

[This is taken from of a public webpage following a Family Access Fighting for Children's Rights teleconference with Dr Amy J L Baker. This version by Nick Child tidies up her own words from the less tidy webpage layout. The content is unchanged.]

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VIDEOS:

Dr Amy Baker – Montreal Symposium 2016
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c6R1kUaoPlk>

Dr Amy Baker - August 2018 PASG Conference in Stockholm
<https://youtu.be/9VwRtADtHjY>

AUDIO:

Dr Amy Baker – MPR News Panel: Coparenting After Divorce
<https://www.mprnews.org/story/2018/07/17/coparenting-after-divorce>

THE EIGHT BEHAVIORAL MANIFESTATIONS OF PARENTAL ALIENATION

These are the symptoms of parental alienation that appear within alienated children.

Generally, the more symptoms present and the more severe the symptoms, the more severe the alienation; all manifestations do not need to be present in order for alienation to exist.

1. Campaign of denigration: Strong or utter rejection of one parent, willingness to tell others, erasing past positive aspects of relationship and memories.
2. Weak, frivolous, absurd reasons for the rejection: When pressed to explain the rejection will give reasons that do not make sense or explain the level of animosity, are false memories (proclaiming to remember something from a very young age), or are patently untrue.
3. Lack of ambivalence: For the most part, one parent is seen as all good while the other is viewed as all bad.
4. "Independent thinker" phenomenon: The child strongly emphasizes that the favored parent played no role in the child's rejection of the other parent.
5. Reflexive support of the alienating parent in the parental conflict: Almost always taking the favored parent's side in almost all disagreements.
6. Absence of guilt: Appearing to have no qualms about cruel and harsh treatment of the rejected parent.
7. The presence of borrowed scenarios: Use of words and phrases that mimic or parrot those of the favored parent.
8. Rejection of extended family of rejected parent: Refusal to spend time with or acknowledge formerly beloved family members.

Amy J. L. Baker and S. Richard Sauber, editors, *Working with Alienated Children and Families: A Clinical Guidebook* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 62.

Richard A. Gardner, *The Parental Alienation Syndrome: A Guide for Mental Health and Legal Professionals*, 2nd edition (Cresskill: Creative Therapeutics, 1998).

SEVENTEEN PRIMARY PARENTAL ALIENATION STRATEGIES

These are strategies used by parents to alienate their children from the other parent. The alienating parent engages in these strategies against the targeted parent.

1. Badmouthing
2. Limiting Contact
3. Interfering with communication
4. Interfering with symbolic communication (i.e. pictures and photos)
5. Withdrawal of love
6. Telling the child the targeted parent is dangerous (may include filing false charges with Child Protective Services)
7. Forcing the child to choose between parents
8. Telling the child the targeted parent does not love him or her
9. Confiding in the child
10. Forcing the child to reject the targeted parent
11. Asking the child to spy on the targeted parent
12. Asking the child to keep secrets from the targeted parent
13. Referring to the targeted parent by first name and encouraging the child to do the same
14. Referring to a step-parent as "Mom" or "Dad" and encouraging the child to do the same

15. Withholding medical, academic, and other important information from the targeted parent/keeping the targeted parent's name off medical, academic, and other relevant documents (see California Family Code 3025)
16. Changing the child's name to remove association with the targeted parent
17. Cultivating dependency/undermining the authority of the targeted parent (may include overly permissive parenting by the alienating parent)

Amy J. L. Baker and S. Richard Sauber, editors, *Working with Alienated Children and Families: A Clinical Guidebook* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 95-97.

TACTICS MANIPULATORS USE TO MAINTAIN POWER AND CONTROL

Dr. Simon and domestic violence expert Lundy Bancroft each identify numerous specific tactics that manipulators use to maintain their power and control in their relationships.

