Alienated Children: Definitions, Research, and Challenges for Case Management & Treatment

Joan B. Kelly, Ph.D.
2011

Focus of Presentation
- Review of different alienation definitions
- Resisting or refusing contact for many reasons
- Moderate agreement on child behaviors and parent alienating behaviors
- Family systems approach needed to understand why children refuse/resist contact with a parent
- What is known about outcomes in children & adults?
- Legal case management essential
- Therapeutic & educational remedies/programs

The Labels Used:
Parental Alienation
- Refers broadly to the situation of a child who has been influenced by a parent to reject the other parent after separation/divorce
- Also refers to the behaviors & attitudes of the parent that negatively influence the child toward or poison the relationship with other parent
- Silent on the behaviors of the rejected parent
- Generally, the clinical and empirical literature support the existence of alienating behaviors of parents in high conflict divorce

The Labels Used:
Parental Alienation Syndrome
- Gardner proposed PAS, a syndrome that includes the child’s campaign of denigration & vilification of a parent in combination with the programming or brainwashing of other parent
- The denigration is unwarranted and associated with refusal to visit
- The rejected parent is innocent victim
- Controversy and no consensus in research or clinical literature that there is a “syndrome”.
  Gardner, 1998

The Labels Used:
The Alienated Child
- A child who expresses strong negative feelings & beliefs towards a parent that are disproportionate to the child’s experience with that parent and resists/refuses contact
- Distinguishes and excludes children who are “estranged” from a parent as a result of parental abuse or neglect and resist/refuse contact
- Describes problematic parenting in both parents
  Kelly & Johnston, 2001

The Labels Used:
Children Who Resist or Refuse Visits
- Problem is defined only in behavioral terms
- No attribution is made regarding reason/cause for refusing visits
- Children's behaviors generally the same as other labels – strong negative feelings and behaviors toward the parent who is rejected
  Fidler & Bala, 2010
Evolution of Concepts re: Children who Reject or Refuse to Visit Parent

- Wallerstein & Kelly (1980) describe later latency children & adolescents who align with an angry parent and resist or reject a parent, in an “unholy alliance” focused on perceived failings of rejected parent (clinical and longitudinal study of 60 divorcing families)
- Gardner (1985) coins the term “parental alienation syndrome”, describes brainwashing of child and child’s campaign of denigration against parent that has no justification (from own clinical work)
- Gardner claims women are most often alienators, and 10-20% make malicious and false sexual abuse allegations

Opinions & Contributions of Others

- Clawar & Rivlin (1991) identify 8 stages of programming/brainwashing that result in severe PAS (descriptive data from clinical studies)
- Turkat (1994) describes a “divorce-related malicious mother syndrome” (from own clinical work)
- Darnell (1997) differentiates PAS from PA, stating that Parental Alienation is preferred term because it focuses on parent (not child) behaviors. He identifies 3 types of alienators: “naïve, active, obsessed”

Opinions & Contributions (2)

- Rand (1997) describes subtype of PAS involving false sexual abuse allegations as “Munchausen syndrome by proxy-contemporary type”
- Kopetski (1998) identifies “phobic reaction” to rejected parent - a psychosocial pathology (analysis of child custody evaluations)
- Kopetski & Rand(s) (2006) said 54% of cases had false allegations of child maltreatment:
  - Neglect alleged primarily by alienating fathers
  - Sexual abuse alleged primarily by alienating mothers

Opinions and Contributions (3)

- Warshak (2001) identifies 3 components that must be present for diagnosis of PAS:
  - A persistent (not occasional) rejection or denigration of a parent that reaches the level of a campaign;
  - An unjustified (unreasonable) or irrational rejection by the child;
  - Rejection by a child that is a partial result of the alienating parent’s influence

