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PARENTAL ALIENATION THE INVISIBLE PARENT

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PARENTAL ALIENATION

THE INVISIBLE PARENT

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WHAT IS PARENTAL ALIENATION?

Parental Alienation

While parental alienation is not officially recognized in the DSM-5, it has been gaining attention in recent years, especially in the co-parenting community. Parental alienation can make it more difficult for a parent to form a lasting and meaningful bond with their child... but what exactly is it?



Parental Alienation Syndrome was originally coined by child psychiatrist Richard A. Gardner to describe a specific type of psychological manipulation that occurs in high-conflict custody cases. It involves one parent (*the alienating parent*) consciously or unconsciously influencing their child to reject, fear, or distrust the other parent without legitimate justification.

Gardner thought it would be possible to diagnose psychological manipulation or undue influence of a child by a parent based on a set of behaviors he saw in some families involved in child custody litigation. Usually, the other parent aimed to keep the child from continuing to have relationships with other family members after family separation or divorce.



EXAMPLES OF PARENTAL ALIENATION

Examples and Effects of Parental Alienation

Examples of parental alienation can vary widely in behavior and intensity, but they all involve attempts by one parent to negatively influence a child's relationship with the other parent. Below are some common examples of parental alienation tactics:

1. Bad-Mouthing the Other Parent

Example: A mother repeatedly tells her child that the father doesn't love them or that he only cares about himself. She might say things like, "*Your dad never really wanted you*" or "*He's always too busy for you.*"

Effect: The child begins to believe these statements, leading to resentment and anger towards the father, despite no direct negative experiences with him.

2. Limiting Contact with the Other Parent

Example: A father consistently makes excuses to prevent the child from visiting the mother during her scheduled parenting time. He might claim that the child is sick, has too much homework, or that the mother is not a good influence.

Effect: Over time, the child has less interaction with the mother, weakening their bond and making the child more dependent on the father's perspective.

3. Interfering with Communication

Example: A parent blocks the other parent's phone calls or texts, deletes voicemails, or tells the child not to respond to the other parent's attempts to communicate.

Effect: The child becomes isolated from the other parent and may feel abandoned or believe that the other parent is uninterested in them.

4. Sharing Inappropriate Information

Example: A parent shares details of the divorce, financial issues, or legal battles with the child, framing the other parent as the cause of all problems. They might say, "*We lost the house because your dad didn't pay the bills*" or "*Your mom is trying to take all my money.*"

Effect: The child is placed in an adult role, feeling responsible for one parent's happiness and blaming the other parent for family difficulties.

5. Creating a Sense of Guilt

Example: A mother tells her child that spending time with the father will make her lonely and sad, saying things like, "*I'll be all alone if you go with your dad*" or "*You're choosing him over me.*"

Effect: The child feels guilty about spending time with the father and may choose to avoid him to protect the mother's feelings.

EXAMPLES OF PARENTAL ALIENATION

6. Undermining the Other Parent's Authority

Example: A father tells his child that they don't have to listen to their mother's rules or decisions, saying things like, "*Your mom doesn't know what she's talking about*" or "*You don't have to do what she says.*"

Effect: The child begins to disrespect the mother and refuses to follow her guidance, leading to increased conflict and tension.

7. Encouraging Rejection of the Other Parent

Example: A parent actively encourages the child to refuse visitation or to say they don't want to see the other parent. They might say, "*You don't have to go if you don't want to*" or "*Tell the judge you don't want to live with your mom/dad.*"

Effect: The child feels pressured to reject the other parent, often out of loyalty to the alienating parent, which can lead to a complete breakdown in the relationship.

8. Portraying the Other Parent as Dangerous or Unfit

Example: A parent tells the child that the other parent is dangerous, mentally ill, or incapable of caring for them. They might say, "*Your mom can't be trusted*" or "*Your dad is crazy, and you're not safe with him.*"

Effect: The child develops irrational fears of the other parent, leading to anxiety and refusal to spend time with them, even if there is no real danger.

9. Manipulating the Child's Emotions

Example: A parent uses emotional manipulation to make the child feel that loving the other parent is a betrayal. They might cry, withdraw affection, or act hurt whenever the child expresses a desire to see the other parent.

Effect: The child learns to suppress positive feelings towards the other parent to avoid upsetting the alienating parent, creating internal conflict and confusion.

10. Exaggerating Minor Incidents

Example: A parent exaggerates small mistakes or accidents, like saying, "*Your mom almost let you drown in the pool!*" when the incident was minor and handled appropriately.

Effect: The child begins to see the other parent as incompetent or dangerous, eroding their trust in that parent's ability to care for them.

11. Pretending to Be the Victim

Example: A parent constantly plays the victim in front of the child, saying things like, "*Your dad left me with nothing*" or "*I'm struggling because your mom won't help me.*"

Effect: The child may feel responsible for the parent's unhappiness and come to resent the other parent for causing this perceived suffering.

EXAMPLES OF PARENTAL ALIENATION

12. Rewarding the Child for Rejecting the Other Parent

Example: A parent gives the child special privileges, gifts, or treats whenever the child refuses to see the other parent or speaks negatively about them.

Effect: The child learns that rejecting the other parent is rewarded, reinforcing the alienation and damaging the relationship with the targeted parent.

13. Setting the Child Up to Fail

Example: A parent gives the child tasks or instructions that are bound to lead to failure, such as sending them to the other parent without necessary items (e.g., *homework, medication*) and then blaming the other parent for the consequences.

