

Parental Alienation

5 Identifying Factors of Parental Alienation

William Bernet's 5 factors that must *all* be present for parental alienation. [1], [2] to be said to exist. Baker just affirms reliability/validity of 4-factor model excluding 1st below (Baker, 2020). These factors are:

1. **Contact Refusal** - child actively avoids, resists or refuses a relationship with a parent.
2. **Prior Positive Rlshp** between the child and the now-rejected parent.
3. **Absence of Abuse, Neglect**, or seriously deficient parenting on the part of now-rejected parent. (If such abuse/neglect were present this would be called "estrangement.")
4. **Child exhibits 8 Behavioral** manifestations of alienation (see below).
5. **Favored/Preferred Parent** (FP or PP) exposes child to 5 Categories/17 Alienating Behaviors. Presence of 7 of these 17 was enough for clinicians to reliably consider that a child's rejection was due to alienation when #2-4 above were present. (Baker, 2020)

8 Behavioral Categories for Parental Alienation Syndrome in Children - Amy Baker

When kids can't resist the pressure they're said to be "alienated." *Relationship* is based on *Favored Parent's perspective – not actual experience* with the Rejected Parent (RP).

Reliability/validity of these categories confirmed in empirical studies (Baker & Ben Ami, 2011; Baker & Brassard, 2013; Baker & Chambers, 2011).

1. **Campaign of Denigration of Rejected Parent** – repeated complaints to family, friends & 3rd parties, usually without reasonable justification. May deny any positive past experiences/memories with Rejected Parent.
2. **Rejection Reasons Weak, Frivolous or Absurd**– intense hostility is not justified – not reasonable, unable to articulate (except for "Borrowed Narratives") – may be trivial reasons, e.g. meal prep, appearance, manners, etc.
3. **Lack of Ambivalence** – one-dimensional black & white thinking - PP idealized beyond reason, RP despised/devalued – all good/all bad – not able to identify negatives for PP or positives for RP (e.g. Limited if any ability to give the targeted parent the "benefit of the doubt" under even reasonable circumstances.)
4. **Lack of Remorse – (or guilt/sorrow)** for spiteful, hateful, cruel or vengeful behavior. e.g. devaluing of gifts or generosity.
5. **Reflexive Support/Defense of Preferred Parent in all inter-parental disputes** - child *no interest in impartiality*. Will reject rationality in favor of PP no matter how absurd the PP's position/view.
6. **"Borrowed" Scenarios** – events/memories described by child using same words/phrases as PP – often child can't provide any detail to support retelling of the "absorbed" story.
7. **"Independent" Thinker Phenomenon** – *insists* rejection is of own free will, w/o influence of PP.
8. **Animosity Extends** – Child rejects/avoids RP's extended family/friends w. which previously had positive/neutral rlshps.

Alienated Children are Unlike Abused/Neglected children: abused children miss abusive parent, want to be reunited, blame selves, minimize neg impact of parent's abuse (Baker, Creegan, Quinones & Rozelle, 2016); **Only alienated children were found *empirically* to exhibit:**

- No positive memory of RP
- Failed to i.d. single positive attribute of RP
- Failed to see *any flaw* in FP (Baker, Burkhard & Kelly, 2012; Bernet & Colleagues, 2017)

17 Preferred Parent Strategies (identified w research studies of Rejected Parents & adults alienated as children:) Fielding v Fielding, 2013 ONSC 5102, mother's attorney called an expert witness presenting 17 alienating strategies.

17 Strategies fall into 5 Major Categories. Together these create a **toxic psychological distance/conflict** btw child & Rejected Parent. **Considered to cause traumatic injury** as child's development thwarted, similar to when cult member leaves cult and is no longer able to rely on cult leader's perspectives and guidance. e.g. Child fails to differentiate and individuate from PP, may not know how to reality-test or think critically on own behalf, without experiencing a sense of danger for diverting away from PP's views/beliefs.

1. **Poisonous Messages** – e.g. portray RP as unsafe/dangerous, unavailable & unloving
2. **Obstructs/Damages Contact & Communication** (Limits/Interferes/Skews) – e.g. **Favored Mom** forces Dad to take kids on Mother's Day so kids resent Dad; **Favored Dad** reinterprets Mom's communication/behavior "for" children as "hostile and mean" or otherwise terrible.
3. **Erases/Replaces Rejected Parent** in child's heart & mind
4. **Encourages Betrayal of Rejected Parent's Trust** (e.g. tolerates/allows, or fails to directly intervene/counter ineffective, devaluing/hostile child behaviors and beliefs; directly or indirectly affirms idea that these extreme attitudes/behaviors are justified given rejected parent's behavior, in the absence of abuse, neglect or *seriously* deficient parenting.)
5. **Undermines Authority of Rejected Parent** (e.g. child feels no reason to respect the authority of the rejected parent)

17 Preferred Parent Alienating Strategies (fall into above 5 categories – may be directly or indirectly communicated). Reliable/Valid outcome studies for **impact of these FP behaviors on kids** (Baker, 2020 – 7 of these R's enough to classify as "alienating" if other 3 factors present; Over 2500 participants in Baker and Ben Ami, 2011; Baker and Brassard, 2013; Baker and Eichler, 2014; Baker and Verrocchio, 2013) – e.g.

- Low self-esteem
- Trouble trusting others
- Depression
- Anxiety

17 Favored Parent Behaviors: (May be direct or indirect)

1. Talks negatively about RP
2. Limits contact btw child & RP – such that they can't share meaningfully in each other's lives
3. Interferes with communication by obstructing or re-interpreting communication, or creates excuses re why the child can't have visitation/contact.

4. Limits or doesn't allow photographs/conversation that include RP to attenuate attachment during separation periods w RP.
5. Withdraws love or expresses anger toward child (e.g. when child exhibits interest/affection twds. other parent)
6. Allows child to "choose" to spend time with the other parent, such that a relationship w. RP appears optional/undesirable; Pressures (covertly/overtly) child to choose btw parents
7. Forces/Pressures child to reject other parent
8. Tells child RP doesn't love him/her
9. Gives child impression RP is dangerous (e.g. unfit)
10. "Confides in child" - shares personal, adult & litigation info that induces child to be hurt/angry at RP
11. Requests child "spy" and report on RP
12. Tells child to keep secrets from RP
13. Asks/Encourages/Models calling RP by first name, not "Mom" or "Dad"
14. Refers to new significant other as "Mom" or "Dad," in front of child
15. Changes child's name to remove any association with RP
16. Withholds child-related info - Obstructs medical, social, academic, or other info about child to be given to/accessed by RP, and keeps RP's name off records (e.g. may tell physicians to keep rejected parent away, persuade teachers/physicians that targeted/rejected parent has inflicted abuse on the child, or encourage/allow child to ignore targeted parent who wishes to be present in waiting room.)
17. Cultivates child's dependency on PP, while undermines RP's authority