

Parental Alienation – a reflection on some cases

By Dr. Monty N Weinstein

I have been working in the field of custodial disputes for almost half a century. During all of these cases that I have been involved with there has been in my opinion one party, whether it is the mother or father, winning everything, and the other person, male or female, coming out of a case litigation with a great deal to be desired. There have been families that have lived together for years and after their children are born, both Mother and Father in many cases have an ongoing, loving relationship with their children. Unfortunately, there are over 50 percent of divorces in these United States and in addition, numerous contentious conflicts which may go on for years. I have noticed in many of these cases, a number of them which will be mentioned, that once court starts, and various legal experts and other people involved in the divorce industry become involved, there is a war and feelings of hatred which are difficult to be resolved. Another component in these issues unfortunately are various mental health experts who add to the dimension and equation and rather than try to resolve an adversarial form of conflict known as divorce, these individuals add fuel to the fire. What I have noticed throughout the years of working in this field is that one party gets involved in order to posture themselves as the future custodial parent and systematically and methodically through various means make an attempt to remove one parent from the child or children's lives so at the end of the rainbow, deservingly or not, they will obtain child support until their children are adults. Today, a number of experts call the phenomenon of one parent systematically and methodically removing the other parent from the children's lives parental alienation and parental alienation syndrome. Without making this more complex, the parental alienation syndrome is a more severe form of alienating the child or children against a targeted parent. This syndrome comes in many forms, such as creating a feeling among vulnerable children that the other parent, whether it be father or mother, is the devil incarnate, and everything they do has no merit. After a while, children, who are already vulnerable to their parents, begin to believe this and start creating fantasy stories that everything the other parent does has an ulterior motive to hurt and destroy the other parent, also known as the targeted parent.

Through the years, I have testified in the area of parental alienation, and because my field of study is family therapy, I have identified the parent that is the perpetrator of this phenomenon as the Identified Patient.

CASES:

Here are some of the cases that I have worked on and for the purpose of this article, I will change their names.

1. New Jersey - I had a case a couple of years ago which involved children, ages 11 and 14, who were living at the time in Texas with their father, and their mother resided in New Jersey. The father, for years, went on a rampage and portrayed the mother as an egregious person who did not know what she was doing, and who did not have the children's best interests at heart. He portrayed the mother as someone who was hot and cold and not nurturing. The mother, after hearing the work that I did, consulted with me in my New York, Greenwich Village office. I also brought my associate, a Harvard-trained educator, Karen Wagner, into the case. The father, instead of being more conciliatory, became more aggressive, and refused to allow the children to have any contact with their mother. The mother was a warm, nurturing individual who loved her children. I testified for the

Mother with my associate, Karen Wagner, and we obtained complete custody for the Mother. That was in 2010. As of now, the children do not want to return to their father and the Mother is the sole custodial parent. The Court eventually halted parenting time with the Father because on a final visit to Texas, the Father once again did not want to return the children.

2. Florida - I testified two years ago, in Bravard County, Florida, where the father did not have any parenting time with his two children, ages 8 and 10. The mother made numerous allegations against the father and called child welfare services to complain that the father is an egregious character and should not have any parenting time. The mother kept alienating these children. I testified as an expert in parental alienation, and custody was reversed. As of now, two years later, the father enjoys complete custody with parenting time given to the mother. In my re-visit of this case, the children appeared to be happy and well adjusted.
3. North Carolina - I testified in North Carolina for a father who had no parenting time with his children, ages 4 and 5, even though the father was a warm individual, who was a successful tax attorney in a large city. I testified about what would happen in several years if the father was not allowed parenting time with the Children. The Court became educated on the phenomenon of parental alienation and eventually gave complete custody to the father. Also at the same time, because of this alienation, the Judge sentenced the Mother to Contempt to six months in the county jail. (I did not ask for that consequence.) As of now, to the best of my knowledge, the children are living in a tranquil, harmonious relationship with their father, and at the same time, are seeing their mother with liberal parenting time.
4. Colorado - There is another case in Colorado that has been ongoing and highly contentious for several years. The parties are the parents of three children, 12 and under. Mother is an educated person, a doctor in her field, and has blocked and aborted parenting time with this father for a number of years. I wrote a report. We have restored parenting time for Father, but this is still pending in litigation. The major part of my thesis is parental alienation and that custody should be reversed to the father to help mitigate the psychological damage sustained by the children throughout the years.
5. Alabama – I've testified in a prominent case on parental alienation. The father has a new family. The mother raised her son who is now 14. She also has constantly aborted parenting time between the father and his son. I testified four times on this matter in Florence, Alabama, with the thesis that unless there is intervention, there will be severe damage to this child.
6. Pennsylvania – I testified for a prominent doctor who had supervised parenting time. The children were ages 11 and 13. The mother, who was also a prominent doctor, (both parents had strong ties to a major university), was constantly for years keeping the children away from the father and accusing him of being selfish, mean and all kinds of allegations which were never validated. I testified to parental alienation. The Judge did not reverse custody, but awarded the father liberal parenting time and lectured the mother to stop the alienation or custody would be reversed. My Associate, Karen Wagner, conducted reunification therapy with the father and the children.