Concept of PAS Begins to Lose Support in late 1990’s

- Legal, judicial, and forensic psychology begin to focus on deficiencies in Gardner’s PAS:
  - Gardner’s PAS too simplistic in exclusive focus on alienating parent as causative agent
  - PAS not established scientifically as a syndrome
  - Many courts reject PAS under Daubert standard
  - Violent, abusive, neglectful parents using PAS to explain child’s rejection, blaming other parent’s alienating behavior

The Alienated Child: Refocusing the Debate on Children

- Systems-based & multi-factor model proposed as more appropriate framework to understand children who become alienated (& why most children in custody disputing families do not)
- Case management, assessment, and therapeutic processes and principles also proposed

Kelly & Johnston, 2001; Sullivan & Kelly, 2001; Lee & Olesen, 2001; Johnston, Walters, & Friedlander, 2001
Children and Adolescents Resist or Refuse Visiting for *Many* Reasons

- Normal developmental vulnerabilities
- High conflict marriage, separation, or divorce
- Poor parenting style of nonresident parent
- Child’s concern about fragile residential parent
- Re-partnering or remarriage of parent
- Estrangement from nonresident parent
- Child is mildly to severely alienated
  
  Johnston, 1993; Johnston et al., 2005; Kelly & Johnston, 2001

Most Children Want Contact with their Nonresident Parent

- 2/3rds to 4/5ths of children want continued relationships with fathers after separation
- Majority of children upset about infrequent access and lengthy separations between visits
- Loss of parent is reported by children and adolescents as most negative aspect of divorce
- Children refusing visits is a *small* group
  

Review of Empirical Research

- Most descriptions of alienation selected and summarized from clinical observations & cases
- All empirical studies to date are methodologically weak:
  - Small, nonrepresentative, cross-sectional samples
  - No consensus definition of alienation
  - Measures used (if any) to assess parent or child behaviors & severity not well developed or reliable
  - Retrospective data, often from one source only
  - Descriptive statistics, not quantifiable numbers
  
  Saini, Johnston, Fidler, & Bala, in press

Alienated Children must be Distinguished from…

- Estranged children whose parent(s) were abusive, violent, erratic, neglectful in marriage
- The resistance to contacts with such parents may represent healthy and realistic response
- Children may refuse contact because of being traumatized, fearful, angry
- Child’s estrangement may be normal and *not* pathological alienation
  
  Fidler et al., 2008; Kelly & Johnston, 2001; Johnston et al, 2005; Johnston et al., 2008

Review of Empirical Research (2)

- Among 39 studies located & evaluated, none were scored as high quality, 18% were moderate quality, 43% low quality, 39% very low quality
- Therefore, one can not generalize from any of these studies as to incidence, causes, or outcomes of alienation
- No studies differentiated alienation from other parent-child relationship problems with similar features and no measures of severity, duration, court interventions, etc.
- General agreement about strategies that parents can use to manipulate children’s feelings, behaviors, and beliefs
  
  Saini, Johnston, Fidler, & Bala, in press
**General Consensus Among Studies**

- Alienation may occur regardless of gender of parent or gender of child
- Alienation occurs within intact and separated families, and custody litigating families, but occurs more frequently in separated families and litigating cases.
- Fathers are more likely to be rejected (2:1 ratio may be related to more mothers as primary custodians)
- Older children are more often alienated than younger children (typically between ages 8 and 16)

**General Consensus onTypical Strategies of Alienating Parents**

- Badmouthing/denigration of rejected parent
- Rejected parent is dangerous & highly flawed
- Rejected parent did/does not love child
- Emotional manipulation
  - Child does not need the other parent
  - Limits/prevents any mention of other parent
  - Confides in child, overly involved (enmeshed) with child
  - Withdrawal of love as constant possibility
- Limits contacts & monitors or limits telephone contact
- Allows child to make adult decisions

**Less Consensus on Behaviors & Parenting of Rejected Parents**

- May have history of lack of warm involvement
- History of angry or emotionally abusive behavior or critical incident of abuse around separation
- Rigid, authoritarian parenting style
- Narcissistic, self-centered behaviors
- Counter-rejection of child in anger
- Lack of empathy for child's dilemma
- Difficulty in responding appropriately to child's aggression and hostility
  