1. Minimizing
2. Lying by omission
3. Denying
4. Attending selectively (Actively ignoring warnings and pleas or wishes of others)
5. Rationalizing
6. Diverting attention
7. Evading detection
8. Intimidating subtly
9. Provoking guilt
10. Shaming
11. Playing victim role
12. Playing the servant role (Cloaking a self-serving agenda in a noble cause)
13. Seducing
14. Projecting blame
15. Feigning innocence (Pretending to be unaware of what he or she is doing)
16. Feigning ignorance or confusion (Acting as if he or she doesn't know what the other person is talking about)
17. Brandishing anger (Deliberately displaying anger to intimidate and coerce others)
18. Distorting what the other person is saying or doing
19. Withdrawing love and approval
20. Indicating contempt for the other person (Mocking, ridiculing, rolling eyes, etc.. showing they have no respect for the others thoughts or feelings)
21. Acting as the final authority
22. Criticizing in a harsh and uncalled-for manner
23. Not listening, interrupting

Amy J. L., Baker and Paul R. Fine, editors, *Surviving Parental Alienation, a journey of hope and healing* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowan & Littlefield, 2014) pgs. 47 to 50.

THE EMOTIONAL LIFE OF THE TARGETED PARENT

Most of the targeted parent's emotions were negative, with alienation described by the

parents as “my biggest nightmare,” the “worst experience of my life,” and “a harrowing ordeal that never really ends.”

1. Sadness
2. Loss
3. Yearning
4. Unending suffering
5. Concern for their child
6. Shock and awe
7. Desperate
8. Weary
9. Worried and afraid
10. Confused, without a plan of action
11. Victimized by the system
12. Alone
13. Anger and frustration

Common characteristics of parents that were able to reunite with their children:

Negative emotions flooded targeted parents on a daily basis, enlisting them in a war they did not want and were not prepared to fight. Nonetheless, they managed to cope and draw on an unwavering commitment to their children during the long and arduous journey. They experienced themselves as being on a mission to rescue their children and this mission infused their lives with purpose and meaning. They developed identities as targeted parents fighting for their children. Some common thoughts among targeted parents were “What helped me is that I am a very persistent person with a lot of fight in me”. I spent nearly every waking minute thinking about how to rescue my daughter,” while another said he “launched into the fight of his life.”

Parents understood they were in a war and realized they needed to marshal their resources and develop a plan of engagement.:

1. Energized
2. Committed
3. Focused
4. Courageous
5. Patient
6. Careful
7. Grateful
8. Appreciate the good

Conceptualize Alienation as a Battle :

Alienation is a battle for the heart and mind of your child. As a targeted parent, you need to steel yourself for the prospect of a prolonged and protracted battle. Inner and external resources need to be reserved and allocated as necessary. You also need to expect the unexpected and not waste any time or energy being surprised or outraged at the behaviors of your ex. Accept that the life of a targeted parent will be filled with gross injustices, rude awakenings, and an enormous waste of time and money.

Because it is a battle, it is essential that you have a battle plan, a vision of what success would mean for you and your child, whether it is to hold on to the relationship before your child becomes more severely alienated or to reconcile with a currently alienated child. Once the

goal is conceptualized you can develop an action plan. The plan will help you stay focused and committed during times when you might despair and feel like giving up. The plan will help you see that each small step you take (each phone call, each letter, each option considered) is part of an overall strategy to one day get your child back. Part of the plan must involve taking the long view, understanding that the plan is long-term and not likely to result in immediate reconciliation or improvement or judicial action. Keeping expectations appropriately low and long-term can help buffer you from the crushing disappointment of failed efforts or lack of immediate results or timely action.

Actions to Take:

1. Appreciate the good
2. Take care of yourself
3. Get social support
4. Work with a mental health provider who understands
5. Find serenity
6. Develop a mantra
7. Call on a helpful image (the child is a puppet being controlled or a prisoner)
8. Validate your identity as a parent

Living with parental alienation is excruciating and heartbreaking. Targeted parents experience a range of negative emotions over an extended period of time. The process of being alienated and the efforts to reconnect with the lost child can be all-consuming. It is important for targeted parents to periodically take a step back to experience themselves as more than just a targeted parent and, there-by, to not let the alienation define them. They need to take care of themselves in order to forge ahead in their alienation journey.

