



Overcoming Parental Alienation

Reconciling Parents and Children

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"Reconcile with Your Children, Reconcile with Yourself if you Cannot"

Qualifying Family Law Practitioners for Parental Alienation Cases

Inadequate professional development and outdated and misleading information about parental alienation can frustrate alienated parents' attempts to recover their children through Family Law action. Such misleading information may lead legal counsel and ICLs (Independent Children's Lawyers) to formulate their case incorrectly, resulting in a sub-optimal outcome. Family consultants, court-ordered counsellors or therapists are responsible to the Family Court for discharging their duties, including relying on validated information to support their assessments and therapy. Professional development in parental alienation practice and theory is available in Australia.

A cross-examination strategy informed by the latest parental alienation theory and research can adversely impact the credibility of or reinterpret a family assessment or therapeutic report. Alienated parents and their legal counsel forearmed with the following checklist may make better choices and turn an otherwise adverse assessment or report to their advantage. The FAQ Qualifying Checklist may be used to interview family consultants and practitioners to gauge their suitability and examine their assessments and reports for aspects that discount it or may be used to support the case for the children.

Best Practice Assessment of Parental Alienation

Family consultants may not adequately differentiate between crossclaims of family violence, child psychological maltreatment by parental alienation, child sexual abuse, and other forms of family violence. The current best practice in the differential assessment of parental alienation and family violence uses the linkage¹ between parental alienation behaviours and children's alienation presentations in an evidence-based Five-Factor Model².

¹ Baker, A. J. L., & Eichler, A. (2016). The Linkage Between Parental Alienation Behaviors and Child Alienation. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 57(7), 475-484. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10502556.2016.1220285>

² Bernet, W., & Greenhill, L. L. (2022). The Five-Factor Model for the Diagnosis of Parental Alienation. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 61(5), 591-594. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2021.11.026>

We can determine from family reports whether they use evidence-based methods to differentiate between different forms of violence and abuse because they:

- Make observations consistent with parental alienation presentations and behaviours but do not assess it as alienation.
- Do not recognise the historical context of parental alienation and how it becomes a family culture over time. Instead, they misattribute children's presentations to parental conflict in the context of separation or divorce.
- Make inappropriate recommendations, such as family therapy, especially in severe cases. These unsuitable recommendations may harm children because they involve more therapeutic processes that exacerbate the abuse or leave the child in the care of a harmful parent.
- Selectively ignore affidavit material relevant to an assessment of parental alienation, de-emphasise its significance or over-emphasise evidence that supports a preconceived assessment of family violence.
- Refer to parental alienation in their reports superficially while discussing family violence in detail. They may use outdated, inaccurate or incorrect information and references about parental alienation.

Best Practice Remediation for Parental Alienation

Practitioners, especially court-ordered therapists, inadvertently expose alienated children to more abuse. They may use inappropriate therapeutic methodologies and demonstrate a lack of information about parental alienation behaviours and presentations.

We can detect therapeutic methodologies inappropriate for parental alienation by the pattern of parenting behaviour the practitioner observes but does not recognise as significant to the child's behaviour. For example, we can also see when practitioners fail to monitor how children's gains in one session erode and dissipate in the next session for no apparent reason but for the favoured-alienating parent's undermining actions. Such practitioners appear unaware that their reports reveal the hallmark parental alienation behaviours that their assessments and treatment ignore.

In such situations, practitioners' attempts at therapeutic remediation become yet another assessment for children already over-counselled, consolidating their alienation. We have observed in such cases how some practitioners engage a circular logic in attributing the failure of their therapy to the rejected parent rather than to how their inappropriate treatment and lack of parental alienation knowledge provide circular reinforcement of alienation. Best practice³ remediations for parental alienation include

³ Templer, K., Matthewson, M., Haines, J., & Cox, G. (2016). Recommendations for best practice in response to parental alienation: findings from a systematic review. *Journal of Family Therapy*, 39(1), 103-122. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-6427.12137>

specialised family therapy, educational-experiential methodologies such as the Building Family Bridges Workshop⁴, New Ways for Families⁵ and reversal of parental care and responsibility in severe cases.