**Consensus on Children’s Responses and Behaviors**

- Refuses or resists contact with rejected parent or strongly dislikes contacts and creates havoc
- Freely, stridently expresses hatred & denigration
- No apparent guilt or ambivalence
- Borrowed scenarios and trivial reasons advanced for rejection of parent that may have kernel of reality
- Over-idealization of alienating parent (as children)
- Differ from estranged children in lack of coherent, detailed stories; sound rehearsed, repetitive, brittle
  
  Kelly & Johnston, 2001; Saini et al, in press; Fidler et al, 2008; Fidler & Bala, 2010

**Only Some Children Become Alienated in High Conflict Divorces**

- About 15% of children in community (counseling) sample, and 21% of children from custody litigating sample had aligned with one parent & had negative attitudes toward other parent and resisted visits
- Extreme rejection of 11% of fathers, 7% of mothers in custody litigating sample
- The majority of children are not alienated despite very hostile separation and adversarial litigation
- Some become alienated without parent encouragement
- Unusual for all siblings to be alienated
  
  Johnston, 2003; Johnston et al, 2005; Saini et al, in press

**Alienation is Best Explained by Systemic Processes and Factors**

- Child alienation is a result of complex interactions between:
  - Background factors (child’s age, personalities of parents, intense marital or separation conflict, aligned professionals)
  - Intervening variables (child’s vulnerability, attachments, parental behaviors & attitudes, siblings)
  - The child’s response
- All or only a few of the factors may be influential in a given family
  
  Kelly & Johnston, 2001
Background Factors, Intervening Variables, and the Child's Response

Intense Marital Conflict

Child's Age, Cognitive Capacity, Temperament

Personality of Aligned Parent

Humiliating Separation

Aligned Parent's Negative Beliefs, Behaviors

Child's Vulnerability

Child's Response

Rejected Parent's Reactions

Personalities and cognitive functioning of aligned parent & rejected parent

Kelly & Johnston, 2001

Intervening Variables that May Influence the Child's Response

- Aligned parents’ negative beliefs about other parent and related behaviors
- Rejected parents’ prior relationship and current reactions and behaviors
- Child’s vulnerability and attachments
- Sibling influence and behaviors

Kelly & Johnston, 2001

Background Factors that may Potentiate Child Alienation

- Intense marital conflict
- Humiliating separation
- High conflict divorce and protracted litigation
- Extended family, new partners, professionals
- Child’s age and abilities
- Personalities and cognitive functioning of aligned parent & rejected parent

Kelly & Johnston, 2001

Research to Assess Systems-based Model of Child Alienation

- Alienating behaviors and negative attitudes toward other parent common in two samples (community N = 91; custody litigating N = 124), some parents more overtly than others
- Very little active support of other parent or encouraging child to love the other parent or to have a good time when together
- Three-quarters of children did not become alienated, even in custody litigating sample
- Children’s rejection of a parent found to have multiple determinants rather than one cause
- Older children more likely to become alienated

Johnston, 2003; Johnston et al, 2005 a,b

Research to Assess Systems-based Model of Child Alienation (2)

- 15% of children in community and 21% in litigating sample were strongly aligned with one parent against other parent
- 11% had extreme rejection of father & 7% of mother in custody litigating sample
- Children’s rejection of a parent found to have multiple determinants rather than one cause

Johnston, 2003; Johnston et al, 2005 a,b
Research: Contributions of Parents

- Emotionally needy mothers who used children for support contributed to child’s rejection of father
- When mothers provided warm and involved care in return for unquestioned loyalty, children more likely to reject fathers
- Mothers who sabotaged relationship contributed to child’s rejection of father
- Lack of warm, involved parenting by rejected parent


Research: Additional Findings

- A critical incident of child abuse by rejected parent (mothers and fathers) also predicted child’s rejection
- Women more prone to behave in alienating manner than men
- Children with more emotional trouble and less social competence were more aligned with one parent against the other
- Prolonged custody litigation contributed to child alienation and polarization of child’s thinking


