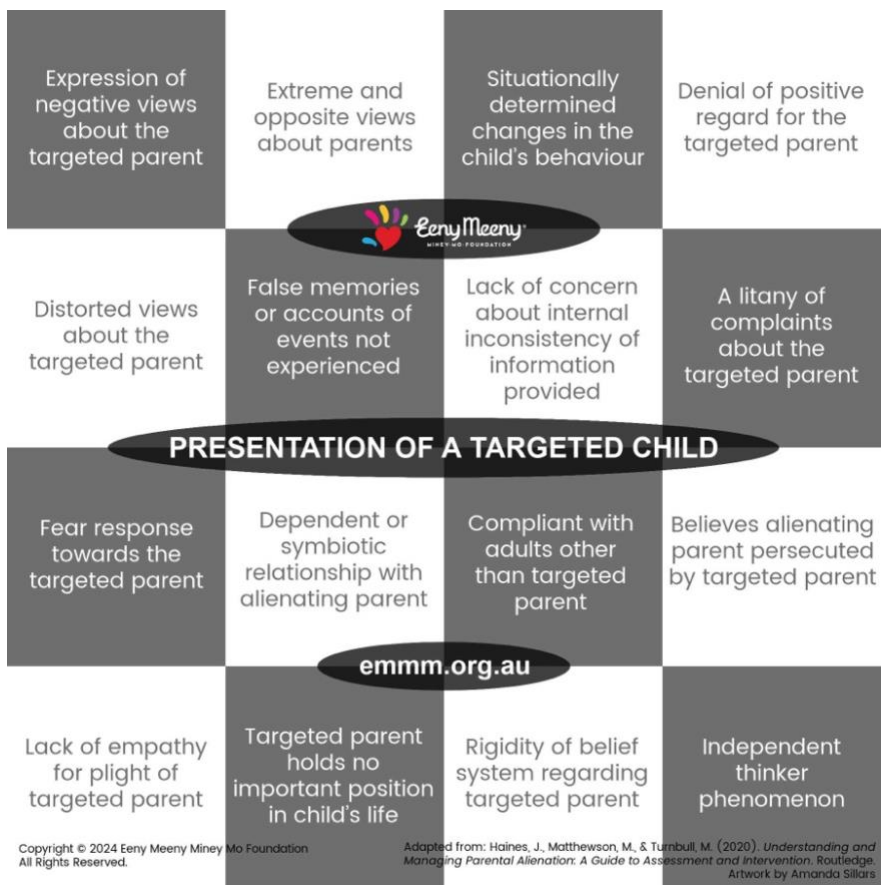
**Children Affected by Parent-Child Trauma, Coerced Attachment & Alienation**

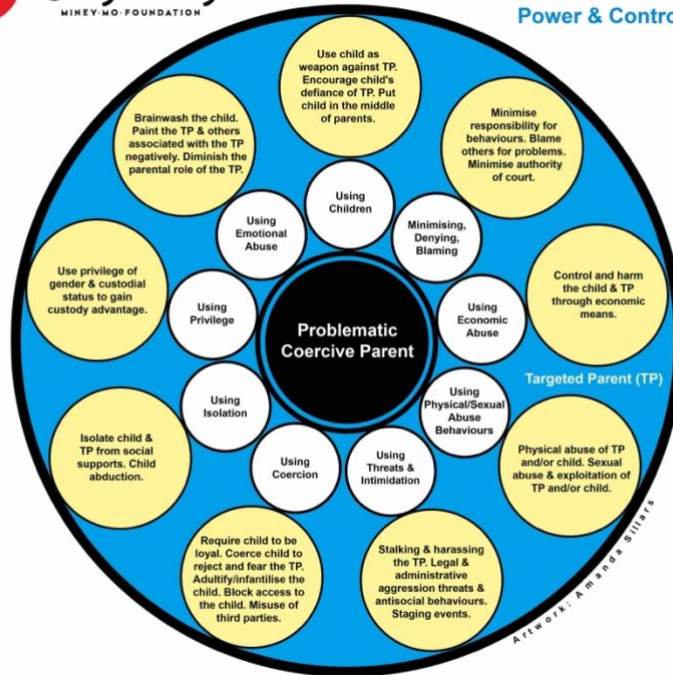
expression of negative views about the targeted parent (+/- extended family)	distorted views about the targeted parent (+/- extended family)	false memories or accounts of events not experienced	dependent or symbiotic relationship with preferred parent	targeted parent holds no important position in child's life (+/- extended family)
situationally determined changes in the child's behaviour	lack of concern about internal inconsistency of information provided	a litany of complaints about the targeted parent (+/- extended family)	believes preferred parent is persecuted by the targeted parent (+/- extended family)	rigidity of belief system regarding targeted parent (+/- extended family)
denial of positive regard for the targeted parent (+/- extended family)	adapted narrative adoption (claiming or owning a negative perspective that mirrors the preferred parent's narrative.)	fear response towards the targeted parent, in the absence of danger (+/- extended family)		entitled attitude towards targeted parent (+/- extended family)
extreme and opposite views about parents (+/- extended family)	lack of empathy for plight of targeted parent (+/- extended family)	compliant with adults other than targeted parent (+/- extended family)	unwarranted disdain for the targeted parent (+/- extended family)	borrowed language from the preferred parent
				child anxiously checks phone (to remain compliant with primary parent)

