

THE ARGUMENT:

Parental Alienation tells us the child has become alienated.

We need terminology that explains why.



MY RESPONSE:

Ok - Investigate why, but don't abandon the term Parental Alienation.

Parental Alienation can describe the relational dynamic. The behaviours and mechanisms help us understand how and why it is developed.

These aren't all synonyms for parental alienation. They're different behaviours, broader constructs and psychological mechanisms that may overlap with, contribute to, or maintain the dynamic:

WHAT MAY DRIVE OR MAINTAIN THE DYNAMIC?

Potential individual/psychological factors that may contribute to alienated child behaviour:

- Post Separation Abuse - Potential Overlap
- Child Psychological Abuse
- Coercive control
- Alienating behaviours
- Psychological manipulation
- Loyalty pressure/binds
- Gatekeeping
- Denigration
- Parentification
- Adultification
- Fear reinforcement
- Interference with attachment/relationships
- False or distorted narratives/allegations
- Repeated narrative framing
- Classical conditioning
- Operant conditioning
- Observational learning
- Learned helplessness

Alienating Parent Observed Behaviour:

WHAT MAY DRIVE OR MAINTAIN THE DYNAMIC?

Potential individual/psychological factors that may contribute to alienating behaviour:

- Unrecognised or untreated mental-health difficulties
 - Maladaptive personality traits or personality pathology
 - Unresolved trauma
 - Attachment insecurity
 - Rigid or black-and-white thinking
 - Heightened threat perception
 - Obsessive/persistent/disproportionate fears about the other parent
 - Difficulty separating their own emotional experience from the child's
 - Genuine but inaccurate belief that they are protecting the child
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- Projection:
Attributing one's own fear, anger or beliefs to the child.
 - Confirmation bias:
Interpreting ambiguous behaviour as evidence that the other parent is dangerous/bad.
 - Poor/lack of insight:
Difficulty recognising that one's own behaviours, beliefs or interpersonal patterns are problematic.
 - Ego-syntonic:
The alienating parent experiences their thoughts/behaviours as consistent with who they are, so they may not perceive them as problematic or needing change.

WHAT CAN HAPPEN WITHIN THE CHILD:

- Fear and anxiety
- Cognitive dissonance
- Black-and-white thinking
- Loyalty conflict
- Guilt and obligation Avoidance
- Distorted perceptions
- Suppression/reinterpretation of positive experiences
- Increasing psychological dependence on the alienating parent

SEVERE PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS

In some individuals, severe or prolonged psychological distress may include suicidal ideation or self-harm.

This is not specific to parental alienation and is not be presented as an inevitable outcome.

Alienated Child

OBSERVABLE OUTCOMES:

- Rejection or avoidance of a parent/ extended family members
 - Hostility, anger or disproportionate fear
 - Strong alignment with alienating parent
 - Black-and-white views of parents
 - Repeating adult narratives/language
 - Rewriting or denying positive memories
 - Persevered claims of abandonment despite attempted contact
 - Blocking or refusing communication
 - Rejection extending to extended family
 - Behaviour changing between parental environments (if applicable)
 - Anxiety around contact or reunification
 - Ongoing estrangement into adulthood
 - Fractured sibling/family relationships
 - Intergenerational repetition of unhealthy patterns/
- Parental Alienation

Adolescence: Autonomy, Enmeshment & Control

BEYOND THE CHILD

THE WIDER IMPACT OF PARENTAL ALIENATION:

- Limited development of independence/autonomy
 - Enmeshment with the preferred parent
 - Parent-child boundaries becoming blurred
 - Guilt associated with independence
 - Feeling responsible for the parent's emotions/wellbeing
 - Parentification or emotional caretaking
 - Difficulty developing an identity separate from the parent
 - Independent choices perceived as betrayal/disloyalty
 - Control over friendships, relationships or family contact
 - First-job income becoming another area of control
 - Restricted access/control over own money and electronic devices
 - Financial dependence limiting independence
 - Rewards/money potentially reinforcing compliance
 - Difficulty making decisions without parental approval
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- Limited Parental Alienation specific support across legal, mental-health and healthcare systems

Limited Parental Alienation specific support across legal, mental-health and healthcare systems

IMPACT ON THE ALIENATED PARENT:

BEYOND THE CHILD

THE WIDER IMPACT OF PARENTAL ALIENATION:

- Chronic grief and ambiguous loss
- Fear of saying or posting the child's name
- Hypervigilance around every interaction
- Fear innocent contact will be misinterpreted
- Repeated allegations or accusations
- Reputational and social damage
- Legal/court exhaustion
- Loss of extended family relationships
- Feeling forced to parent from a distance
- Silence becoming a form of self-protection
- Financial control & pressure
- Significant legal and court costs
- Child-support obligations continuing despite little/no relationship with child
- Financial pressure potentially being used within broader coercive dynamics
- Employment disruption from proceedings/conflict
- Costs associated with repeatedly attempting contact or reunification
- Anxiety & chronic stress
- Loss of parental role and important milestones
- Social isolation & fractured extended-family relationships
- Powerlessness / learned helplessness
- Impact on future relationships, grandparents & other children

We know chronic childhood stress can affect the developing brain.