Family therapists and other practitioners may:

- Confuse children's alienation presentations with resistance associated with systemic family relationship issues,
- Rely on family systems theories that do not identify parental alienation behaviours or presentations. Such theories attribute children's behaviour to the family relationship environment, such as high conflict, rather than specific parenting behaviours.
- They may incorrectly assume that a child will be traumatised by reversal of care and responsibility even when their residential parent abuses them.
- Presume that children's descriptions are always accurate. They may not identify inconsistencies in children's accounts that suggest they may describe a third-party narrative instead of their own, especially in family violence and child abuse situations.
- They may not realise that a favoured-alienating parent is undermining their therapeutic approach between sessions. Therefore, they may incorrectly attribute the child's lack of progress with their rejected parent to that parent or other factors,
- They may not differentiate between enmeshed and corrupted parent-child relationships. Corrupted parent-child relationships involve parentification, adultification or infantilisation, or,
- Demonstrate confirmation bias that discounts the father's experiences.

⁴ Lorandos, D. (2020). Parental Alienation, Traditional Therapy and Family Bridges: What Works, What Doesn't and Why: Part I of II.

Lorandos, D. (2020). Parental Alienation, Traditional Therapy, and Family Bridges: What Works, What Doesn't, and Why: Part II of II. *American Journal of Family Law*, 34(1), 9-17. <https://search.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/parental-alienation-traditional-therapy-family/docview/2371358180/se-2?accountid=28745>

⁵ Eddy, B. (2009). *New Ways for Families Collaborative Parent Workbook*. High Conflict Inst.

FAQ: Qualifying Checklist for Family Consultants and Court-ordered Practitioners:

FAQ	Significance
Do they make observations consistent with parental alienation presentations and behaviours but do not assess it as alienation?	Practitioners with an inadequate understanding of parental alienation may not make appropriate recommendations if they assess the children's presentations as something else.
Do they confuse children's alienation presentations with resistance associated with systemic family relationship issues?	<p>They may also rely on family systems theories that do not identify parental alienation behaviours or presentations. Such theories attribute children's behaviour to the family relationship environment, such as high conflict, rather than specific parenting behaviours.</p> <p>They may presume that children's descriptions are always accurate. They may not identify inconsistencies in children's accounts that suggest they may describe a third-party narrative instead of their own, especially in family violence and child abuse situations.</p> <p>They may not realise that a favoured-alienating parent is undermining their therapeutic approach between sessions. Therefore, they may incorrectly attribute the child's lack of progress with their rejected parent to that parent or other factors,</p>
Do they recognise the historical context of parental alienation and how it becomes a family culture over time?	Children's presentations are often misattributed to parental conflict in the context of separation or divorce
Do they make inappropriate recommendations, such as family therapy, especially in severe cases?	These unsuitable recommendations may harm children because they involve more therapeutic processes that exacerbate the

FAQ	Significance
	<p>abuse or leave the child in the care of a harmful parent.</p> <p>They may incorrectly assume that a child will be traumatised by reversal of care and responsibility even when their residential parent abuses them.</p>
<p>Do they selectively ignore affidavit material relevant to an assessment of parental alienation, de-emphasise its significance or over-emphasise evidence that supports a preconceived assessment of family violence?</p>	<p>Practitioners may reveal their bias toward ideologies by disregarding validated parental alienation theories and research. There is a solid argument to disregard an adverse report if it does not correctly assess affidavit evidence or ignores it.</p> <p>They may not differentiate between enmeshed and corrupted parent-child relationships. Corrupted parent-child relationships involve parentification, adultification or infantilisation, or,</p>
<p>Do they superficially refer to parental alienation in their reports while discussing family violence in detail?</p>	<p>They may use outdated, inaccurate or incorrect information and references about parental alienation.</p> <p>They may demonstrate confirmation bias that discounts the father's experiences.</p>