Effect: The child feels stressed and confused, and the other parent is unfairly blamed for being unprepared or negligent.

14. Alienating the Extended Family

Example: A parent discourages or prevents the child from having contact with the other parent's extended family, such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. They might say, "*Your dad's family doesn't really care about you*" or "*They're all the same as your mom.*"

Effect: The child loses connections with an entire side of their family, reinforcing the alienation from the targeted parent and creating a sense of isolation.

15. False Allegations of Abuse

Example: A parent falsely accuses the other parent of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, encouraging the child to believe or report the abuse, even when it never occurred.

Effect: These false allegations can lead to severe legal consequences, including loss of custody or visitation rights for the accused parent, and can cause significant emotional harm to the child.

PARENTAL ALIENATION AND NARCISSISM

Is There a Connection?

There can be a connection between parental alienation and narcissism. Narcissistic personality traits or narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) may contribute to the behaviors associated with parental alienation.



Although you should never self-diagnose or attempt to diagnose others without expert insight, narcissistic traits can exist in someone who exhibits a desire to alienate their child from their co-parent. Narcissistic parents may exhibit grandiosity by maintaining an inflated sense of self-importance and viewing themselves as the superior or more deserving parent, which drives them to undermine the other parent in order to preserve their perceived superiority. This intense need for control can manifest in custody disputes as a desire to dominate the child's relationship with the other parent, resulting in various alienation tactics. Furthermore, their manipulative nature may be evident to the co-parent as they employ lies, exaggerations, and deceit to convince the child of false narratives about the other parent, thereby reinforcing the alienation and deepening the rift between the child and the targeted parent.

PARENTAL ALIENATION AND NARCISSISM

Effects on the Child

Children subjected to parental alienation by a narcissistic parent often face significant emotional manipulation, where they are led to believe that the other parent is unloving, unworthy, or dangerous, with the narcissistic parent instilling fear, guilt, or shame to secure the child's loyalty. This manipulation frequently results in confusion and anxiety for the child, who becomes entangled in the conflicting narratives of both parents and may internalize the alienation, feeling unjustly responsible for the estrangement. Over time, the long-term psychological impact of growing up under such influence can be profound, potentially leading to issues such as low self-esteem, difficulties in forming healthy relationships, and an increased tendency to develop maladaptive coping mechanisms.

In Family Law Cases...



Addressing parental alienation in cases involving a narcissistic parent presents several difficulties in both legal and therapeutic contexts. Recognizing narcissistic traits can be challenging in family law cases, as narcissists often display charm and persuasiveness that may obscure the underlying issues from the court. Therapeutic intervention is equally complex, as traditional therapy might prove ineffective due to the narcissistic parent's potential resistance or sabotage of treatment; thus, interventions must prioritize safeguarding the child's well-being and promoting a healthy relationship with the other parent. Legal strategies in such scenarios often involve requesting court-ordered psychological evaluations, obtaining expert testimony on the impacts of narcissism and alienation, and advocating for custody arrangements designed to minimize the narcissistic parent's capacity to manipulate the child.

LAWS AGAINST PARENTAL ALIENATION

Are There Any? ---

In Massachusetts, while there is no specific law addressing "parental alienation," the concept can be recognized and addressed within the broader context of family law, particularly when determining custody and visitation arrangements.

1 **If one parent is found to be engaging in behaviors that alienate the child from the other parent,** this can be seen as contrary to the child's best interests. The court may take such behavior into account when making custody and visitation determinations.

2 **If a court finds that one parent is actively alienating the child from the other parent,** it may modify custody and visitation orders to protect the child's relationship with both parents. This might include granting primary custody to the targeted parent, adjusting visitation schedules, or ordering supervised visitation for the alienating parent.

3 **In extreme cases,** the court may change custody entirely if it is determined that the alienating parent's behavior is severely harming the child's relationship with the other parent and their overall well-being.

4 **Massachusetts courts may appoint a Guardian ad Litem (GAL)** to investigate allegations of parental alienation and make recommendations to the court. The GAL will assess the family dynamics, interview the parents and child, and report their findings to the judge. This report can significantly influence the court's decisions regarding custody and visitation.

The GAL's role is to represent the best interests of the child and provide an objective perspective on the allegations of alienation.

5 **In cases where parental alienation is alleged, the court may order psychological evaluations of both the parents and the child.** These evaluations are conducted by licensed mental health professionals and can provide the court with insights into the extent of the alienation and its impact on the child.

LAWS AGAINST PARENTAL ALIENATION

6 The results of these evaluations can be pivotal in custody decisions, particularly in proving that alienation is occurring and that it is harmful to the child.

7 If a parent violates custody or visitation orders in a way that contributes to alienation (e.g., refusing to allow the other parent to see the child), the court can take enforcement actions. This might include finding the offending parent in contempt of court, imposing fines, ordering make-up parenting time, or even altering custody arrangements.

8 Continued violations can lead to more severe consequences, including a change in custody.

9 Massachusetts courts may order parents involved in custody disputes, especially those with allegations of alienation, to attend parenting classes or counseling. These programs aim to educate parents on the importance of fostering a healthy relationship between the child and both parents, and to address any behaviors contributing to alienation.

10 Family therapy or counseling for the child may also be ordered to help repair the relationship with the alienated parent.



