

Character Framing

The other parent is described as unsafe, harmful, unstable, selfish, uncaring, or emotionally dangerous, rather than as a parent with ordinary strengths, flaws, and limitations.

Blame Allocation

The child is repeatedly given the message that the other parent is the reason the family is fractured, distressed, or not functioning properly.

Mistake as Proof

The other parent's ordinary mistakes, limitations, or differences are treated as proof of bad character, bad intent, or deeper unfitness as a parent.

Ordinary Behaviour Recast

Everyday parenting behaviour from the other parent, such as setting rules, disciplining, asking questions, showing emotion, being imperfect, or getting something wrong, is recast as controlling, rejecting, selfish, or abusive.

Adult Grievance Burdening

The child is exposed to adult allegations, grievance material, or emotionally loaded claims about the other parent that sit well outside the child's developmental role and capacity to evaluate.

Selective Narrative Repetition

The child hears selected negative stories about the other parent again and again, while ordinary, warm, repairing, or positive experiences are minimised, omitted, or overwritten.

Positive Experience Undermined

Loving, enjoyable, or comforting moments with the other parent are explained away as fake, manipulative, confusing, temporary, or not to be relied on.

Attention and Meaning Directed

The child is repeatedly directed toward what to notice about the other parent, what to feel uneasy about, and what meaning to attach to the other parent's behaviour.

Expectation Priming Before Contact

Before contact or communication, the child is primed to expect disappointment, pressure, discomfort, rejection, or emotional harm from the other parent.

Closeness Framed as Costly

Closeness to the other parent is framed as risky, hurtful, disloyal, unsafe, or likely to cause emotional fallout.

Defensive Stance Adoption

The child is drawn into a defensive stance toward the other parent, so caution, distance, or opposition begin to feel necessary and justified.

Repeated Negative Associations

The other parent becomes repeatedly associated with fear, blame, instability, selfishness, rejection, abandonment, unreliability, or harm, until those associations begin to feel self-evident.

Fixed Story

The child is given a fixed story about why the family is fractured, with the other parent cast as the problem and little room left for complexity, mixed experience, or independent thought.

Ordinary Events Given Distorted Meanings

Ordinary contact with the other parent, affection from the other parent, discipline, misunderstandings, missed calls, conflict, or separation-related distress are given distorted meanings that support a negative picture of the other parent.

Motives and Character Pre-Interpreted

The child is repeatedly exposed to interpretations of the other parent's motives, intentions, and character, instead of being left free to gradually form their own view through direct experience over time.

When repeated and sustained, these dynamics can amount to coercive control and psychological abuse of a child.

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How a child's view of a parent can be shaped in post-separation coercive dynamics

In post-separation coercive dynamics, children may be repeatedly exposed to one-sided messages, distorted meanings, and emotionally loaded explanations about the other parent.

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Over time, these repeated inputs can shape interpretation, memory, appraisal, and belief formation.

The child learns which thoughts, feelings, loyalties, and expressions are safer to hold and show.



All-or-Nothing Appraisal

The child starts speaking about the other parent in all-or-nothing terms, with little room for ordinary strengths, flaws, mixed experience, or relational complexity.

Borrowed Beliefs

The child expresses beliefs about the other parent that sound borrowed, unusually fixed, or more adult-like than developmentally expected.

Selective Recall

The child recalls negative incidents involving the other parent quickly and easily, while warm, ordinary, repairing, or contradictory experiences become harder to access.

Suspicious Interpretation

The child becomes suspicious of ordinary behaviour from the other parent and begins interpreting neutral events through a lens of threat, manipulation, selfishness, or likely harm.

Rehearsed Account

The child gives explanations about the other parent that sound repeated, rehearsed, or overly organised, suggesting a learned account more than an openly developed one.

Rigid Blame

The child places blame narrowly on the other parent, with little openness to multiple causes, relational complexity, or competing explanations.

Reduced Capacity for Mixed Feelings

The child struggles to hold mixed feelings about the other parent, making it harder to feel love, hurt, disappointment, anger, and care within the same relationship.

Guilt About Warmth

The child feels guilt, anxiety, unease, or inner conflict when missing the other parent, enjoying time with them, or showing warmth toward them.



How post-separation coercive dynamics can start to show up in the child

Over time, repeated exposure to these messages and meanings can begin to shape how the child thinks, feels, remembers, speaks, and responds to the other parent.

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Self-Monitoring

The child becomes careful about what they say, remember, feel, or show about the other parent, especially when positive feelings or experiences may carry consequences elsewhere.

Overt Rejection or Contempt

The child rejects, avoids, dismisses, or shows contempt toward the other parent in ways that seem broader, stronger, or more rigid than direct experience alone would explain.

Shaped Beliefs Felt as Self-Generated

The child experiences shaped beliefs about the other parent as if they arrived there independently, even when those beliefs have formed within repeated external messaging and framing.

Difficulty Integrating Contradictory Lived Experience

The child has difficulty integrating lived experiences with the other parent when those experiences do not fit the dominant negative story already absorbed.

Narrowed Relational Freedom

The child loses freedom to move openly toward the other parent with warmth, curiosity, trust, affection, flexibility, or ordinary relational ease.

Fixed and Closed Stance

The child becomes more guarded, morally positioned, emotionally closed, or fixed in relation to the other parent, as though the issue is already settled and no further reflection is needed.

What appears on the surface as a strong personal position about the other parent may reflect development within dependency, fear, loyalty pressure, and repeated relational shaping. When this pattern takes hold, the child's thoughts, feelings, memory, and behaviour may begin to reflect adaptation to relational pressure rather than an independently formed understanding of the other parent.