Amy J. L. Baker and Paul R. Fine, editors, *Surviving Parental Alienation, a journey of hope and healing* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowan & Littlefield, 2014) pgs. 131 to 153

THE SIX TACTICS OF PERSUASION

The following six tactics of persuasion are used by alienating parents to sell their alienation message to their children. This creates psychological cohesion with them and disaffection with the targeted parent. Because alienating parents are such effective salesman and are so compelling in their use of persuasion tactics, it is likely that legal and mental health professionals who come into contact with them will also find them likable and believable. This may explain in part why alienating parents often seem to prevail in court. With all of these tactics, the child must be unaware of the role of the alienating parent. The reason these tactics are effective is the child is convinced that he or she is willingly making his or her own choices at each step.

1. The rule of reciprocity.

The rule of reciprocity dictates that a person will generally feel obligated to reciprocate when given a gift or favor. The alienating parent can do this by reminding the child of everything he or she has done for the child and signaling that something is expected in return (loyalty, preference, rejection of the other parent). Moreover, the child's sense of indebtedness can be increased if the alienating parent creates the appearance of going to battle for the child. The rule of reciprocity may also explain why alienated children are pressured to refuse gifts from

the targeted parent and the extended family of the targeted parent, as that would create an indebtedness toward them.

2. The rule of consistency and commitment.

Once a choice has been made or a stand taken, we will encounter personal and interpersonal pressure to behave consistently with that commitment. If the alienating parent can create a situation in which the child will betray the targeted parent (be rude, lie to, spy on, reject, and the like), the child will come to believe that the targeted parent must be unworthy. The very act of betrayal creates inside the child an identity as someone who doesn't love or care for the other parent. If the child puts the betrayal in writing, this can further enhance the negative feelings, as people tend to believe that they mean what they write. This may explain the frequency of alienated children being encouraged to write letters of rejection to their targeted parent.

The commitment also must be perceived to be the result of free will. The external pressure must not be detectable. This, of course, fits well with the independent thinker phenomenon seen so frequently in alienated children who go out of their way to deny any external influence on their thoughts and feelings about the targeted parent.

Another aspect of commitment is that it should be incremental. The alienating parent can achieve that outcome by asking the child in small incremental steps to move in that direction. If the alienating parent can convince the child to make a small act of betrayal or unkindness to start with, it is more likely that the child will engage in a larger act of betrayal or unkindness later. Each step solidifies the child's commitment and moves that child in the desired direction.

3. Endorsement of the social group.

People naturally look to others to understand how to behave especially in a novel or uncertain situation. If the alienating parent has activated the social group to rally behind them (through the vilification of the targeted parent) and has them endorse their alienation message, the child will be likely to find the necessary cues for how to behave (i.e., believe that parent). This rule may also explain why younger children become alienated following the alienation of their older brother or sister: they are following the cues of their relevant social group.

4. Social influence and likeability.

Important elements of likeability are physical attractiveness, similarity, and flattery. Alienators may have good looks, humor, warmth, and an ability to project kindness, success and competence.

Another aspect of likeability that may be particularly relevant for alienation is similarity. The more similar the child feels to the alienating parent, the more likeable the parent will be to the child. If the alienating parent is able to enhance the child's sense of being more like that parent than the targeted parent, the stronger their alliance will be. Another way to enhance similarity is to create the feeling of being on the same team, working toward the same goals.

5. Authority.

Research has consistently demonstrated that individuals are highly susceptible to the dictates of authority figures. In families affected by parental alienation, the child comes to respect and honor the authority of one parent while disregarding the authority of the other. This may be because the alienating parent knows how to play the role of the all-knowing and all-powerful authority better than the targeted parent.

6. The appearance of scarcity.

With respect to alienation, this refers to the potential for the alienating parent to become scarce (i.e., withdrawing their love), creating a heightened demand for their affection. When an object is perceived as scarce or having the potential to be taken away, it becomes more desirable and attractive. The alienating parent can activate this trigger simply by becoming aloof or indicating disapproval or disappointment in the child. The fear of loss increases the child's desire for that parent.