Massachusetts case law includes several decisions where parental alienation was a factor in custody determinations. Courts have recognized that alienation can be detrimental to a child's well-being and have, **in some instances, modified custody arrangements to mitigate its effects.**

FIGHTING PARENTAL ALIENATION

Steps to Take

Fighting parental alienation can be challenging, but there are several steps you can take to protect your relationship with your child and address the alienating behaviors. Here's a comprehensive guide on how to combat parental alienation:

To effectively address parental alienation, **it is essential to document everything meticulously**. Keep detailed records of all incidents of alienation, noting dates, times, specific behaviors, and the impact these actions have on your child, as these details will need to be provided to the court. Save all forms of communication with the other parent, such as emails, text messages, and voicemails, which may reveal alienating behaviors or attempts to disrupt your relationship with your child. Record your interactions with your child, paying close attention to any changes in behavior or attitudes that could be influenced by the alienating parent. By maintaining thorough documentation, you can build a stronger case to protect your child's well-being and your parental rights.

It is important to stay calm and consistent. Remain patient, recognizing that your child may be experiencing significant emotional pressure from the alienating parent, and reacting with anger or frustration could exacerbate the situation and reinforce the negative narratives being promoted. Instead, focus on being consistent by continually showing your child love, support, and stability. Make sure to follow through with your parenting time, even if your child shows resistance, as your reliability and steadfastness can help counteract the alienating parent's influence and provide a sense of security and normalcy for your child.

Improving communication with your child is crucial when dealing with parental alienation. Start by encouraging open and honest dialogue, allowing your child to express their feelings and concerns without fear of judgment. Listen attentively and gently counter any false or negative narratives they may have heard, helping them to see a more balanced perspective. Use positive reinforcement to affirm your love and commitment, emphasizing that both parents care deeply for them and that they do not need to choose sides. It's also important to avoid speaking negatively about the other parent, regardless of their actions, and instead focus on strengthening your bond with your child, fostering a healthy and supportive relationship.

Enrolling your child in therapy with a licensed professional experienced in handling cases of parental alienation can be beneficial, as a therapist can assist your child in processing their emotions and provide valuable insights into the alienation they are experiencing. **Family counseling** may also be useful in addressing the dynamics between parents and children and working towards rebuilding the relationship. However, in cases of severe alienation, such counseling should be approached carefully and under professional guidance to ensure it is beneficial rather than harmful.

FIGHTING PARENTAL ALIENATION

Additionally, if the situation is particularly severe, requesting a court-ordered psychological evaluation of all parties involved can provide objective evidence of alienation and its effects on your child, which can be instrumental in court proceedings.

Educating yourself about parental alienation is a crucial step in effectively addressing this challenging issue. Start by researching the dynamics of parental alienation, including its signs and effects, to better understand what you and your child may be experiencing. This knowledge can help you recognize alienating behaviors early and take appropriate actions to counteract them. Consider joining support groups for parents facing similar challenges. These groups offer a platform to share experiences and strategies, providing both emotional support and practical advice, which can be invaluable in navigating the complexities of parental alienation.

Taking legal action can be a necessary step when addressing parental alienation.

Start by consulting with an experienced family law attorney who specializes in parental alienation cases, as they can help you develop a legal strategy to address the alienation and protect your relationship with your child. In cases where alienation is particularly severe, it may be necessary to seek a modification of the current custody arrangement. The court has the authority to alter custody or visitation orders to reduce the alienating parent's influence, or in some cases, to grant primary custody to the targeted parent to ensure the child's well-being.

If the alienating parent is violating court-ordered custody or visitation rights, filing a motion for contempt might be required. This legal action can enforce existing court orders and hold the alienating parent accountable for their actions, helping to safeguard your rights and maintain your relationship with your child.



Requesting the appointment of a Guardian ad Litem (GAL) can be a strategic step. A GAL is a court-appointed advocate who investigates the family situation by assessing the dynamics, interviewing all parties involved, and making recommendations to the court that reflect the best interests of the child.

FIGHTING PARENTAL ALIENATION

Focus on the Long-Term



When dealing with parental alienation, it is important to remain focused on the long-term. Understand that overcoming alienation is often a prolonged process, requiring dedication and a commitment to maintaining your relationship with your child and working towards a healthier family dynamic, even when progress seems slow. **Be prepared for setbacks and challenges,** as they are a natural part of the journey. Persistence and patience are essential, as well as having a strong support network to help you navigate the difficulties. By staying focused on the long-term goal of fostering a positive relationship with your child, you can increase your chances of successfully combating parental alienation.

Create a safe, stable, and loving home where your child feels secure and comfortable, away from any tension or conflict they might experience with the other parent. It's important that your child views your home as a safe space where they can relax and be themselves. Additionally, engage in activities together that your child enjoys, as spending quality time and creating positive memories can help strengthen your bond and counteract the negative effects of alienation. Fostering a nurturing and supportive environment will encourage your child to feel connected and valued, reinforcing a healthy and strong relationship.



FIGHTING PARENTAL ALIENATION

How to Prove Parental Alienation in Court

• Document Alienating Behavior

Keeping detailed records of instances of parental alienation is crucial. These records can include:



Records of Communications: This includes written correspondence between the parents regarding the children as well as texts, emails, records, and letters. All of these documents can show attempts at contact refusal or alienation.



Testimony Statements: Detailed accounts from third parties like teachers, family friends, or neighbors regarding the other parent's interactions with the children. Any instances in which children have heard negative things about you should be addressed.