We don't yet have evidence of a Parental Alienation specific neurological signature.

I'd personally like to see more neuroimaging research specifically examining people impacted by parental alienation.

WITHIN THE CHILD: POTENTIAL NEUROLOGICAL IMPACTS OF CHRONIC STRESS

PARENTAL ALIENATION

POTENTIAL IMPACTS OF CHRONIC STRESS ON THE DEVELOPING BRAIN:

- Chronic psychological stress
- Heightened fear and threat responses
- Hypervigilance and anxiety
- Persistent or disproportionate fears about the rejected parent

Neurological processes potentially affected by chronic stress:

- Amygdala: altered threat detection and emotional processing
- Prefrontal cortex (PFC): developing emotional regulation, impulse control, reasoning and flexible thinking may be affected
- Orbitofrontal cortex (OFC): reward/punishment processing, behavioural adaptation and social-emotional decision-making may be affected
- Hippocampus: chronic stress may affect learning, memory formation, contextual memory and recall

**Heavily informed by EMMM Foundation's intervention framework,
alongside lived experience.**

REUNIFICATION & INTERVENTION

Intervention should match severity

- First identify what is driving and maintaining the child's rejection
 - Rule out genuine abuse, neglect, fear or other valid reasons for estrangement
 - Intervention should match the severity; there is no one-size-fits-all approach
 - Mild cases may respond to early intervention, psychoeducation and relationship support
 - Moderate cases may require structured therapeutic support and active intervention
 - Severe cases may require interrupting the environment or dynamics reinforcing the rejection
 - In appropriately assessed severe cases, a change of residence to the rejected parent may need to be considered
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- Where necessary, contact with the alienating parent may need to be temporarily reduced or carefully structured
 - Give the child opportunities to have safe, independent experiences with the alienated parent
 - Help the child separate learned fear from genuine danger
 - Rebuild trust through consistent, safe and corrective experiences
 - Support the child's independent thinking, identity and psychological autonomy
 - Reduce loyalty conflicts and reinforce that the child is allowed to love and have relationships with both parents
 - Avoid placing the child in the position of deciding which parent is "right" or "wrong"
 - Treat the whole family dynamic, rather than viewing the child's rejection in isolation
 - Where safe and appropriate, work toward healthy reintroduction of relationships that have been disrupted
 - Continue support after reunification; reconnection is a process, not a single event

For me, as a severely alienated child, physical separation from the environment maintaining my rejection gave me the opportunity to independently experience my alienated parent and begin reassessing what I had believed.

A NOTE ON SOURCES & PERSPECTIVE

This post combines psychological concepts from my university studies, my lived experience, and EMMM's work on alienating behaviours and intervention.

I acknowledge that my lived experience may influence how I interpret and apply this information.

I have tried to distinguish between established psychological research, parental alienation-specific research, and my own interpretation.

Some broader psychological concepts have been applied to parental alienation and should not be interpreted as findings specific to parental alienation.

More research specifically examining parental alienation, its impacts and effective interventions is needed.

DISCLAIMER

This content is for education and awareness and combines psychological research, university learning, lived experience and EMMM resources. It is not medical, psychological or legal advice. Parental alienation is complex and contested. Individual cases require careful assessment, including consideration of genuine abuse, neglect, estrangement and safety concerns.



DISCLAIMER

This proposed framework has been developed independently by **Aus. PA Advocacy (APAA)** and is informed by lived experience, existing research, and concepts explored through the work of the **EMMM Foundation, particularly the work of Amanda Sillars**.

Acknowledgement of Amanda Sillars and the EMMM Foundation does not imply endorsement, authorship or formal affiliation with this proposed framework.

This is a conceptual and advocacy framework, not a validated clinical or diagnostic model. It is not used to diagnose individuals or determine the circumstances of individual families, nor does it constitute psychological, medical or legal advice.

The framework is presented to encourage discussion, research and the continued development of evidence-informed approaches to understanding parental alienation, coercive and controlling behaviours, intervention and reunification.

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