

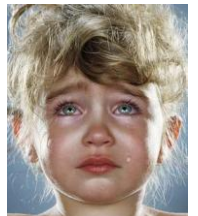
## Parental Alienation is child abuse!

By Breakup Angels expert Kirsten Gronning in collaboration with Greg Downing

**Living under the same roof as the former partner you're divorcing for 18 months is enough to make any seemingly rational parent want to leave home.** This is the situation I found myself in many years ago when I divorced. Two things prevented me from leaving – one was my solicitor telling me even having a break away for a few days wasn't a great idea – and the second was reading Penny Cross' compelling book *'Lost Children - a guide to separating parents'* especially the chapter called *'Parental Alienation Syndrome'* which raised my awareness around the possibility that leaving the marital home could also result in my losing my children. Forever.

If this sounds dramatic, sadly, it is not. I was very lucky: forewarned is forearmed and by following a gut feeling that that my ex husband's angry threats along the lines of 'you want a divorce, you leave the family' was a very serious one (though I didn't fully understand the implications at the time) it nevertheless gave me the strength to retain control of a situation which, had I not done so, may have meant my relationship with my children became seriously undermined.

Since then I've been very aware to some of the damage caused by hitherto 'normal' and good parents to their children when one parent has all-consuming feelings of anger and revenge against the other and uses these feelings to persuade the children that the absent parent has abandoned them. When I met **Greg Downing**, founder of **Parental Alienation- Parent Association** and a spokesperson for **Families Need Fathers**, campaigning at a Westminster Debate for parental alienation to be recognised as child abuse I was keen to use his expertise in an article to help others recognise it for what it is – child abuse. What causes it? Why it does so much harm? What to do about it if you recognise the symptoms? By raising awareness this article will hopefully help separating parents recognise the damage both parents can cause through mild unconscious to hostile conscious Parental Alienation.



**Q: What is PA – Parental Alienation?**

**A: Emotional abuse with devastating consequences.**

- ❖ PA arises primarily in the context of child contact disputes during and post separation.
- ❖ When a child expresses unjustified hatred or unreasonable strong dislike of a **loving** parent, making access and parenting time by the rejected parent difficult or impossible.
- ❖ Even though the child expresses these wishes and feeling, deep down they still love and want to be with the rejected parent but do not feel they have the emotional permission to do so.
- ❖ Its primary manifestation is the alienator/child's campaign of denigration against a parent, a campaign that has no justification.
- ❖ Animosity is spread to the friends and/or extended family of the alienated parent, to the point where the alienator can truthfully say that the child doesn't want to spend any time with this parent or family.

**Q: What Causes PA – Parental Alienation?**

**A: An alienating parent** may have:

- ❖ Unresolved anger toward the other parent for perceived wrongs during the relationship, and may be unable to separate those issues from parenting issues.
- ❖ Unresolved issues from their childhood, particularly in how they related to their own parents, which he or she projects onto the other parent (whether or not it is factually accurate).

- ❖ A personality disorder, such as narcissism or paranoia, which makes him or her unable to empathize with the child's feelings or see the way their behaviour is harming the child. Such personality disorders may also make the alienating parent more likely to be jealous of the other parent's adjustment to the break-up, and cause the alienating parent to have extreme rage toward the other parent.

**A: An alienating parent** may be:

- ❖ So insecure as to his or her own parenting skills that he or she projects those concerns onto the other parent, regardless of reality.
- ❖ So wrapped up in their child's life that he or she has no separate identity, and sees the child's relationship with the other parent as a threat.

**Q: What Causes a Child to Buy into the Alienating Parent's Brainwashing?**

**A: The child** may:

- ❖ Feel the need to protect a parent who is depressed, panicky or needy.
- ❖ Want to avoid the anger or rejection of a dominant parent, who is also often the resident parent.
- ❖ Want to hold onto the parent the child is most afraid of losing, such as a parent who is self-absorbed or not very involved with the child, while knowing the other parent loves them and will not reject or leave them.
- ❖ In choosing to go along with the viewpoint of the alienating parent, the child can avoid conflict and remove him or herself from the constant tug-of-war.

**Q: What are the Warning Signs of Parental Alienation?**

**A: Your intuition will have told you something is wrong but you may not have found it difficult to place your finger on it.**

**The parent** may:

- ❖ Shift responsibility to the child/ren regarding the decision of contact.
- ❖ Ask the child/ren to choose a parent.
- ❖ Involve the child/ren in adult matters i.e. any details of the separation and divorce.
- ❖ Refusing the other parent to be involved in the life of the child/ren i.e. their parental responsibility (access to school, medical records etc.)
- ❖ Denigrate the other parent and apportion blame, especially in the presence of the child/ren.
- ❖ Encourage or direct natural anger to the alienated parent.
- ❖ Be passive or encourage the child/ren, refusing contact or behaving badly toward the other parent.
- ❖ Let the child/ren know they do not have emotional permission to enjoy time or be with the other parent.
- ❖ Use the child/ren to spy or gather information on the other parent.
- ❖ Make the other parent out to be a liar, causing the child/ren to become confused and the other parent naturally to try and defend themselves, increasing disharmony.
- ❖ Interrupt or interfere with contact whether direct or indirect (phone, letters etc.)



**Q: When should you respond and what should you do?**

**A:**

- ❖ You should respond as soon as there are **any warning signs** and take action quickly.
- ❖ Prevention is better as cures can be very challenging due to the adversarial nature of the family courts. (Recommend Resource: Putting Children First – Karen Woodall)
- ❖ PA is like snake poison and can take hold quickly with paralysing effect. (Recommended Resource: Divorce Poison – Dr Richard Warshak)
- ❖ Good open communication is the key to a successful separation. Unfortunately this has normally broken down when PA is taking effect.
- ❖ Get help, but ensure you seek the help of professionals and experts who understand Parental Alienation so that the family can be helped as a whole.
- ❖ Read and educate yourself, through books and parenting courses.
- ❖ Join organisations and forums to share and learn from others.

**Q: How does this Emotional Abuse Harm a Child?**

**A: May result in:**

- ❖ Smaller stature, lower weight, missed developmental milestones.
- ❖ Detrimental effects on cognitive and school performance.
- ❖ Reduced ability to manage emotional difficulties, cope with stressful situations, and develop problem-solving skills.
- ❖ Strongly linked to later mental health problems, particularly low mood, hopelessness and low self-esteem.
- ❖ Significantly higher drug and alcohol abuse.
- ❖ Higher levels of delinquency.
- ❖ Increased hyperactivity, anxiety, learning and memory problems.
- ❖ Internalising the critical voice of the abusive care giver.
- ❖ Being more likely to later select relationships which reproduce and confirm the abusive experience.
- ❖ Reduced ability to empathise.
- ❖ Relationship difficulties.
- ❖ Impaired parenting skills.

**Q: How can you help?**

**A:** Make others aware so it becomes socially unacceptable. Volunteer your time/skills or donate to help PA-PA.org help others.

**Greg believes the effect of emotional abuse is as bad, if not worse than physical abuse as it can last a life time.**

For more information and assistance go to:

[www.PA-Pa.org](http://www.PA-Pa.org) **Parental Alienation – Parent Association** Parental Alienation awareness, prevention and support

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