Visual Evidence or Proof: Any pictures or recordings that show the other parent acting inappropriately against you or your children. This could include situations that occur in public, hostile behaviors, or other actions that have a negative impact on the child's perception.



Professional Assessments: Testimony or assessments from psychologists, psychiatrists, or therapists who have interacted with the children or parents can provide insights into the behavioral dynamics and the psychological impact of the alleged alienation.



Child Interviews: Understanding the child or children's feelings and experiences with both parents requires neutral professionals to lead conversations with them. It's important to conduct these interviews sensitively to prevent the child from experiencing more trauma.



Social Media Evidence or Proof: Posts made in public that make fun of you, especially if they tag you or your children, might be interpreted as distancing behavior. Both overt and covert types of alienation, such as being left out of family activities or photo albums.



Record of Refused Visitation: Dates, times, and any relevant contact related to any incidents in which the other parent refused or disturbed your visitation rights should be documented.



Educational and Health Records: Records from schools or hospitals may highlight behavioral and health patterns in the child that could be connected to actions that alienate others.



Legal Documents: Collect any prior court rulings, legal filings, or official records that provide insight into the history of the relationship and custody agreements.

FIGHTING PARENTAL ALIENATION

- **Demonstrate the Impact on the Child**



Provide evidence of how the alienation is affecting your child's emotional and psychological well-being. This can include changes in behavior, mood swings, academic performance, or social interactions.

- **Present Evidence of Efforts to Maintain the Relationship**



It's important to show compliance with custody and visitation orders, demonstrating that you have consistently adhered to the legal arrangements despite the alienating behavior of the other parent. Provide evidence of positive parenting by highlighting your efforts to nurture a supportive and loving relationship with your child. This can include examples of attending their events, supporting their interests, and maintaining open and positive communication. By showcasing your dedication to your child's well-being, you strengthen your position and emphasize your role as a caring and involved parent.

- **Prepare for Counter-arguments**



Anticipate defenses that the other parent may present, such as counter-arguments or outright denial of any alienating behavior. Collaborate with your attorney to prepare for these and help develop strategies to effectively counter their claims. Being well-prepared for the other parent's arguments not only strengthens your case but also demonstrates your commitment to protecting your relationship with your child and ensuring their best interests are upheld in the court's decision-making process.

- **Continuously Monitor and Adjust**



Regularly reviewing the progress of your case and the effectiveness of any interventions is essential when dealing with parental alienation. This ongoing evaluation allows you to adjust your strategies as needed based on new developments or changes in the situation, ensuring that your approach remains effective and responsive to your child's needs. Additionally, staying informed about legal precedents and best practices related to parental alienation is crucial. By keeping up-to-date with changes in the law and understanding the latest strategies, you can adapt your approach accordingly and remain prepared for any legal challenges that may arise.

By systematically gathering evidence, demonstrating the impact on the child, and presenting a well-organized case in court, and working closely with your attorney, you can effectively prove parental alienation and work towards a resolution that prioritizes the child's well-being.

CAN A PARENT LOSE CUSTODY

Because of Parental Alienation? _____

Yes, a parent can lose custody for engaging in parental alienation. Courts take allegations of parental alienation (although we do not recommend using the term in court) very seriously because it can have a significant negative impact on the child's well-being and relationship with the other parent. If a court finds that one parent is deliberately interfering with the child's relationship with the other parent, it may take steps to protect the child, which can include a change in custody.



The best interests of the child are the court's primary consideration in custody decisions. If a parent's actions are found to be harming the child's relationship with the other parent, these behaviors are considered contrary to the child's best interests. Parental alienation can cause significant emotional and psychological harm, which the court seeks to prevent. If the court determines that the alienating parent's behavior is negatively affecting the child's well-being, it may take steps to intervene and protect the child, ensuring that custody arrangements serve the child's welfare and foster healthy relationships with both parents.

The court may impose several consequences on an alienating parent to protect the child's well-being and restore their relationship with the targeted parent. One potential consequence is the **modification of the existing custody arrangement**, which may involve reducing or removing the alienating parent's custody rights and increasing the custody or visitation rights of the other parent. This adjustment aims to minimize the alienating parent's influence and help rebuild the child's relationship with the targeted parent. In cases where the court deems it necessary, **supervised visitation** may be ordered to prevent further alienation, ensuring that the alienating parent cannot continue harmful behaviors during visits.

CAN A PARENT LOSE CUSTODY



Additionally, the court might require the alienating parent to participate in therapy or counseling, either individually or with the child, to address the alienation and work towards mending the parent-child relationship.



In extreme cases of parental alienation, where the alienating behavior is severe and persistent, the court may take drastic measures to protect the child's well-being. One such measure is the complete loss of custody by the alienating parent. The court may decide to transfer primary or even full custody to the targeted parent if it believes this is the only way to safeguard the child's best interests.

If the alienating parent continues their harmful behaviors despite court orders to cease, they could be found in contempt of court. This finding could lead to serious legal penalties, including fines, imprisonment, and a further reduction or complete removal of custody rights. These consequences serve as a strong deterrent against continued alienating behavior and emphasize the court's commitment to the child's welfare.

These precedents demonstrate the lengths to which courts will go to intervene in situations of alienation and ensure a healthier family dynamic for the child.

CPS OR DCF INTERFERENCE

with Parental Alienation

Child Protective Services (CPS) or the **Department of Children and Families (DCF)** can be involved in cases of parental alienation, but their involvement is typically limited to situations where the child is at risk of abuse or neglect.