Amy J. L. Baker and Paul R. Fine, editors, *Surviving Parental Alienation, a journey of hope and healing* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowan & Littlefield, 2014) pgs. 81 to 85

THE ALIENATION TIPPING POINT

In the book *The Tipping Point*, journalist Malcolm Gladwell highlights features of the messenger, the message, and the context within which the message is heard that help to create an unstoppable force. Some of these features are particularly relevant to alienation.

1. "Stickiness" of the message. Although we are bombarded with thousands of messages daily, only a few "stick" with us. There are ways to package information to make it more or less irresistible, and sometimes small tweaks to the message can have a big impact on its effectiveness. Tweaking is what marketers do when they field-test new campaigns to craft the most compelling message.
2. "Field testing". Alienating parents may do this to find the message that will stick with their children. Perhaps the most compelling message is that the other parent is crazy or a monster or has rejected the child. Alienating parents can try out different messages until they find the one that takes hold inside the child. Most likely it will be the one that resonates with the child's own experiences of the targeted parent. For example, the alienating parent can take an actual event or quality of the targeted parent and reinterpret it for the child as evidence of that parent's rejection.
3. Presenting in a narrative format. A narrative format includes characters and a plot that has a beginning, middle, and end. Children are hardwired to receive information in this manner. Narratives help children integrate disparate events, actions, and feelings into a single structure, a coherent whole that helps them make sense of the world. Once the outline of the story has been established, new information is incorporated in a way that is consistent with the original narrative. If the alienating parent is able to package the alienation as a "story" in which he is the hero, the child is the victim, and the other parent is the villain, the child will be primed to see unfolding events according to the storyline. The targeted parent will have a hard time counteracting the negative message once it is internalized as the child's story of his family.
4. Difficulty in assimilating contradictory information. Once the storyline is set. It is difficult to assimilate contradictory information. This is because the "deep need to repress inner contradictions is a fundamental property of the human mind." Once children are certain of the story, they stop listening to the part of their brain that says it might be wrong. A schemata of the family becomes embedded in the child's mind and information that does not fit that schemata is selectively ignored and actively rejected. Most people when directly confronted by evidence that they are wrong, do not change their point of view or course of action but justify it even more tenaciously.

5. Being uncertain is uncomfortable. Uncertainty is extremely uncomfortable for our brains. The greater the uncertainty, the worse the discomfort. In this way, the negative message the alienating parent wants the child to absorb about the targeted parent “sticks” in their brain.
6. The art of persuasion. Persuasion is a skill the alienating parent is good at, having a powerful sense of how to make their message irresistible. This trait makes people who meet him/her want to agree with him/her no matter what comes out of their mouth.
7. The effectiveness of the messenger. The messenger's effectiveness is more important than the sticky message. According to classic social persuasion theory, the qualities of the speaker account for the vast majority of the message conveyed to the listener. Evidence indicates that how people respond to the communication is greatly affected by perceptions about the communicator's intentions, expertness, and trustworthiness. The listener's interpretation of the knowledge and character of the speaker determines, to a large extent, whether the content of the message is absorbed.
8. Body language, emotions, and feelings. Another nonverbal way to convey the sticky alienation message is through body language, emotions and feelings. Through the force of their personality, alienators know how to make their ideas compelling to children-to the extent that their ideas override actual experiences. Gladwell states “part of what it means to have a powerful or persuasive personality, then, is that you can draw others into your own rhythms and dictate the terms of the interaction.” The alienating parents crafted their sticky message so that it would seem like the targeted parent didn't love the child. They sold it to the children through the effectiveness of their persuasion. The art of persuasion is so compelling that the person experiences the implanted idea as authentic rather than as forced upon them from an external force.

Amy J. L., Baker and Paul R. Fine, editors, *Surviving Parental Alienation, a journey of hope and healing* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowan & Littlefield, 2014) pgs. 78 to 81

THREE DEGREES OF PARENTAL ALIENATION

1. Mild Parental Alienation:

Refers to cases in which the child objects to and criticizes the targeted parent, but yet enjoys the presence of the targeted parent once time passes or when the location is no longer in close proximity to the alienating parent.