Adversarial Divorce Process is a High Conflict Parent’s Dream

- Competing parental entitlements reinforce angry agendas and grievances
- Parent conflict escalates and consolidates
- Positional and black/white thinking encouraged
- Emphasis on parental inadequacies to exclusion of adequacies and strengths
- Poor reality testing and thinking sustained
- Civility and communication between parents may be irrevocably destroyed

HCP – The Perfect Fit - Court

- Blaming others is core preoccupation
- Avoids taking any responsibility in life
- Seek attention/sympathy
- Get allies in support
- Dramatic, emotional
- Seeks punishment for other's wrongdoing
- Lies are OK if desperate
- Deciding who is to blame or guilty
- Court will find the other responsible
- Gets attention big time
- Brings advocates to court
- Dramatic affidavits
- Court may impose punishment
- Lying is easy and rarely dealt with

Measures of Child Alienation

Child Rejection of Fa/Mo
(13 items) Eg. Expresses overt hatred, strong dislike; Overt scorn, denigration, verbal abuse, harassment; Vague, unspecific, trivial reasons for dislike; Cites family legends, borrowed scenarios to justify dislike of parent)

No Enjoyment of Fa/Mo
(5 items) Eg. Looks forward to seeing parent, able to remember good times, able to express love for parent (scores reversed)

Role Reversal with Mo/Fa
(7 items) Eg. Parent has difficulty distinguishing child’s feelings from own; Child comfort’s parent; Child is confident to parent’s adult interests & concerns

Separation Anxieties M/F
(2 items) Whiny, crying/fretful, weepy at times of leaving parent for visits; Experiences separation anxieties from parent

(Alpha for scale, .91 - .74)

Psychological Adjustment of Alienated Children: Variable Findings

- Children who rejected either mother or father had more total behavioral problems, compared to non-rejecting children (on CBCL)
  - more externalizing symptoms
  - more internalizing symptoms
- More depressed, withdrawn, somatic, and aggressive behaviors (aligned parents’ reports)

Johnston, Walters, & Olesen, 2005a, b.
Child Risk Factors for Alienation

- Age & developmental capacities (8–14 yrs)
- Psychological adjustment problems
- Cognitive and perceptual distortions
- Fewer coping skills available
- Intense and confusing emotions
- Lack of contact with rejected parent


Research on Adults Alienated From a Parent as Children

- 15 males, 25 females (mean age = 40)
- Three patterns of alienation from a parent identified in qualitative retrospective study:
  - Narcissistic alienating mothers in divorced families
  - Narcissistic alienating mothers in intact families
  - Abusive/rejecting alienating mothers and fathers, mostly in divorcing families

Baker, 2005

Follow Up on Alienated Children as Young Adults

- Interviews of 37 adults with history of alienation from a parent 15-20 years later
- Views of fathers:
  - Controlling
  - Manipulative – played games
  - Lacking empathy
  - Narcissism, wrapped up in self
  - Intrusive, insensitive

Johnston & Kuehnle, 2009; Johnston & Goldman, 2010

Follow up on Alienated Children as Young Adults (2)

- Views of mothers:
  - Very overprotective and overly close
  - Overly dependent
  - Had to struggle to emancipate
  - Some borderline, others malicious
  - Mothers were gatekeepers of father involvement
- Most re-established positive relationships as adults, but 21% continued to refuse all contact

Johnston & Kuehnle, 2009; Johnston & Goldman, 2010

Rejection of Fathers: Thoughts about Subtypes

- Father adequate, some involvement in child’s life
  - Mother warm/over-involved, core identity as primary caregiver
  - High gatekeeping of mother during marriage/separation
  - Father seeks shared time, mother distraught
  - Mother enraged by affair or separation
  - Critical incident of emotional or physical abuse, or serious misjudgment intensifies anger & rejection
- Child alienated and refuses contact
- Father’s litigation further enragues parent and alienated child
Rejection of Fathers: Thoughts about Subtypes (2)
- Father very involved with child, seeks divorce
- Mother severe borderline or narcissistic personality disorder, humiliated by abandonment, outraged
- Openly hostile with child about father, tells child he abandoned both of them, doesn’t love them
- Child feels abandoned, very angry at father
- Aligns with very angry mother in mutual rejection
- Mother and child demean father’s prior involvement and many contributions to child’s life