These agencies primarily focus on situations involving abuse, neglect, or where a child's safety is at risk. Parental alienation, although harmful, may not always fall under their jurisdiction unless the behavior is so severe that it constitutes emotional abuse and endangers the child's welfare. In cases where the alienating behavior causes significant emotional or psychological harm to the child, CPS or DCF might intervene and investigate. However, proving emotional abuse can be particularly challenging, as it typically requires substantial evidence to demonstrate the severe impact on the child's well-being.

If there is a report of emotional abuse related to parental alienation, Child Protective Services (CPS) or the Department of Children and Families (DCF) (in Mass, our CPS is DCF) may initiate an investigation to assess whether the child is at risk. This process could include interviews with the child, parents, and other relevant parties to gather information and determine the severity of the situation. DCF might refer the family to various services, such as counseling, parenting classes, or mediation, which can help address underlying issues, including parental alienation. If the investigation uncovers evidence of abuse or neglect, DCF may involve the court, which could result in modifications to custody or visitation arrangements to better protect the child's well-being.

DCF ALTERNATIVES

Against Parental Alienation

1. Family Court



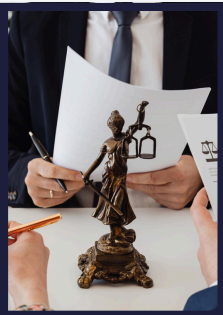
If parental alienation is the primary concern and there is no evidence of physical abuse or neglect, addressing the issue through family court is usually more effective. In family court, parents can seek modifications to custody arrangements, request the appointment of a Guardian ad Litem to represent the child's best interests, or pursue other legal remedies specifically designed to address parental alienation. Family court is equipped to handle complex custody disputes and can implement solutions tailored to restoring and preserving a healthy parent-child relationship.

2. Therapeutic Interventions



Engaging therapeutic interventions can be an effective way to address parental alienation and protect the child's emotional health. Working with a therapist, counselor, or mediator who has experience in handling parental alienation cases can provide a more direct approach to resolving the issue. These professionals can help facilitate communication between parents, address the psychological impact on the child, and work towards rebuilding healthy relationships. Therapeutic interventions offer a supportive environment for both parents and the child, focusing on mitigating the negative effects of alienation and fostering a more positive and stable family dynamic.

3. Work with a Family Law Attorney



Working with a family law attorney is crucial in navigating the complexities of parental alienation cases and pursuing the appropriate legal actions. An experienced attorney can provide valuable guidance on how to address alienation effectively within the legal framework. They can assist in developing a strategy for seeking custody modifications, requesting the appointment of a Guardian ad Litem, and utilizing other legal remedies. By making use of their expertise, you can ensure your relationship with your child and advocacy of their best interests in court.

DOES PARENTAL ALIENATION LAST FOREVER?

Factors Influencing the Duration

Parental alienation doesn't necessarily last forever, but its effects can be long-lasting and, in some cases, persist into adulthood if not properly addressed. The duration and impact of parental alienation depend on several factors, including the severity of the alienation, the child's resilience, the timing and effectiveness of interventions, and the ongoing relationship between the child and both parents.



The severity of parental alienation significantly impacts the potential for resolution and recovery.

In cases of mild to moderate alienation, with timely and appropriate intervention and support, the negative effects can often be mitigated. The child may eventually be able to rebuild a healthy and positive relationship with the alienated parent. However, in cases of severe alienation, where the manipulation and estrangement have been deeply entrenched over a prolonged period, the effects can be more persistent and challenging to overcome. The child may develop a strong aversion or fear towards the alienated parent, making the process of reconciliation more difficult and complex. Addressing severe alienation requires a comprehensive and sustained approach to address the deep-seated issues and support the child's emotional healing.

The age of the child plays a crucial role in the dynamics of parental alienation and the potential for resolution.

Younger children are often more susceptible to alienation due to their dependency on and trust in the alienating parent. However, they may also be more open to positive changes and interventions if addressed early, as their emotional and cognitive development is still forming. In contrast, older children and teenagers may have more deeply ingrained views shaped by the alienating parent, making their resistance to change more pronounced.

Despite this, adolescents are generally more capable of understanding complex situations with the right guidance and therapy.

Effective intervention for older children requires a nuanced approach that acknowledges their more developed reasoning skills while addressing the entrenched attitudes fostered by the alienation.

DOES PARENTAL ALIENATION LAST FOREVER?

The success of addressing parental alienation heavily depends on the timeliness and effectiveness of intervention and support. Early and effective measures, such as counseling, family therapy, and legal action, can significantly reduce both the duration and impact of alienation. These interventions focus on rebuilding trust and improving communication between the child and the alienated parent, which is crucial for overcoming the estrangement. Conversely, without intervention, the effects of parental alienation can persist for years or even into adulthood. The child may continue to hold negative feelings towards the alienated parent, which can have lasting consequences for their emotional well-being and their ability to form healthy relationships. Prompt and targeted support is essential to mitigate these long-term effects and foster a more positive and stable family dynamic.



Ongoing relationship dynamics between parents play a significant role in determining the long-term impact of parental alienation. If the parents are able to adopt a cooperative co-parenting approach, the effects of alienation can be mitigated, allowing the child to either maintain or rebuild a positive relationship with both parents. This cooperative effort can facilitate healthier communication and reduce the emotional conflict experienced by the child. However, if the alienation persists or the conflict between the parents remains unresolved, the negative effects may endure, potentially leading to a permanent estrangement between the child and the alienated parent.

