

Manifestations of Alienated Children¹

Campaign of denigration

The alienated child is programmed by the alienating parent to believe that her/his other parent is worthless, selfish, unloving, malevolent, undeserving, and dangerous. The effective result is that the child becomes convinced that he/she will be happier, healthier, better adjusted, and lacking nothing if the targeted parent is eradicated from his or her life. The child then contributes to the campaign by engaging in behaviors to maltreat, disrespect, deprecate, criticize, defy, reject, and even physically abuse the targeted parent. The alienating parent and child will deny the targeted parent information about the child's medical, educational, and social activities. The targeted parent will not be informed of, or consulted about, major decisions affecting the child. Contact via visits, text messaging, phone calls, activities, events, etc. may be undermined by the alienating parent, and, in severe cases, contact may cease as the child "freely" decides to refuse all contact. Gifts and cards from the targeted parent may be returned unopened, and the targeted parent should not expect to receive from his/her child as much as a phone call on his/her birthday or on Mother's day or Father's day.

Weak, frivolous or absurd rationalizations for the denigration or deprecation

Having engaged in the unnatural endeavor to deprecate and reject a parent, the child must then concoct rationales for having done so. At the behest of the alienating parent, alienated children remain armed with a laundry list of vague injustices, deceptions, and disappointments that were allegedly inflicted upon them by their targeted parent. When these children are requested to provide specific incidences or explicit examples of the alleged injustices, they are unable to cite examples that would rise to a level that would justify the rejection of a parent. Sometimes, however, these children create mayhem for their targeted parent when they fabricate fantastic, ludicrous, and exaggerated accusations involving child abuse. False allegations of child abuse and domestic violence are common and distinguishing genuine from fabricated allegations often requires the skills of a clinician who is a subspecialist in this area.

Lack of ambivalence

Alienated children will recite a long list of deficits about their alienated parent while minimizing or refuting any positive attribute or redeeming quality of that parent. These children are curiously stricken with "amnesia" when it comes to acknowledging and appreciating their alienated parent's lifetime involvement with them. Alienated 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, or offer to their children is viewed with disdain. All

¹ Adapted from Baker, 2007; Gottlieb, 2013; and Gottlieb, 2012.

meaningful interactions that had occurred between the child and the targeted parent prior to the onset of the alienation will be denied, minimized or “forgotten.” 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, reveals no character flaws whatsoever, has met all of the child’s prior needs and wants, and is capable of unilaterally meeting all current and future needs. These children think only in terms of black and white when it comes to their parents.

The independent-thinker phenomenon

Alienated children proclaim uninfluenced ownership of their horrific opinions and hostile feelings towards their 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 negatively in the slightest against their alienated parent. Imagine, a child accepting absolute culpability for his/her reprehensible deeds! And these children will spontaneously volunteer authorship of their ideas, frequently volunteering that their alienating parent has not influenced their negative, hostile feelings and abusive behaviors one iota towards their alienated parent.²

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

This symptom 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. Alienated children are so pathologically enmeshed with their alienating parent that they will interpret the alienated parent's efforts to defend against the alienating parent's humiliating behaviors and malicious accusations to be an attack upon them as well. For example, should the alienated parent bring a petition to redress his/her violated parental rights, the alienated child will characterize this action as the alienating parent having taken “us back to court.”

Presence of borrowed language or borrowed scenarios

² The independent thinker phenomenon is often absent, especially in mild or moderate cases, but when present is considered highly specific for alienation. This makes sense because estranged children—i.e., those who have been abused or neglected—have no need to make defensive comments such as to deny that either parent had unduly influenced them.

When one listens to alienated children, one is inescapably impressed with how scripted they sound and how effectively they employ language, concepts, and terminology commensurate with a cognitive development well beyond what is typical for their actual age. One cue to the brainwashing is that these children are unable to define their words and explain the meaning of their phrases. In addition to the sophisticated use of language, another indication of borrowed scenarios is the commonality of expressions between those of alienated children and the expressions and concepts of their indoctrinating parent. Furthermore, these 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 or when they were infants. 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 alienated parent.

Spread of animosity to the friends and/or extended family of the alienated parent

The vilification and rejection of the alienated parent generally extends to his or her friends and extended family. Relatives such as grandparents, who had had a previously loving relationship with the child, may be inexplicably rejected. In severe cases, 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; all requests for visits are refused.

Additional Manifestations

In addition to the above eight manifestation (that are essentially confined to the child), several additional manifestations are also important; they are grouped separately because they focus on the child's interactions with the alienating parent:

The child and rejected parent had a good, healthy relationship prior to the onset of alienation.

There was a relatively sudden change for the worse in the relationship between the child and the rejected parent that began or took place at about the same time as the parents' separation or divorce.

The child appears to have "forgotten" or "erased" positive memories of interactions with the rejected parent in the past.

There is evidence of pathological enmeshment between the child and the alienating parent; this tends to manifest as one or more of three types: infantilization; adultification; and/or parentification.