Rejection of Mothers: Thoughts about Subtypes
- Father has narcissistic traits or personality disorder
- Self absorbed, not too involved with kids in marriage
- Makes clear child will lose out if aligned with mother
- Father emotionally abusive, powerful, & rejecting of partner and children in marriage
- Enraged and humiliated by partner’s separation decision
- Re-incarnates self as benevolent persuasive father with newfound intimacy, lavishes attention & gifts on children
- Previously rejected & needy children respond to new overtures of love and apparent affection

Rejection of Fathers: Thoughts about Subtypes (3?)
- Father marginalized in marriage by enmeshed mother who resists & criticizes father’s attempts to parent
- Mother home schools, directs all activity, on duty 24/7
- Child’s relationship with father friendly, but not close
- Insufficient individuation from mother, vulnerable
- No capacity to withstand mother’s rage & demands for loyalty, accusations that father never cared about the child, and rejection of father
- Father’s litigation for adequate time with child further enrages mother and child

Potential Factors Believed to Moderate Child’s Risk of Alienation
- Contact order with rejected parent is issued immediately if no safety issues
- Child not given choice in visiting
- Rejected parent is self-protective and honest
- Rejected parent apologizes for any inappropriate behavior, accepts responsibility
- Rejected parent seen as acceptable person and parent by others in family/school/community
- Court and/or therapist takes strong role in promoting contact as important in child’s life

Case Management Principles
- Avoid delay in every process (initial orders, evaluations, settlement conferences, trial, setting up interventions, therapy, PC)
- Ensure continuity of family/other relationships
- Manage conflict through highly detailed plans
- Deal with noncompliance immediately
- Family-systems thinking for all professionals
- Appropriate structural & therapeutic interventions
Sullivan & Kelly, 2001

Judicial Case Management
- High level of complexity in these cases requires same judicial officer for:
  - Initial hearing
  - During evaluation process
  - Post-evaluation or settlement conference
  - Post-adjudication disputes
  - Parenting Coordination reports
Martinson, 2010; Sullivan & Kelly, 2001
Judicial Case Management

- Put joint legal custody into place at initial hearing to keep rejected parent in loop
- Orders for time-sensitive communication re: medical, school, child's activities
- No unilateral decisions by either parent regarding child and:
  - Therapy
  - Choice of physician
  - School, school attendance at child events, tutoring, etc.
  - Extracurricular activities that impinge on other parent's time

  Sullivan & Kelly, 2001

Judicial Management of Contacts

- Visits ordered at initial hearing if no safety issues
- If allegations, order for issue-focused expedited evaluation with specified time frame
- Child given no discretion re: visits
- Court is firm in dealing with non-compliance
- Telephone contacts restricted with aligned parent when at rejected parent's home
- Order de-briefing session if necessary after contacts with PC or court ordered therapist

How Much Contact is Enough?

- In mild-moderate alienation:
  - Every other weekend is not sufficient – too much toxic time with alienating parent
  - Consider shared custody (assumes rejected parent is adequate) with short intervals (5-5-2-2) or alternating weeks if alienated child 12 or older
  - What about restriction of cell/phone calls?
  - Neutral transition locations essential: school, therapist, Parenting Coordinator- or supervised exchanges

If “Supervised Visits” are Required During Focused Assessment

- Contact with rejected parent should be weekly if no evident history of child abuse or DV
- Consider using language of “facilitated access”
- Can use family therapist (not child’s) to monitor
- Non-confidential model to give feedback to court or evaluator on compliance and child’s response is best approach