DOES PARENTAL ALIENATION LAST FOREVER?

Long-Term Effects

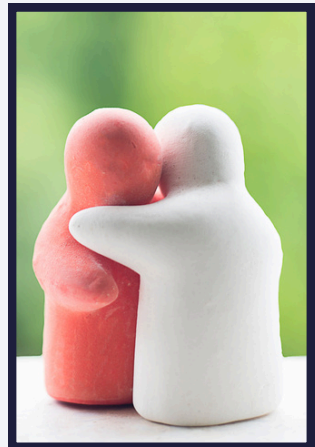
Adult Relationships: If left unaddressed, parental alienation can affect the child's relationships in adulthood. They may struggle with trust, intimacy, and emotional regulation, and may have a distorted view of family dynamics.



Personal Identity and Self-Esteem: Alienation can impact a child's sense of identity, especially if they internalize negative beliefs about the alienated parent. This can lead to issues with self-esteem and personal development.

Hope for Reconciliation

Rebuilding relationships after years of parental alienation, while challenging, is possible with patience, persistence, and appropriate professional support. Many alienated children eventually reconcile with the alienated parent through a dedicated effort to address the underlying issues and restore trust. Therapeutic support, such as counseling and family therapy, plays a crucial role in this process by helping both children and parents navigate the complex emotions and dynamics involved in alienation. Therapy provides a structured environment to heal emotional rifts and reestablish healthy family connections, offering hope for mending relationships and fostering a more positive and supportive family dynamic.



RECONNECTING WITH ADULT CHILDREN

It's Not Impossible



Reconnecting with adult children who have experienced parental alienation can be challenging, but it is possible with patience, understanding, and the right approach. The process requires rebuilding trust, addressing past hurts, and being open to honest communication. Rebuilding a relationship with an adult child affected by parental alienation involves a multifaceted approach rooted in empathy, patience, and strategic communication.

Start by acknowledging the profound impact the alienation may have had on your child. Recognize that they might harbor deep-seated feelings of abandonment, confusion, or mistrust due to the distorted narratives they received. Validate their emotions without becoming defensive, showing that you understand their experience even if it was shaped by misinformation.

Taking responsibility for any actions or behaviors that may have contributed to the estrangement is crucial, but do so with sincerity and without shifting blame. Apologize for past mistakes, and focus on your own role in the situation rather than criticizing the other parent. When reaching out, choose a non-confrontational approach—consider writing a heartfelt letter or sending a thoughtful message expressing your desire to reconnect and your respect for their boundaries.

RECONNECTING WITH ADULT CHILDREN

Understand that rebuilding trust and repairing your relationship will take time.

Be patient and allow your adult child space to process your outreach and respond at their own pace. When appropriate, share your perspective on the past, providing honest explanations of your own experiences and feelings during the period of alienation. Be prepared to answer questions or address accusations with calmness and clarity, avoiding defensiveness.



Shift the focus from past conflicts to creating new, positive experiences together. Engage in activities that foster positive memories and build a foundation for a healthier relationship. Set realistic expectations for the pace and nature of the reconciliation, acknowledging that progress may be slow.

Consider seeking professional support to aid in the process. Engaging a therapist or counselor experienced in family dynamics can provide valuable guidance and facilitate difficult conversations. Family therapy, if your child is open to it, can also help address unresolved issues and work towards healing.

Respect your child's boundaries and decisions, giving them the time and space they need. Show consistent commitment to the relationship by being reliable, supportive, and understanding. Follow through on promises and commitments to demonstrate your genuine intent to reconnect.



Educate yourself about parental alienation to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics at play. Support groups for parents who have experienced similar situations can offer emotional support, practical advice, and encouragement.

Finally, remain patient and hopeful throughout the process. Rebuilding a relationship affected by parental alienation is a challenging and gradual endeavor, but with persistence, empathy, and love, it is possible to achieve meaningful reconciliation and restore the bond with your adult child.



O'Connor Family Law

Heather O'Connor is the CEO and Founder of O'Connor Family Law. Choosing to practice in the field of family law is usually due to some type of personal connection with this particular area of law. The history of the firm itself as an entity as well as the spirit and values of what our firm is built on intertwines so deeply with Heather's story, that we feel it must be shared. Her story is one of overcoming obstacles, of refusing to listen to those who told her she could not do it or was dreaming too big. It is one of finding that life can be more than what you can even physically imagine at the moment, and that no one is stuck in a situation if they are willing to change themselves and work hard. It is about finding a new path when divorce has closed an old one. The summary of Heather's path that led to you reading this book which we are including below is one that every new employee must read and align themselves with. Our firm's values and, as a result, every decision we make, exude a belief in the following: accountability, being forward-looking, remaining optimistic, being inspiring, throwing in a little bit of humor, and to always be learning and improving.



Heather O'Connor

Growing up, Heather was a figure skater. Her life focused on her dreams of being an Olympic competitor. Her family was what most would consider lower-class. However, as Heather's talent on the ice became apparent, her parents took on multiple jobs to be able to pay for her coaching, ice time, and eventually room and board as Heather moved away from home at 14 to train with Olympic level coaches. After a number of ankle injuries causing her to realize that she may not realize her dream of being an Olympic contender, she moved back home with her parents for the last half of her senior year of high school, graduating in 1994.