disrupted social-emotional development	obsessive-compulsive tendencies	anger	ambiguous loss		
attachment disorders	maladaptive coping	loneliness	emotional dysregulation	isolation	cognitive dissonance (eg. memories vs. narrative)
corruption of memory and perception	cognitive distortions	guilt and obligation	depression	somatic symptoms	trauma related disorders (eg. BPD, PTSD, complex PTSD)
paranoid thinking	low self-esteem	fear and anxiety	toxic stress	suicide ideation and suicide	loss of self and identity
conflicted thoughts and feelings (eg. love vs. hate)	eating disorders	resentment	learned helplessness	substance related problems	loyalty bind
	self-harm	shame	disfranchised grief	trauma bond and dependence	interpersonal problems
					abandonment and trust issues
					intergenerational transmission
					family violence and abuse (children can go on to be in abusive relationships meaning their partners are abusive)

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 Disclaimer: This Iceberg is a general illustration, not a diagnostic tool, and may not reflect all cases.  
 Artwork by Amanda Sillars BPsychSc  
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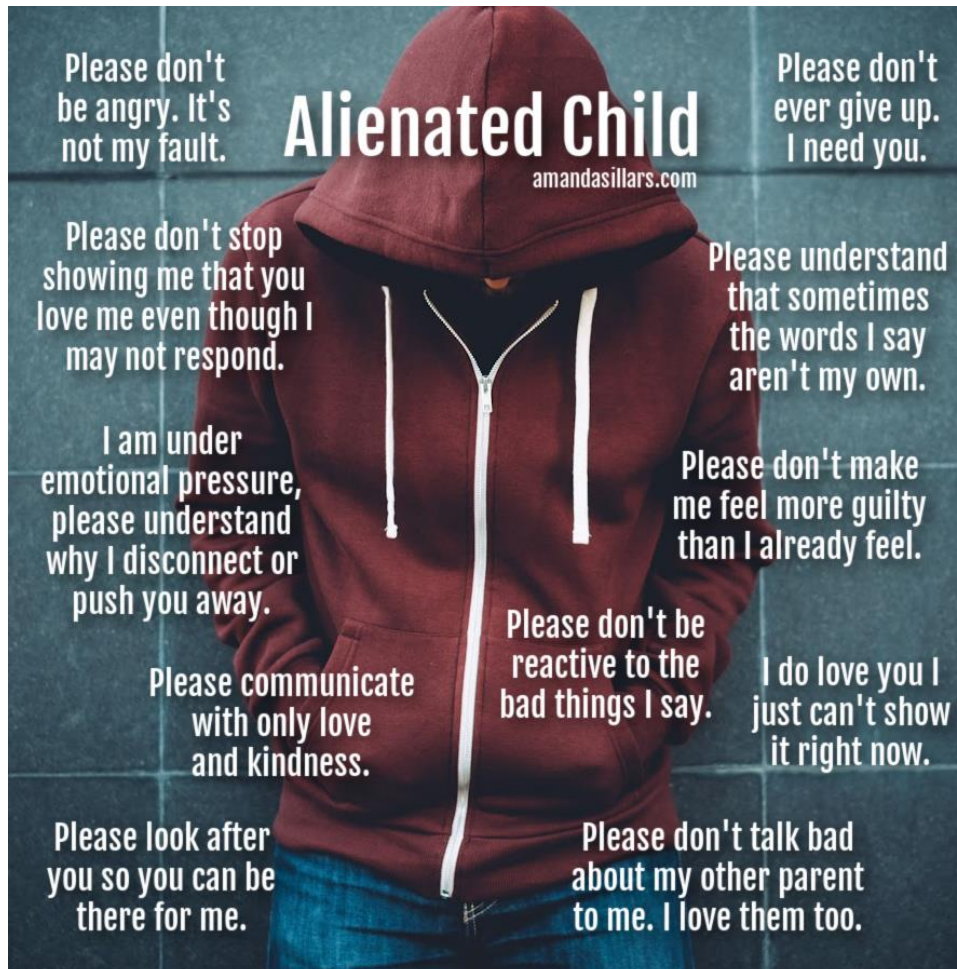