What starts to show in the child may reflect adaptation to repeated relational shaping, not simply an independently formed view of the other parent.

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In post-separation coercive dynamics, children can be exposed over time to repeated messages, distorted meanings, selective narrative exposure, and emotionally loaded explanations about the other parent. Those repeated psychological inputs do not merely influence what a child says in the moment. They can begin to organise how the child interprets the other parent's behaviour, what the child notices and stores in memory, how responsibility is assigned, which emotional responses begin to feel justified, and which thoughts, loyalties, and expressions become safer to hold and show. When this process is repeated and sustained, the child's developing view of the other parent can become increasingly structured around fear, blame, caution, and negative expectation rather than open experience, balanced interpretation, and relational freedom.

A child may be told, directly or indirectly, that the other parent is unsafe, harmful, unstable, selfish, uncaring, or emotionally dangerous. The child may be given the message that the other parent is the reason the family is fractured, distressed, or no longer functioning properly, with complex adult dynamics reduced to a simplified and morally loaded account of blame. Ordinary parental mistakes, limitations, or differences may then be treated as proof of deeper character flaws, harmful intent, or parental unfitness, while everyday parenting behaviour, such as setting limits, disciplining, asking questions, showing emotion, getting something wrong, or simply being imperfect, is reinterpreted as evidence of control, rejection, selfishness, manipulation, or abuse. The child may also be burdened with adult allegations, grievance material, and emotionally charged claims that sit well outside the child's developmental role and capacity to evaluate, while selected negative stories are repeated and reinforced and ordinary, warm, repairing, or positive experiences with the other parent are minimised, omitted, overwritten, or explained away.

What makes this especially harmful is that the child is not only hearing negative content, the child is also being taught how to organise meaning. Attention can be directed toward what to notice about the other parent, what to feel uneasy about, what to anticipate before contact, and what conclusions to draw from ordinary interactions. Closeness itself may begin to be framed as risky, disloyal, unsafe, or emotionally costly, especially if positive feelings toward the other parent are followed by tension, disapproval, distress, withdrawal, or some other relational consequence. Over time, the child may be drawn into a defensive stance in which caution, distance, opposition, or rejection no longer feel excessive or puzzling, but responsible, justified, and necessary. Repeated associations between the other parent and fear, blame, instability, rejection, selfishness, abandonment, unreliability, or harm can then accumulate until they begin to feel self-evident, as though they arise naturally from the child's own understanding rather than from sustained external framing.

When this takes hold, it often starts to show up in the child in ways that can look persuasive on the surface but are better understood as adaptation under pressure. The child may begin speaking about the other parent in all-or-nothing terms, with little room for ordinary strengths, flaws, contradiction, or mixed experience. Beliefs about the other parent may sound borrowed, unusually fixed, or older than would be expected developmentally, yet still be experienced by the child as entirely self-generated. Negative incidents can become easier to retrieve than warm or ordinary moments, while neutral behaviour from the other parent may be interpreted through a lens of threat, manipulation, selfishness, or likely harm. The child's account may sound repeated, rehearsed, or overly organised, with blame assigned narrowly to one parent and little openness to multiple causes, relational complexity, or competing explanations.

The impact is not only cognitive, it also becomes emotional and relational. A child shaped in this way may struggle to hold mixed feelings about the other parent, making it harder to experience love, disappointment, anger, hurt, and care within the same relationship. Missing the other parent, enjoying time with them, or showing warmth toward them may begin to evoke guilt, anxiety, unease, or inner conflict. The child may become more careful about what is said, remembered, felt, or shown, especially if positive experiences with the other parent are likely to create emotional or relational fallout elsewhere. In more overt form, this can present as rejection, avoidance, dismissiveness, contempt, emotional coldness, or a fixed and closed stance toward the other parent that appears broader and more rigid than the child's direct experience alone would explain. What can look like a strong personal position may, in some cases, reflect adaptation within dependency, fear, loyalty pressure, and repeated relational shaping.

None of this means the child is being dishonest, and none of it means that genuine concerns about a parent should be ignored. Where legitimate concerns exist, they should be assessed carefully, proportionately, and with proper evidentiary discipline. The problem arises when a child's words, feelings, and behaviour are treated as straightforward evidence about the other parent, without examining the dependency relationships, repeated influence, relational pressures, and restriction of alternative views and experiences in which those responses have developed. Children form views about parents within attachment relationships, developmental dependency, and ongoing contingencies around safety, belonging, approval, and emotional survival. When access to the other parent, other perspectives, and corrective lived experience is narrowed, blocked, or persistently reinterpreted, the child's beliefs may be shaped under conditions of limited comparison rather than open reflection. If those conditions are not examined, shaped beliefs can be mistaken for independently formed views, and adaptive responses can be misread as reliable evidence of the parent-child relationship itself.

These dynamics may be conveyed by a parent, another family member, or a non-family person in the child's world, including a practitioner whose framing, interpretations, or responses become part of the child's developing understanding. That does not mean every negative view is induced, nor that every practitioner contributes to harm. It means that influence must be examined carefully wherever repeated framing, selective meaning-making, and relational pressure are present. When these processes are repeated and sustained, they can amount to coercive control and psychological abuse of a child because they shape far more than what the child says about the other parent. They can constrict how the child thinks, feels, remembers, relates, and moves between attachment relationships with ordinary warmth, trust, and flexibility.