Heather applied for college, but neither of her parents had gone to college and did not know how to help her in that respect. Because of their hard work in supporting Heather's figure skating costs, they had moved up the status ladder to what most would consider middle-class. With the focus being on athletics, there was no college fund or savings to help with the expense of higher learning; however, her parents reached past the threshold of allowing Heather to get financial aid to attend school.

In 1995, Heather accepted a coaching position in Lake Ironwood, Michigan. Her boyfriend at the time decided to move to the Upper Peninsula with her. In the beginning of 1997, after finding out she was pregnant, Heather did what every girl afraid of being looked down at did – she got married. Heather had three kids during that marriage, and when the youngest one was about a year old, her husband was arrested for Domestic Assault and Battery and a very long, contested divorce followed.

The divorce was Heather's first experience with court. She hired a lawyer who her mother went to a networking group with. Although holding a restraining order against her husband, she found herself terrified and sleepless at night as her ex-husband's truck would drive past her house and rev its engine. The police said there was nothing they could do without proof it was him. Heather purchased a home security system, but still couldn't prove it was him. The words he said to her before he left would replay over and over in her head every time she heard the truck driving down her street, "If you ever try to divorce me, I will take everything from you. You will have no money, no home, and I will make sure the kids hate you. You will be lucky if you can even find a park bench to sleep on."



Heather O'Connor

After nights of this going on, she called her attorney out of desperation. "There must be something we can do to make this stop." His suggestion: "Try going to bed earlier." Like she hadn't already tried that and everything else she could think of.

There was no empathy in her lawyer's advice. There was no hope provided that her future would be different than what she was currently living through. There was dry advice that left Heather feeling even more hopeless as she wondered if her ex would be able to make good on his threats.

Heather's divorce was contentious to put it mildly. And if anything couldn't be worse, the economy crashed in 2003 and extracurricular activities were one of the first expenses parents pulled back on, so her income from coaching figure skating dried up incredibly quickly.



A court hearing at the time meant dressing up and walking into a cold building where you know your life, your children, your future, absolutely everything was in the hands of people who had no idea about who you are or your life and, whether they even cared about all of that was up for debate.

The feeling of walking into this situation and then seeing the person who was threatening to take everything away and destroy your future, coupled with the realization that this is not what you ever thought would happen the day you said, "I do," and promised to be by the side of the person who now sat at the table on the other side of the room, created intense competing feelings. In one way, there was excitement of a better and peaceful future, there was anger for getting to this place, there was hatred at how someone you thought you knew suddenly was a stranger who wanted to hurt you, there was fear of the worst case scenario, there was emptiness at the loss of a life partner and confidant, there was embarrassment for ever thinking love was real, there was sadness at the realization that the institute of marriage was not the same commitment it was

Heather O'Connor

previously believed. It was everything rolled into one huge knot in your stomach; not to mention seeing your ex and wanting to run up and hug them and reassure them everything will be okay but at the same time wanting to punch them right in the face or run over them with your car as they walked across the courtroom parking lot. It was all of those.

Heather sat in court one day waiting for her case to be called for probation. She had spoken to a number of people going through similar situations as hers, but this one woman on this one particular day resonated with Heather in a way that was life changing. "My attorney seems okay. I mean they get the law, I guess, because they seem to know all the right lingo, but I don't know. They just don't get it."

Heather went home and had dreams about that last sentence. "It." What was "it?" Suddenly, it dawned on her. Not getting "it" was the same issue she had with her lawyer. Sure, the lawyer could tell her about the factors the court looks at when determining custody or child support, but they just didn't get IT. It was the empathy for what a person goes through emotionally, mentally, and physically when going through litigation that can influence their future. It was making sure the person was okay and helping them understand what was going on; not just lecturing them about something that, to the lawyers, was just another day of work. It was seeing a client doesn't just need legal representation. They need someone to give them hope. They need someone to let them know things will be okay. They need someone to inspire them so that they can push through the tough times, even if things don't go their way, so that they know it will work out in the end. They need someone who understands all of that.

As Heather sat in court watching each case get up, she noticed the first attorney would get up and make their speech. "Wow, that person is going to get exactly what they want." Then the next attorney would get up and give a presentation that left Heather saying, "Oh hold on! No, THAT person is right!" It was a strategic showcase where whichever attorney could pick up the puzzle pieces and present them in a way that made them fit the best for the Judge to decide in their favor - that person would win the Judge's favor.

It was the same as putting on a spectacular figure skating routine for an audience; only, the audience was the Judge and you wore a suit instead of a skating outfit.



Heather O'Connor

Heather thought about the ways she could improve on the service. She thought of some of the injustices she had experienced during her three-year divorce. She felt she could do better. And, she thought, "Lawyers are all rich, so what's the downside?" (She laughs at that now!)

One day after a contempt hearing where the child support that her ex owed her was still left hanging in limbo while an order was taken under advisement, Heather's (new) lawyer turned to her and asked, "Heather, you are struggling financially and you have three little kids to support. What are you going to do?"

Heather smiled and said, "Oh, I know what I'm going to do actually! I'm going to go to school and become a divorce attorney and open a law firm."

The look of shock on his face is something Heather will never forget. After a moment he broke the silence. "No. Seriously," he laughed, "What are you really going to do?"

"I just told you."

"Do you have any idea what you'd be getting yourself into?" he asked questioning Heather's impossible dream.

