

Behaviour & Warning Signs Exhibited by Child, Alienating Parent and Rejected Parent

Dr. Barbara-Jo Fidler's is a nationally recognized psychologist and expert in the field of parental alienation. She has testified as an expert witness in many custody cases and has collected the list below from a cross section of literature on the subject. The list is not exhaustive and not all the behaviours need to present in order for the harm to the child be found.

Pathological Alienation:

Warning Signs of Behaviour Exhibited by Child, Alienating Parent and Rejected Parent, which is reproduced below.

Child Behaviours:

- View of parents one-sided, all good or all bad; idealizes one parent and devalues the other
- Vicious vilification of target parent; campaign of hatred
- Trivial, false and irrational reasons to justify hatred
- Reactions and perceptions unjustified or disproportionate to parent's behaviours
- Talks openly to anyone about rejected parent's perceived shortcomings
- Extends hatred to extended family and pets (hatred by association)
- No guilt or ambivalence regarding malicious treatment, hatred, etc.
- A stronger, but not necessarily healthy, psychological bond with alienating parent than with rejected parent
- Anger at rejected parent for abandonment; blames him/her for divorce
- Speech is brittle, a litany; obsessed; has an artificial quality; affect does not match words; no conviction; unchildlike, uses adult language; has a rehearsed quality
- Stories are repetitive and lacking in detail and depth
- Mimics what siblings report rather than own experience
- Denial of hope for reconciliation; no acknowledgement of desire for reconciliation
- Expresses worry for preferred parent, desire to care for that parent; or, defensive denial that child is indeed worried about parent

Alienating Parent Behaviours:

- Allows and insists that child makes decisions about contact
- Rarely talks about the other parent; uninterested in child's time with other parent after contact; gives a cold shoulder, silent treatment, or is moody after child's return from visit.
- No photos of target parent; removes reminders of the other parent

- Refusal to hear positive comments about rejected parent; quick to discount good times as trivial and unimportant
- No encouragement of calls to other parent between visits; rationalizes that child does not ask
- Tells child fun things that were missed during visit with other parent
- Indulges child with material possessions and privileges
- Sets few limits or is rigid about routines, rules and expectations
- Refuses to speak directly to parent; refuses to be in same room or close proximity; does not let target parent come to door to pick up child
- No concern for missed visits with other parent
- Makes statements and then denies what was said
- Body language and nonverbal communication reveals lack of interest, disdain and disapproval
- Engages in inquisition of child after visits
- Rejected parent is discouraged or refused permission to attend school events and activities
- Telephone messages, gifts and mail from other parent to child are destroyed, ignored or passed on to the child with disdain
- Distorts any comments of child that might justify accusations
- Doesn't believe that child has any need for relationship with other parent
- When child calls and is quiet or non-communicative, parent wrongly assumes pressure from target parent, or that child is not comfortable with target parent; evidence of bad parenting; does not appreciate that child is uncomfortable talking to alienating parent about target parent
- Portrays other parent as dangerous, may inconsistently act fearful of other parent in front of child
- Exaggerates negative attributes of other parent, and omits anything positive
- Delusional false statements repeated to child; distorts history and other parent's participation in the child's life; claims other parent has totally changed since separation
- Projection of own thoughts, feelings and behaviours onto the other parent
- Does not correct child's rude, defiant and/or omnipotent behaviour directed towards the other parent, but would never permit child to do this with others
- Convinced of harm, when there is no evidence
- False or fabricated allegations of sexual, physical and/or emotional abuse

- Denigrates and exaggerates flaws of rejected parent to child
- Says other parent left “us”, divorced “us” and doesn’t love “us”
- Over-involves child in adult matters and litigation
- Child required to keep secrets and spy or report back on other parent
- Child required to be messenger
- Overt and covert threats to withdraw love and affection from child unless other parent is rejected
- Extreme lack of courtesy to rejected parent
- Relocation for minor reasons and with little concern for effects on child

Rejected Parent Behaviours:

- Harsh, rigid and punitive parenting style
- Outrage at child’s challenge to his/her authority
- Passivity or withdrawal in face of conflict
- Immature, self-centred in relation to child
- Loses temper, angry, demanding, intimidating character traits, but not to level of abuse
- Counter-rejecting behaviour
- Lacks empathic connection to child
- Inept and unempathic pursuit of child, pushes calls and letters, unannounced or embarrassing visits
- Challenges child’s beliefs and/or attitudes and tries to convince them otherwise
- Dismissive of child’s feelings and negative attitudes
- Induces guilt
- May use force to reassert parent position
- Vents rage, blames alienating parent for brainwashing child and takes no responsibility