

Eight Symptoms in the Child of Parental Alienation

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Caveat: It is not necessary to have all the symptoms below to make a diagnosis of Parental Alienation. The first two, by themselves, are necessary and sufficient. The subsequent ones are additional evidence for the diagnosis.

THE CAMPAIGN OF DENIGRATION

The campaign of denigration is an example of the construction of family myths which are used for the purpose of turning a child against a previously loved and loving parent. The child is programmed to believe that her/his other parent is: worthless, selfish, unloving, malevolent, undeserving, and dangerous, etc. The effective result is that the child becomes convinced that she/he will be happier, healthier, and better adjusted if the targeted parent is eradicated from her/his life. At the orchestration by the alienating parent, the alienated child adopts the following feelings, wishes and behaviors regarding the alienated/targeted parent:

Examples of the denigrating behaviors are listed below and are not inclusive:

- 1) Refusing and/or shunning visits with the rejected parent for no justifiable reason.
- 2) Behaving miserably and disrespectfully, sometimes abusively, towards the rejected parent when there is any contact—even in reunification therapy.
- 3) Depriving the rejected parent of important information including but not limited to medical, educational, and social activities. Telling the rejected parent that she/he is not entitled to have this information. Not consulting or collaborating with the targeted parent in these important aspects of the child's life.
- 4) Not informing about and excluding the rejected parent from activities, parent/teacher conferences, birthdays, religious events, graduations, etc.
- 5) Belittling, criticizing, and deprecating the rejected parent.
- 6) Removing of pictures and all memorabilia of the rejected parent.
- 7) Failing to communicate with the rejected parent. This contact includes the telephone, text messaging, e-mailing, Skype, or other methods.
- 8) Verbally and physically abusing the rejected parent by the child and/or alienating parent—even in public locations and at the child's activities and events.
- 9) Defying the rejected parent's supervision and authority.
- 10) Refusing and/or returning the rejected parent's gifts, cards, vacation opportunities, and offers for help, counseling, and guidance.
- 11) Making false allegations of child abuse and/or domestic violence.
- 12) Amnesia about and denial of a loving and supportive relationship with the rejected parent prior to the onset of the alienation.

- 13) Not contacting the rejected parent to wish her/him happy birthday, happy father's day/mother's day, or happy holidays on other occasions. Of course, visit refusal on the rejected parent's special day
- 14) Making the rejected parent like a persona non grata in the child's life

WEAK, FRIVOLOUS, and ABSURD RATIONALIZATIONS for the DEPRECIATION

This symptom no better reflects the distortion of family events or "the enshrining of revisionist history" by the alienating parent and the alienated child about the targeted/rejected parent in order to portray that parent in the worst possible light. Alienated children remain armed with a laundry list of vague injustices, deceptions, and disappointments that were allegedly inflicted upon them by their targeted/alienated parent. These children exploit the opportunity to reiterate their complaints ad nauseam when they respond with their inventory of grievances to nearly every question asked of them about their relationship with their targeted parent. When they are requested, however, to provide specific incidences or explicit examples that support their accusations, they are unable to document credible, significant, or factual examples. To the contrary, these children utter nothing more explicit than vague comments such as "she/he lies;" "she/he is embarrassing," "she/he is annoying," etc. Sometimes these children will say, "She/he is abusive," but they will be unable to cite specific incidences to support the claims. These children, nevertheless, have the potential to create havoc for their targeted/alienated parent when they fabricate fantastic, ludicrous, and exaggerated accusations to justify their deprecation, such as child abuse allegations. What these children can specifically articulate is the nastiness of their alienating parent as well as that parent's corroboration of their misperceptions of the targeted parent.

If the children and alienating parent are vague about alleged injustices committed by the targeted parent, they are very specific about allegations of child abuse and domestic violence. But these allegations are either entirely manufactured for utterly distorted and exaggerated.

LACK OF AMBIVALENCE

Alienated children can be predicted to recite a long list of deficits about their targeted parent while minimizing or refuting any positive attribute or redeeming quality of that parent. Alienated children are curiously stricken with "amnesia" when it comes to acknowledging and appreciating their targeted parent's lifetime involvement with them. Targeted parents receive no recognition for the time, energy, and emotional and financial support which they had invested and continue to invest in their children. Instead, everything targeted parents utter, accomplish, propose, and offer to their children is viewed with disdain and negativity. The inventory of characteristics is just the reverse for the alienating parent, who is idealized, appears to possess a halo, is perceived as capable of walking on water, and reveals no character flaws whatsoever. Alienated children have relinquished any interest in engaging in an objective assessment of each of their parents.