7. California – I testified for a prominent mother several years ago in Los Angeles. The father was constantly undermining the Mother during his parenting time, post-divorce. Their child was 9 at the time. I testified to the egregious effects of parental alienation and what was likely to happen if mother did not get some parenting time. Mother won custody of the child in this matter, and as of now, father has liberal parenting time. The Court recognized parental alienation.
8. New York – I am presently testifying for a Father who did not have any parenting time with his children, ages 13 and 14, for a number of years. The mother portrayed the father as a horrific individual who should not have any parenting time with his children. I am in the middle of my testimony in this matter, and the Court recognized the necessity of family therapy and the phenomenon of parental alienation. I am currently in the middle of testifying to reverse parenting time.
9. Georgia – I testified for a prominent father of a 15-year-old daughter. There were numerous motions filed with the Court that this father smoked marijuana and for that reason should have a reduced relationship with this child. I testified a number of times that the father had a strong bond with the child. The father's marijuana use was a catalyst to reduce father's parenting time. I testified about parental alienation and the devastating effects if the child continued to lose time with the father. The Judge in his wisdom gave the father a shared parenting schedule. The father is not using any form of substance abuse, and the child is flourishing in their joint custody atmosphere.
10. Wisconsin – I testified in Wisconsin for a woman who was represented by Dave Oles, Esquire, of Georgia, and I was accompanied by Ms. Karen Wagner. The woman in this case was accused of alienating her children against the father. There were three minor children. I testified for several days and was deposed. The Court recognized parental alienation. However, the opposing party accused my client, who was a prominent attorney, of being the alienator as well as having a substance abuse problem. Through testimony, Mr. Oles and I attempted to demonstrate to the Court that Mother had not been alienating the children. Mother received liberal parenting time, a step up from the previously-ordered supervised visitation. However, the Court did find that Mother alienated the children through a series of bizarre acts.

Symptoms:

The major symptoms of parental alienation revolve around the campaign of denigration and hatred towards the other parent. It also involves rationalizations about another parent by the children that have no basis in reality, and is planted by the alienating parent. Also, it lacks a form of ambivalence. When one cognitively perceives another person, they have many images of that person. An alienator would accentuate a negative image rather than anything positive about an individual who was being targeted by the alienator. An example of this in one of my cases in f Colorado follows: Father physically is about 6-feet, 3-inches, and about 230 pounds. Rather than portraying the father as warm and fuzzy and a nurturing, kind, teddy-bear type of person, he is portrayed mostly like

Shrek, this bizarre, movie character. The way a mother portrays a father, or vice-versa, has a residual effect on the children's impressions. Another part is on-going support and confirmation of the programming parent, in other words, that means the children are beginning to identify with the alienator during the alienation process. Another factor is reflective support of the programming parent. That means the children are programmed to alienate not just the identified parent, but also any member of the family that is connected with that parent. In addition there is no guilt by the children or the alienator toward the horrible treatment that the adversarial parent is receiving by them. This is usually accompanied by grotesque scenarios and acquisitions against the targeted parent.

Many mental health experts identify the difference between parental alienation and parental alienation syndrome as being two separate parts of the alienating phenomenon with the syndrome being the most severe part of the spectrum. In my work with numerous people and families, I find that the syndrome and parental alienation are similar in that the syndrome and its components are just a more severe form of the alienating process.

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