

Parental Alienation



A Recognized Form of Child Abuse & Mental Health Concern

Protecting children's psychological and emotional well-being through evidence-based recognition and intervention

AT A GLANCE

Parental alienation is a form of child abuse that occurs when a parent engages in a pattern of behavior that manipulates a child into unjustifiably rejecting the other parent. This conduct undermines a child's emotional security, distorts the child's sense of reality, disrupts healthy attachment, and can result in significant, long-term psychological harm.

IMPACTS ON CHILDREN

- Severe emotional and psychological impairment
- Loyalty conflicts and identity disruption
- Increased risk of anxiety, depression, and trauma
- Long-term and intergenerational effects

"Research suggests that the impact of psychological aggression by an intimate partner is **every bit as significant as that of physical violence** by an intimate partner." P. 15 (CDC, 2015)

Research indicates the complex trauma caused by parental alienation can be **as damaging—or more damaging**—than physical or sexual abuse. (Kruk)

- Key Impacts:**
- 🧠 Complex trauma
 - 👤 Attachment disruption
 - 🔄 Intergenerational harm
 - ⚖️ Systemic mislabeling as "high conflict"

Estimated Affected (Harman, 2016)

25% OF CHILDREN IN HIGH CONFLICT BREAKUPS

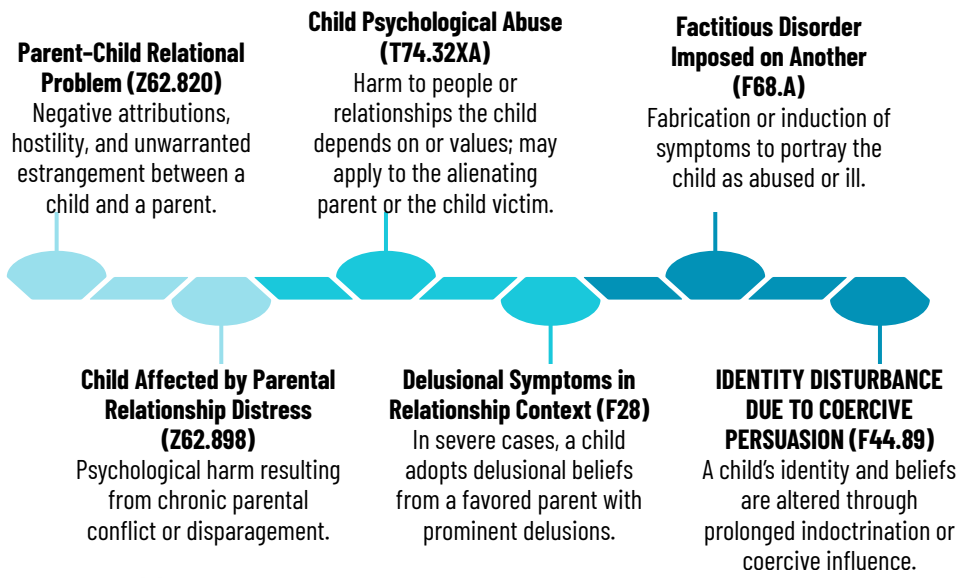


WHAT IS PARENTAL ALIENATION?

Parental alienation, a **form of abuse**, is a pattern of coercive and manipulative behaviors by one parent that causes a child to unjustifiably fear, reject, or denigrate the other parent. These behaviors interfere with the child's psychological development and healthy parent-child relationships.

MENTAL HEALTH RECOGNITION

The American Psychiatric Association confirms that parental alienation is recognized within the DSM-5-TR, even when the term itself is not explicitly listed.



Based on analysis by William Bernet and Amy J. L. Baker, *Parental Alienation Is in the DSM-5-TR, PAI (Nov. 2023)*

CRITICAL CLARIFICATION

While both parents may contribute to conflict in high-conflict custody cases, alienation is rarely mutual or equal. Professional evaluations consistently identify:

- One alienating parent, and
- One targeted (alienated) parent

Failure to recognize this distinction places children at continued risk of psychological harm.

WHY RECOGNITION IS ESSENTIAL

- ✓ Protects children's psychological safety
- ✓ Supports accurate clinical assessment
- ✓ Prevents mislabeling abuse as "conflict"
- ✓ Promotes healthy attachment and recovery

Recognizing and addressing parental alienation is a **child-protection imperative—not a parental dispute.**

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