"No. But I'll figure it out."

And figure it out she did. She started her college education at a local community college called Massasoit and finished with a 4.0 GPA. She received a full scholarship to the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth and graduated with top honors from there as well. She then went to law school at Roger Williams University School of Law, where she also founded the Family Law Society and served on the editorial board of the school's Law Review.

Heather O'Connor



Her proudest moment is not one of her own accomplishments. It was a story her daughter told her at the age of 11. Heather was in her first year of law school, and she lived in Fall River, which is a city not known for being high-income. Her daughter had to take a foreign language in school, and, although she wanted to take Mandarin, her teacher told her that she had to take Portuguese. Her daughter came home livid and was telling Heather the story of her day, "In front of the whole class, the teacher said that I needed to take Portuguese because I live in Fall River and everyone here speaks Portuguese so I needed to know how to speak it. I told her I didn't need to learn it because I wasn't going to stay here forever, and she laughed and me and said, 'Accept the fact you live in Fall River. No one leaves here.' I stood up out of my chair and I said, 'EXCUSE ME??? Don't you sit here and tell me or anyone else in this room that we are stuck and can't do things in our future just because of where we live. I watch my Mom who had nothing and had no education, but now she is in law school and she's going to be a lawyer. So don't you try to tell me or anyone else they can't be what they want to be."

Her daughter's words inspired Heather to push through every tough moment in her life because, as much as sometimes it did feel impossible and too hard and she heard the words echo through her head that she was dreaming too big or couldn't do it because, if she could get through – if she could make it – she could send a message to every single person out there who has heard those same limiting words know that they are not true. She had to make it; no matter what challenge she faced.

Heather O'Connor

Heather graduated law school seventh in her class, and went on to serve for two years as a lead judicial clerk for the Chief Justice of the Rhode Island Supreme Court. When the clerkship was ending, Heather had every intention of commencing on her dream and hanging her shingle; however, a pesky LinkedIn invitation continued to show up in her email. She opened it and saw that a family law firm in Massachusetts was hiring. Thinking it might be some sort of sign (not to mention some good practical experience), she applied.

During the third round of interviews, the Managing Partner of the firm asked Heather, "Where else have you applied?" Heather looked at him and responded honestly, "Nowhere." The Managing Partner crossed his arms, leaned back in his chair, and smirked, "So you have all your eggs in this one basket?"

"Oh no," Heather replied, "I have all my eggs in my own basket. I was planning on opening my own practice, so this is my back up plan." She was offered the job.

She spent four incredible years with that firm, learning the ins and outs of family law and how to be an amazing attorney. But then the day came when she knew it was time.

In July 2016, she left the law firm she was with and opened the doors of O'Connor Family Law. Since then, to date, the firm has grown to servicing clients in a manner that has provided an annual seven-figure revenue, which has allowed the firm to adopt new services for clients, including an on-staff coach who helps clients free of charge transition emotionally through divorce and custody litigation.





We've covered a lot of material so far, and while we definitely hope you've found this book helpful; we've really only just scratched the surface. The material in this book has largely been procedural related and hasn't even begun to delve into the world of legal strategies and deploying one towards your goals. There is a lot of work that needs to be done. When you're ready to take the next step, or if you've been served and need immediate help, feel free to contact our Firm so that we can start work on a custom legal solution that meets your needs. You can reach us at info@familylawma.com or by calling (774) 541-1430.

WE LOOK FORWARD TO BEING A PART OF YOUR TEAM.



WE'RE HERE FOR YOU

THANK YOU FOR READING
OUR PARENTAL
ALIENATION E-BOOK.

This book is about how parental alienation can be viewed in Massachusetts, where one parent, intentionally or not, manipulates a child into rejecting the other parent.

While this book emphasizes strategies to navigate parental alienation, it also acknowledges the complexity of family dynamics. **Not every case fits neatly into the framework of alienation, and each family's situation is unique.** Readers are encouraged to consider the nuances of their circumstances, understanding that the insights provided should not be taken as definitive legal advice. We always recommend that you speak with a family law attorney to learn more about how your case could be affected by the actions of your co-parent or other family members.

Whether you are navigating a high-conflict custody battle, representing a client, or seeking to understand this phenomenon, this e-book provides a clear and compassionate approach to one of the most emotionally charged areas of family law.

PARENTAL
ALIENATION
THE INVISIBLE PARENT



**"IT IS HARD TO FIND AN ATTORNEY WHO
WILL GIVE YOU THE EMPATHETIC HAND
THAT SHE PROVIDES."**

Attorney O'Connor is extremely knowledgeable and cares about her clients. It is hard to find an attorney who will give you the empathetic hand that she provides. Whenever I have an issue, I call her. I highly recommend her for any family law issues.

-DAVID B.

ATTORNEY HEATHER O'CONNOR

Heather O'Connor has been described as one of the nicest people you will ever meet until you are an opposing party in the courtroom. She then puts on her game face and will ensure that your side is heard and understood by the Judge. To her, litigation is not a game; she is fighting for justice for her clients and their children.

Attorney O'Connor's favorite cases surround the issue of parental alienation —where one parent is acting in a manner that makes it very difficult, if not impossible, for the other parent to have a relationship with his or her children. She is passionate about protecting clients who have suffered from domestic violence but is very familiar with the ways in which restraining orders and criminal complaints are utilized simply to get an upper hand in a divorce or custody battle.



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