

FACT SHEET

WHAT IS PARENTAL ALIENATION?

Parental alienation is the outcome of a process of one parent (the alienating parent) influencing a child (alienated or targeted child) to turn against and reject their other parent (alienated or targeted parent) without legitimate justification. The alienating parent can also be a grandparent, a step parent and even a non-family member.

Parental alienation can occur even when the relationship between the targeted child and targeted parent was once a very positive one. It occurs when a child is forced to choose one parent's side over the other after family separation and during parenting disputes.

CAUSES OF PARENTAL ALIENATION

The challenge for a family following separation is to transition from an intact family structure to a separated family structure that is now united by the children and by the continuing parental roles and shared bonds of affection with the child.

Sometimes the emotional reactions and psychological functioning of one parent in response to the separation prevents this transition. When this occurs children can be exposed to that parent's continuing anger and sadness.

TYPES OF PARENTAL ALIENATION

Mild parental alienation: The child is able to maintain contact with the targeted parent but is closely aligned with and concerned for the alienating parent who is distressed over the family separation.

Moderate parental alienation: The child struggles with the transition from the alienating parent's care to the care of the targeted parent. Once they have made the transition the child quickly settles and bonds with the targeted parent.

Severe parental alienation: The child is emphatic in their rejection of the targeted parent and refuses all contact with them.

CONSEQUENCES OF PARENTAL ALIENATION

The consequences of parental alienation on children are serious and long-lasting. Some of these consequences include:

- Conflict with Parents
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Post traumatic responses
- Loneliness
- Sleep problems
- Substance abuse
- Poor Body Image
- Eating Disorders
- Difficulties in relationships
- Problems with planning, organising and remembering information
- Problems at school or work
- Poor sense of self

WHAT CAN ADULTS AVOID DOING IN RESPONSE TO PARENTAL ALIENATION?

There are many ways adults can make parental alienation worse. Here are some behaviours adults need to avoid:

- Talking to children about parenting disputes
- Arguing in front of the children
- Saying negative things about the other parent to children
- Saying negative things about the other parent in front of the children
- Being distressed in front of the child causing them to feel anxious
- Behaving in ways that encourages the child to choose between their parents
- Adults who work with or support families involved in parenting disputes need to avoid taking sides in these disputes

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Children have a right to be raised in loving and nurturing families. They should be free to have a relationship with both parents and their wider extended family. For mild to moderate parental alienation, families need to be supported in making the transition to a separated family and parents. Parents need to learn how to co-parent without exposing their children to conflict. In severe parental alienation, the family may need extensive support and consideration given to transferring custody of the child to the targeted parent.

It is important that parents seek professional co-parenting support and advice when:

- One or both parents cannot set aside their own distress to support their child in maintaining healthy parent-child relationships after family separation
- When one parent doesn't seem to want to be cooperative in co-parenting after separation