Enforcing Compliance

- Court stresses expectation of compliance with both shared legal decision-making and access orders in advance
- Violations of court orders must be dealt with promptly
- Without enforcement, alienating parent continues contempt, increases sense of power, disregard for authority (bad role model for child)
- The message of compliance is for the child also and could be delivered personally to child in chambers or court
- Expect hysterical reaction

Types of Sanction Clauses

- Make up time, compensatory driving, paying for costs, greater share of treatment costs, paying for incurred (but lost) costs
- Court can require a posting of bond, community service, probation
- Warning about change of custody if noncompliance
- No house arrest or jail - it does the child no good to have parent in jail, and may create martyr victim
Assessing for Alienation in Child Custody Disputes

- Reasons for case referrals
  - Child’s resistance or refusal to visit
  - Allegations of alienation by rejected parent
  - Allegations of abuse or neglect
  - Re-unification efforts have failed

Drozd & Olesen, 2004; Fidler et al, 2008; Johnston et al, 2009; Lee & Olesen, 2001

Assessing for Child Alienation

- Focus on child’s presentation – does the child look/sound alienated?
- Distinguish between estrangement and alienation
- Assess the family history, parent-child relationship history, dynamics, and contributions of each family member to current problem
- Gather clinical, assessment, collateral data
- Assess contributions of other professionals and the adversarial system
- Identify parental contributions to child’s alienation

Droze & Olesen, 2004; Fidler et al, 2008; Johnston et al, 2009

Making Recommendations when Child is Alienated

- No simplistic solutions for these families
- Structural:
  - Proposed schedule of visits with graduated access built-in
  - Ask court to include remedies for non-compliance
  - Proposals for parental decision-making, minimizing conflict, models for essential communication
  - Specify therapeutic interventions, spelling out goals, including who will be seen and by whom
- Address each parent’s need for specific behavioral and attitudinal change and why

Changing Custody to Rejected Parent: Controversies

- Gardner recommended a change of custody to rejected parent in cases of severe alienation
- Viewed as many as very radical, because child doesn’t want to be with this parent
- With severe alienation, child may be in situation of emotional abuse by alienating parent
- If rejected parent has significant parenting liabilities, change of custody may be problematic

Changing Custody to Rejected Parent: Controversies (2)

- Change of custody is increasingly recommended by evaluators/ordered by judges
- In severe cases, consider suspension of contact with alienating parent for 3-6 months with reviews
- Another option: court indicates that custody will be changed in 3-4 months if child does not spend court ordered time with rejected parent and parent does not comply with orders for family therapy intervention
- Change of custody may be accompanied with order for child/family therapy if any chance of success

Sullivan, Ward, & Deutsch, 2010; Fidler et al., 2008; Sullivan & Kelly, 2001

Orders For Therapy Should Specify:

- Both parents must be involved
- Fee sharing, attendance, remedies
- Therapists’ access to information specified
- Therapists’ ability to see each family member in any combination
- Therapist should have family systems orientation and understanding of alienation


Breaking Barriers Camp (2)

- Intensive staff meetings each night to confer and develop strategies for next day’s events
- Difficulty getting voluntary agreement to attend and getting sufficient funding a problem
- High levels of satisfaction of participants (children & parents)
- Most left with aftercare program mutually agreed upon

Sullivan, Ward, & Deutsch, 2010

Therapeutic Goals for Families with an Alienated Child

- Goals:
  - Re-unification is not the primary or only goal
  - Transform the child’s distorted “good/bad” views and polarized feelings into more realistic ones
  - Restore appropriate parent-child roles and co-parental roles in the family
  - Work with aligned and rejected parents, and with child(ren) to restore more appropriate dynamics

Fidler et al., 2008; Friedlander & Walters, 2010; Johnston, Walters, & Friedlander, 2001;

New Massachusetts Program: “Breaking Barriers Camp”

