

Critical Importance of Contact Between the Alienated Parent and the Child for Amelioration

Richard Gardner, M.D.,(2001) in affirmation of the necessity of contact between children and the alienated parent stated in *Therapeutic Interventions with Children with Parental Alienation Syndrome*, page 348:

"The child and alienated parent being in a room together can be therapeutic in its own right, the child's lack of cooperation notwithstanding. The PAS child must have living experiences that the victimized parent is not the ogre he or she has been portrayed to be by the alienator. The living experience that the target parent is not perpetuating the abominable crimes predicted by the alienator is therapeutic in its own right. Furthermore, all time spent with the alienated parent is less time with the alienator, and therefore less time for indoctrination."

And, Dr. Gardner further asserted, "If a picture is worth 1000 words then an experience is worth 1 million pictures."

In *Children Held Hostage*, Stanley, Clawar, Ph.D; & Brynne Rivlin, MSS., (1991), credit "abundant positive contact with the targeted parent" and the child as the most significant factor in overcoming the brainwashing. pp. 129-130. They also suggest as therapeutic: "environmental modification----changing the amount and type of time the child spends with the programming/brainwashing parent and the target parent." (p. 132). They continue, "As a general rule, we have found the change in the physical environment and increase in social contact with the targeted parent are the major positive ways to deprogram a child. The more continuous and regular contact the child has with the programmer and brainwasher, the more likely the process is to continue and damages to increase" Addressing the swiftness in reversing the PAS as a result of the contact between the targeted parent and child, Rivlin and Brynne assert, "In some cases, the positive changes that occur in the child are so radical that they are surprising to observe." p. 148

Baker, Amy, PhD. (2007), in *Adult Children of Parental Alienation Syndrome*, stated, "The therapist's primary role is to create opportunities for the child to spend time with the targeted parent in order to experience firsthand that he or she is not a dangerous person as the child has been led to believe. Gardner believed the PAS children need an excuse to spend time with the targeted parent in order to avoid the wrath of the alienating parent. If the therapist orders visitation, which can be enforced with sanctions against the alienating parent, children will have such an excuse....and can therefore be freed from the responsibility of appearing to choose or want visitation with the targeted parent." p. 233.

In her sub-chapter entitled "being an involved parent", Baker continues,"if targeted parents behave as if the relationship with their child is not valued, the child will believe that the seeds of parental alienation syndrome will grow even stronger. The job of targeted parents is *not* provide fertile ground for the seeds of alienation. The alienating parent will take full advantage of any lapses in judgment and will certainly exploit such failings in subsequent legal confrontations. Being late for

pickups, not showing up for visits, not attending major events in the child's life, endangering the child, not putting effort into making time spent together enjoyable and meaningful, will all be pointed out to the child by the alienating parent and will be used as part of the alienation campaign. These lapses will make the ground for alienation more fertile. Targeted parents may have no control over what the alienating parent says about them but they do have control over how they behave with their child." p, 267. Baker continues, "One task for the therapist is to encourage targeted parents to never give up hope. Targeted parents cannot know how much movement and work is going on under the surface of their alienated child. In fact, targeted parents may be the last to know that their child is beginning to question and rethink the alienating parent's behaviors." p. 273.

Richard Warshak, PhD, (2010) in *Divorce Poison*, pp. 38-39, stated, "Maintain contact. When children repeatedly complain about being forced to see the alienated parent, many parents make the crucial mistake of telling them in effect, 'If you are so unhappy being here with me, stop coming'.... If your goal is to improve your relationship with your children, ceasing contact will not bring you any closer. Maintaining contact is crucial for reversing alienation. Even when they seem to have no use for you, the children have a long history of depending on you for their care. Surprisingly, if you counter-reject them, on some level they will feel hurt and abandoned, and will channel their pain into more anger and alienation. Years later, children remember the perceived abandonment and blame the alienated parent for the ruptured relationship: 'you said you didn't want to see us anymore.' The absence of contact can be distorted in court to argue that you caused the alienation by your rejection of the children. When you lose contact with them, you lose the opportunity to help them escape or withstand the noxious environment. In too many families, when children are allowed to determine when to contact the alienated parent, they never see or talk to that parent again."