Adapted from:  
Harman, J. J., & Matthewson, M. (2020). Parental alienating behaviors. In D. Lorant and W. Bernet (Eds.),  
Parental Alienation - Science and Law, pp. 82-141. Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas Publisher.

**Losses Experienced by Children Alienated from a Parent**





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## Comparative Analysis: Attachment Bonds, Trauma Bonds, Protective Parents and Alienating Parents

Criteria	Attachment Bond	Trauma Bond	Protective Parent	Alienating Parent
<b>Emotional Connection</b>	Strong, Secure Fosters Trust and Comfort	Mixed, Conflicted Emotions Due to Abusive Distressing Experiences	Supportive of Healthy Emotional Bonds	Undermines Emotional Bonds and Causes Confusion
<b>Child's Well-being</b>	Promotes the Child's Well-being and Security.	May Compromise the Child's Well-being and Stability	Prioritises the Child's Safety and Emotional Stability	Disregards the Child's Well-being. Prioritises Own Agenda and Themselves Over Child's Needs
<b>Relationship Dynamics</b>	Nurturing and Supportive	Abusive and Manipulative	Fosters Healthy Relationships between Child and Both Parents (+ extended family)	Undermines the Relationship with Other Parent (+/- extended family)
<b>Behaviour Towards Child</b>	Encourages Healthy Interaction and Attachment	Conflicted Responses and Potential Dependency	Supports the Child's Relationships with Both Parents	Undermines the Child's Relationship with Other Parent
<b>Impact on Child</b>	Positive Impact, Encourages Growth and Development	Confusing, May Lead to Emotional Dependency	Positive Impact, Encourages Healthy Family Dynamics	Negative Impact, Hinders Emotional Growth and Stability
<b>Impact on Development</b>	Encourages Independence and Healthy Attachment	Mixed Emotions, Potential for Attachment Issues	Encourages Bonding with Both Parents	Hinders Healthy Bonding and Emotional Stability

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## Schools and Children's Relationships with Parents: Understanding Coercion and Forced Alignment



This guide explores how school practices impact children's relationships with separated parents in challenging family situations, focusing on unequal treatment, coercive alignment, and disregard for legal decisions.



### Unequal Information Sharing

Schools may unintentionally or intentionally provide information to one parent while excluding the other.

This can manifest as:



**School Reports:** One parent receives regular updates; the other does not.

**Communication about School Events:** One parent is informed about school trips, performances, and meetings; the other is not.

**Access to Online Portals:** One parent has full access to online systems and communication tools; the other is excluded.

**When it Happens:** Often when there is a history of conflict, one parent actively restricts the other's involvement, or the school inadvertently defaults to communicating primarily with one parent.

### Disregarding Legal Decisions

Schools may fail to acknowledge and comply with court orders regarding parental access, communication, or decision-making.

This can include:

**Ignoring Custody Arrangements:** Ignoring or undermining court-ordered custody or visitation schedules.

**Disregarding Communication Orders:** Failing to facilitate communication as directed by a court order.

**Non-Compliance with Parental Agreements:** Neglecting to respect agreed arrangements concerning school involvement.

**When it Happens:** When there is a lack of understanding of legal requirements or when one parent attempts to circumvent the legal process.

### Promoting Open Communication

Schools should prioritise clear, consistent, and equitable communication with both parents, ensuring:

**Regular Updates:** Providing both parents with regular updates on the child's progress.

**Open Dialogue:** Encouraging open and collaborative communication.

**Written Correspondence:** Maintaining written records of all communications.

**When to Implement:** At all times, especially when concerns arise.

### A Child's Emotional and Psychological Well-Being Must be Paramount

Prioritising a child's well-being requires a proactive approach. Schools must equip staff to identify signs of coercion and forced alignment, enabling timely referrals to mental health professionals where necessary. Creating a safe and supportive school environment is crucial for all children, particularly those navigating challenging family situations.



### Coerced Attachment and Forced Choices

Children might be subtly or overtly pressured to favour one parent over the other.