- Designed to help children and parents where child has lost/is losing relationship with one parent
- Five day camp (3 ½ days was too short)
- Psycho-educational focus each morning with separate groups for alienating parents, rejected parents, children
- Afternoons/evenings are devoted to camp activities with skilled, supportive staff with opportunities for parents & children to interact if desired
- Rural camp setting very important for promoting interaction, reducing anxiety of parents and children

Sullivan, Ward, & Deutsch, 2010

“Family Bridges”: Workshop for Alienated Children

- Established in 1990’s for families with severe alienation
- Family reunification program, not therapy
- Instruction & education not deprogramming
- Legal and physical custody shifted by court order to rejected parent (which allows attendance at FW)
- All minor age siblings encouraged to attend
- 3-4 day program, usually in protective casual resort setting with shared snacks & meals & time for fun

Kelly, 2010; Rand & Warshak, 2008; Warshak, 2010.
Family Bridges: Structure
- Orientation and Risk Assessment
- Four phases to the educational program
- Conclusion and Aftercare Planning
- Vacation scheduled immediately after to solidify progress made in workshop – continuing experience of giving and receiving love
- Multi-media demonstrations based on psychological research in critical thinking, impact of conflict, stereotype formation, suggestion, distortions in perception and memory

Family Bridges: Principles
- Emphasizes autonomous thinking, including decision to participate in workshop, breaks, etc.
- No blame; designed to be face-saving
- Teaches critical thinking skills
- Avoids repetition, suggestion, one-sided portrayals of parents
- Teaches how persuasion, influence, attitudes & programming work, how attitudes & behavior can be shaped by these factors

Family Workshop: Types of Education
- Negative stereotype formation; factors affecting misperception; impact of suggestion on memory and perception; impact of group pressure and authority figures on critical thinking and rupture in relationship
- Impact of exposure to high parent conflict
- Apply information above to child’s situation in a manner to save face with no blame
- Acquire/practice communication skills, conflict management and conflict resolution skills in family meetings

Follow-up 2-4 years after Workshop
- Sample: 22 children in 11 families (most 8 – 16)
- Prior failed counseling experiences
- All severely alienated children restored relationship with rejected parent at time of workshop
- At follow-up:
  - 17/22 families maintained relationships (delayed contact with favored parent was part of Order)
  - 2 families did not maintain relationship gains (contact with favored parent ordered too soon after workshop)
  - Outcome was linked to influence of favored parent, who was not part of workshop
  - Warnak, 2010; Kelly, 2010

The Role of the PC or GAL in Alienation Cases
- Understanding the situation clearly (through evaluation) and follow-up interviews with all family members
- Monitoring compliance with all court orders for access, therapy, other interventions
- Monitoring communications
- Understanding reasons for non-compliance
- Supporting parents and children to comply
- Reporting to court, getting support from court

Non-compliance and PC
- Parent Coordinator gives interfering parent an opportunity to comply with orders regarding contact, communicating child information to rejected parent, or therapy
- PC increases time with non-rejected parent if spelled out in court order
- PC must have authority to report to court immediately with subsequent noncompliance
When All Else Fails - Last Resort: Rejected Parent Withdraws

- When all appropriate remedies have failed for more than a year in severe alienation cases
- When adolescent is too old to control, runs away, destroys property of rejected parent
- When child refusing contact has pathologically close relationship to aligned, disturbed parent
- When court system fails to work
- The parent has no funds to seek/get help

Rejected Parent Withdraws: How to Exit Leaving Bridges

- Rejected parent writes letter to child that expresses:
  - Continued love for child
  - Sadness that child doesn’t want to be together
  - That parent will cease all legal attempts to have visits
  - That parent is not abandoning child but will be available in the future if child wishes to contact him
  - The hope that over time, the child will see things differently

Additional Related Publications

Additional Related Publications


- Martinson, D. J. (2010). One case-One specialized judge: Why courts have a duty to manage alienation and other high conflict cases. Family Court Review, 48, 1.


© Joan B. Kelly, Ph.D.