



# Parental Alienation: Finding the Right Therapist

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Navigating through the trenches with a child who once loved you but now claims to hate you, rejects you, or refuses visitation can be a tough terrain without having a skilled guide. When parental alienation is suspected or detected, locating a forensically trained therapist is vital. However, finding the right therapist for your situation can in and of itself be a daunting task.

You will need to ensure the therapist has specialized training, as well as extensive experience, in working with troubled-parent child relationships. Therapists who lack an adequate understanding and competence in dealing with parental alienation may be too quick to accept at face value the favored parent's and child's representations of events.

Some therapists will list their experience in this specialized area on a curriculum vitae (CV). The therapist should have documented on his/her CV extensive training, known as Continuing Education Unites (CEUs) through organizations such as the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts. Realize that being "passionate" and "proficient" are not one and the same. There are numerous excellent therapists, who sincerely care about children and families, but not all have adequate training nor the experience in a forensic setting to work in this specialized area.

It is important for parents to understand that early intervention is key to offsetting unwarranted rejection by your child. Detecting alienating behaviors and distasteful antics early on can lead to greater successful outcomes in a therapeutic setting. A skilled therapist can assess when/if individual therapy is suited for your child and/or if a team approach is warranted in order to work with the entire family.

It is also key to realize that your therapist cannot diagnose a person he/she has not met. In today's diagnostic label milieu, terms such as "sociopath" and "borderline" are flippantly tossed around. Buzz words run amok through social media and everyday conversations without any real critical thought behind the implications of the label(s). Bad behavior is simply bad behavior and most agree that alienating behavior is damaging to a child. Many people have traits of narcissism, borderline, or other mental health diagnoses, however, having a specific diagnosis does not in itself damage a parent-child relationship. On the contrary, blocking access, badmouthing, berating, and belittling are observable behaviors that are problematic.

Finally it is essential to be patient and recognize that the troubled-parent child relationship did not become damaged overnight. It takes time to repair and to restore fractured relationships.

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