Examples include:

**Implicit Bias:** School staff unconsciously favouring one parent's perspective.

**Open Favouritism:** Staff explicitly showing preference for one parent.

**Children's Statements Taken at Face Value:** Accepting a child's negative statements about one parent without further investigation.

**Activities and Events:** Children are only encouraged to participate in events with one parent.

**Name Changes:** Schools sometimes allow or facilitate name changes reflecting only one parent's preference.

**When it Happens:** Frequently in high-conflict situations, particularly when allegations of abuse or neglect exist (requiring thorough investigation), or when one parent actively alienates the child from the other.

### The Need for Professional Development

Comprehensive and ongoing professional development for school staff is essential for effectively managing challenging family situations and supporting children's well-being and positive relationships with both parents.

### Maintaining Neutrality

Schools should remain impartial in parental disputes, avoiding taking sides:

**Objective Observations:** Documenting observations objectively, without bias.

**Balanced Interactions:** Treating both parents with equal respect and professionalism.

**Respecting Legal Processes:** Following court orders and legal processes diligently.

**When to Implement:** At all times, in all interactions.



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## Alienating Behaviours in Schools: Identifying Problematic Parental Interactions



This guide identifies key behaviours alienating parents may use within the school environment to undermine the other parent's relationship with their child. Recognising these patterns can help mitigate their impact and support children's well-being.

### Manipulating Information & Communication



**Withholding Information:** Failing to inform the school of the other parent's contact details, address, or other relevant information. This prevents the school from easily contacting the other parent about the child.

**Providing False Information:** Deliberately providing inaccurate or misleading information about the other parent's involvement in the child's life (e.g., claiming the other parent is absent, neglecting the child, or a danger to the child).

**Controlling Communication:** Insisting on being the sole point of contact for all school communications, thus preventing the other parent from receiving crucial information about their child's progress, school activities, and well-being.

**Interfering with Communication:** Intercepting and manipulating communication between the school and the other parent (e.g., deleting emails, intercepting phone calls).

**Misrepresenting School Events:** Presenting a distorted picture of school events to the child, emphasizing positive interactions with the alienating parent while downplaying or ignoring involvement with the other parent.

**Fabricating Incidents:** Making false allegations about the other parent's behaviour towards the child or school staff, creating a negative perception of that parent.

**Selective Disclosure of Information:** Sharing only positive aspects of their own involvement with the child and only negative aspects of the other parent's relationship with the child.

### Manipulating the Child

**Coaching the Child:** Directly instructing the child to lie or provide false information about the other parent to school staff.

**Pressuring the Child:** Putting pressure on the child to align solely with the alienating parent and distance themselves from the other parent (e.g., through emotional manipulation or threats of love withdrawal).

**Creating a False Narrative:** Using the child to relay false or exaggerated accounts of the other parent's behaviour to school staff.



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### Manipulating School Procedures and Processes



**Forging Documents:** Creating false or altered documents (e.g., forged enrolment forms, medical records, or permission slips) to exclude the other parent from the child's schooling or school activities.

**Exploiting School Policies:** Taking advantage of school policies or procedures (e.g., flexible attendance, flexible pick-up/drop-off) to restrict the other parent's access to their child or to undermine their authority.

**Misusing Emergency Contact Information:** Providing only their own contact details as the emergency contact, ignoring court orders or other agreements that dictate both parents should be listed.

**Obstructing Access to Records:** Preventing the other parent from accessing their child's school records, reports, or other relevant documentation.

**Creating Barriers to Involvement:** Making it difficult or impossible for the other parent to participate in school events, meetings, or parent-teacher conferences.

**False Accusations of Abandonment:** Making false claims to the school that the other parent has abandoned the child, thereby attempting to limit the other parent's rights and involvement.

### Using External Influences

**Seeking Support from School Staff:** Gaining the support of particular staff members by selectively sharing information, thereby building a bias against the other parent.

**Involving External Authorities:** Involving external authorities (e.g., Child Protection Services, police) with unsubstantiated allegations against the other parent to further restrict their involvement in the child's life.

### Influencing Other Parents

**Targeted Social Isolation:** Spreading negative information about the other parent to other parents, creating social isolation for them.

**Coalition Building:** Forming alliances against the other parent to limit their involvement.

### Problematic Parent Works at the School

**Power Abuse:** Misusing position to access information, influence policies, or create an unfair advantage.

**Internal Coalition Building:** Recruiting staff allies to support their narrative.

**Biased Environment Creation:** Manipulating the child's school experience to favour their narrative.

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