On the one hand, they consider their targeted parent to be unadulterated evil. On the other hand, they demonstrate an unshakable reverence for their alienating parent, even when an objective observer would evaluate the alienator to possess insufferable, problematical, and even reprehensible attributes. These children think only in terms of black and white when it comes to their two parents.

THE INDEPENDENT-THINKER PHENOMENON

Alienated children proclaim uninfluenced ownership of their "horrific" opinions of and feelings for their targeted/alienated parent. Moreover, they accept sole responsibility for their abusive, disrespectful and rejecting behaviors towards that parent, adamantly affirming that their alienating parent does not encourage them in the slightest. Imagine, a child accepting absolute culpability for their reprehensible deeds! And they will spontaneously volunteer authorship of these ideas, frequently volunteering that their alienating parent has not influenced their feelings and behaviors one iota.

CRUELTY towards the ALIENATED PARENT with no Remorse or Guilt

Alienated children typically exhibit toward their targeted parent a cruelty so wounding that the serpent's bite pales in comparison. Pouring salt in their parent's wounds, these children reveal no remorse or guilt for having caused such pain.

REFLEXIVE SUPPORT of the ALIENATING PARENT

The symptom called "reflexive support the alienating parent" is descriptive of the process by which alienated children uncritically and dogmatically align with their alienating parent, particularly when disagreements and hostilities arise between the parents. Family systems therapists labeled this coalition the "perverse triangle" whereby the child is manipulated by one parent into forming a coalition to the disengagement of the other parent. This interactional pattern acquired such a label because it is a dysfunctional behavioral pattern: when a parent and child collude (either consciously or unconsciously) to deprecate and reject the other parent, the child often develops severe emotional disturbances. The requirement of the coalition is a destructive demand for the child to choose between parents: it creates a double bind in that the child must either sever a relationship with the targeted parent or else incur the wrath and probable rejection of the alienating parent for refusal to do so. In the face of parental disputes, alienated children express unequivocal support for and allegiance to the feelings, opinions, and behaviors of their alienating parent and absolute disregard for those of their alienated parent. They assert that their alienating parent possesses a veracity above reproach in every dispute while the alienated parent is always guilty of mendacity. Indeed, the enmeshment with the alienator is so powerful, that these children will interpret their alienated parent's struggle to defend against the alienating parent's humiliating behaviors and malicious accusations to be an attack upon them.

Alienated children, for example, uncritically align with the alienating parent even after that parent's allegations of domestic violence are dismissed, and even when having failed to witness a single such incident. Whether it be issues such as child support, financial disputes, infidelity accusations, fallacious child abuse allegations, or any matter arising in the divorce proceedings, the alienated child will align with the alienating parent.

PRESENCE of BORROWED SCENARIOS

Because it is so illustrative of a programming, the symptom called "borrowed scenarios" is highly indicative of the presence of alienation. When interviewing alienated children, one is inescapably impressed with how scripted they sound and how effectively they employ language, concepts, and terminology commensurate with a cognitive stage well beyond what is typical for their actual age. If the interviewer is unknowledgeable about alienation and its symptoms, the interviewer would likely conclude that these children are child progenies! However, when the alienation-aware interviewer goes where most interviewers fail to go by requesting that these children define their words and explain the meaning of their phrases, they are unable to do so. Their precocious charade then collapses like a house of cards. In addition to the sophisticated use of language, another indication of borrowed scenarios is the commonality of expressions between those of PAS children and those of their indoctrinating parent. Indeed, the litanies of deprecation uttered by these children are often indistinguishable from the litanies expressed by their alienating parent. A further indication of the presence this symptom occurs when alienated children reveal an intimate knowledge of events that they could not have witnessed or of which they have had no personal experience, such as events that occurred before their birth. It is only because of the alienator's programming that these children became privy to such information, which is usually inflammatory, exaggerated, or completely fabricated about their targeted parent.

SPREAD of ANIMOSITY to EXTENDED FAMILY of the ALIENATED PARENT

That is, the vilification and rejection of the targeted parent usually will extend to her/his entire family of origin. These relatives, such as grandparents, who had had a previously loving relationship with the child, will now be inexplicably rejected. The alienated child utters no remorse regarding such rejection and expresses no feelings of loss for the termination of these relationships. When these relatives attempt contact with the child, their efforts go unanswered, and all requests for visits are refused.

The above excerpts are taken from the book, *The Parental Alienation: A Family Therapy and Collaborative Systems Approach to Amelioration*, by Linda J. Gottlieb