Gottlieb, Linda (2012), in *The Parental Alienation Syndrome: A Family Therapy and Collaborative Systems Approach to Amelioration*, quoted Raymond Havlicek, PhD., an esteemed clinical psychologist and forensic expert, a Diplomat of the American Board of Professional Psychology, a Fellow at the American Academy of Clinical Psychology, and a founding member of the Parent Coordinator Association of New York. Dr. Havlicek has completed hundreds of child custody evaluations for Supreme and Family Courts throughout New York State. He has been consulted by CPS to do evaluations for that agency. He is currently developing an educational program for upstate New York judges concerning issues of child custody and parental alienation. He specializes in family reunification, domestic violence treatment, validation for sex abuse, and assessment and treatment of parental alienation. Dr. Havlicek emphatically upholds the fulfillment of the child's need and desire "to have both parents appropriately and meaningfully involved in her/his life." Addressing the child's requirement for a relationship with both parents----even if one has problems, just as

long as they do no harm to the children----he asserted, "The trust that children place in **BOTH** parents is to their mental health what the foundation is to a building. If you undermine that trust, there is no stability." (pp. xi-xii)

Dr. Amy Baker affirmed in her interview for this book: "Kids really want a relationship with the rejected parent. This is what I believe. Their consciousness is complicated that on one level they are nasty and rejecting children; and on another level, they still want their rejected parent in their life. This is an eye-opener for the rejected parents who have gone through this. I keep telling them that their child is in there and that they should not to listen to the brittle shell." (pp. xiii).

Barbara Burkhard, Ph.D., co-founded Child and Family Psychological Services, P.C., Smithtown, New York in 1999 with Jane Albertson-Kelly, Ph.D. This agency provides research-informed therapy for children and families. It has a contract with Suffolk County Department of Social Services (DSS) to provide therapeutic child/parent visits and evaluations of parents who have been accused of abuse and neglect. They also receive referrals from Suffolk County Supreme and Family Courts for custody evaluations, therapeutic visitation, reunification therapy, and forensic mental health evaluations and risk assessments. These may include problems related to high conflict divorce such as parental alienation. They further receive referrals for sex abuse validations as well as referrals to provide therapy for children who are victims of crime. Both Dr. Burkhard and Dr. Kelly affirmed that children benefit from a relationship with each parent with respect to the attainment of healthy long-term relationships and for their optimal social, psychological, and cognitive development. These doctors maintain that children, even those who have experienced documented abuse, generally crave a relationship with each parent; expressions to the contrary may be questionable and should raise a red flag. (p. xiv)

As a family therapist, Linda J Gottlieb states, "I could not agree more with these respected doctors regarding the importance of both parents playing an active role in their children's lives----especially in situations when the parents are apart. In order to support the goal for each parent to provide meaningful and substantial involvement in the lives of their children, I affirm that the resolution to custody requires an arrangement for joint legal custody with physical custody that maximizes the time that non-residential parents have with their children, preferably a 50/50 split, if feasible. It is my professional opinion that the customary visitation arrangement for non-residential parents to visit every other weekend and one night during the week is not sufficient to maintain a consequential relationship with their children. Although I have heard matrimonial attorneys as well as children's attorneys assert that the child needs the consistency of the same residence, I deem this assumption to be nonsense. I cannot be convinced that the consistency with one's bed trumps consistency with a parent! I further submit that this typical visitation arrangement is based on custom and has no basis in any scientific research about optimal child development and child rearing." (xiv).

What are the treatment remedies, according to this therapist?: "Gardner (2001) suggested a way when he proclaimed, 'A picture is worth a 1000 words....An experience is worth a million pictures'. I could not concur more with his axiom. Having been trained by the world-renowned and highly respected child psychiatrist, Salvador Minuchin, founder of structural family therapy, I believe in the power of family members to heal each other through their experiences with each other. It seems so marvelously simple to appreciate that we are most likely to change for someone whom we love and who loves us. I have found in my 43 years of practice that no quantity or quality of words between an individual and the therapist----who is nonetheless a stranger----can possibly have as powerful and as meaningful an impact as when the therapist provides, instead, an environment in which emotions and experiences are released among family members. No therapist, however competent and well intentioned, can possibly re-create a relationship with the patient that rivals intimate family relationships----particularly the meaningful parent/child relationship. It seems so evident, then, that the crucial player to assume the deprogramming role is the "formally" loved and loving alienated parent. Indeed I assert that the deprogrammer who has the greatest potential for success is the alienated parent----who is not only the holder of the family's truths but who has had the loving relationship with the child. The role then for the therapist is to serve as a catalyst who encourages and guides the creation of healthy, corrective transactions between the alienated parent and the child as well as among all the family members." (p. 143).

Gottlieb continues, "The targeted parent must nonetheless assume the role of the principal deprogrammer, even if the process occurs within the safety of a therapist's office. This approach will send a powerful message to the child in that the authority of the therapist validates and supports the alienated parent's position in the family hierarchy and as the holder of the family truths. The approach has the additional advantage of conveying to the child that the targeted parent merits status, given the "therapeutic" position accorded to the parent within the therapy session." (p. 143.)

Indeed, I assert that amelioration of the PAS will likely be unsuccessful without meaningful, sustained, and intensive contact between the alienated parent and child.