2. Moderate Parental Alienation:

Refers to cases in which all eight primary manifestations of PA are likely to be present and each is more advanced than in mild cases, but less pervasive than in severe cases. Children will usually go with the targeted parent after expressing and demonstrating significant reluctance. Also, moderately alienated children will express consistent negative feelings toward the targeted parent whether or not the alienating parent is present. Although these children may enjoy the time they spend with the targeted parent, they will not admit this in the presence of the alienating parent.

3. Severe Parental Alienation:

Severe cases of alienation are differentiated from mild and moderate cases by the extent of the child's rejection and degree of negativity in the attitudes and behavior toward the targeted parent. Severely alienated children have little if anything positive to say about the

targeted parent and often rewrite the history of their relationship with the targeted parent. They seem content to avoid all contact with the targeted parent, may reject an entire branch of their extended family and often threaten to defy court-ordered parenting plans that schedule them to be under the care of the targeted parent.

(Note: Please see "Missing the Alienation" by Linda Kase-Gottlieb for an explanation as to why Parental Alienation is often misunderstood or incorrectly diagnosed for something other than what it is.)

UNDERSTANDING AND MITIGATING THE ALIENATION

Parental Alienation is a devastating form of emotional child abuse, but it is preventable. PA is a dysfunctional family interactional pattern that intensifies appreciably when the professionals in the larger social systems (i.e. the mental health community, Child Protective Services, law enforcement, and the judiciary) become co-opted by the alienating parent and empower her/him in response. Statistics of interviews with alienated children confirm that children desire a healthy loving relationship with both parents. However, due to their loyalty to the alienating parent, children are prevented from this relationship. Parental Alienation will not simply disappear nor will a child outgrow it. It needs to be dealt with in a proactive manner that can only be accomplished through aggressive measures to prevent or repair the damage caused by alienation. These are a few items to consider:

1. Work toward teaching the alienated child critical thinking through games, reading, discussions etc...
2. Work with knowledgeable professionals.
3. Keep a journal documenting important information.
4. Keep yourself informed about the child's activities.
5. Be proactive in keeping the school informed about your current contact information.
6. Give the school copies of your custody orders and keep a copy readily available at all times.
7. Understand the Family Law Codes regarding your rights to access information about your child's education, health and well being.
8. Continue to educate yourself regarding new information on PA and reunification techniques.
9. Never give up loving your child.
10. Get support so you can maintain emotional and physical well being for yourself.

Reason for Hope: The stories of reconciliation, more than anything else, offer hope. They confirm that someday, sometimes, alienated children can in fact find their way back to their targeted parent. Knowing that this is true is extremely helpful, if not essential, for currently targeted parents, as it provides them with the much-needed beacon of hope from which they can draw their strength to forge ahead in their own alienation battle. The hope of a better tomorrow fuels them each and every day and guides them on their journey. Without the hope, some may give up.

Amy J. L., Baker and Paul R. Fine, editors, *Surviving Parental Alienation, a journey of hope and healing* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowan & Littlefield, 2014) pgs. 78 to 81.

ELEVEN CATALYSTS FOR REUNIFICATION

1. **Maturation** – The child has increasing number of opportunities to observe the ways that people in other families behave and begins to slowly question the story of his or her own family, especially as – in the addition to life experience – the child has increased cognitive maturity and capacity to question his or her own upbringing and the capacity to tolerate psychological distance from his or her parents.
2. **Alienating Parent Turned on the Child** – The favored parent becomes overly and unnecessarily controlling and harsh with the child, showing him /herself to be the mean and vindictive person he or she really is.
3. **Experiencing Parental Alienation as a Parent** – The grown alienated child marries and alienating parent and experiences parental alienation from the perspective of the targeted parent. That child comes to realize that his or her own childhood may have not been as it seemed.
4. **The Targeted Parent Returned** – The child has the opportunity to experience the rejected parent due to enforcement of court orders, and in the process finds out that the rejected parent is not the monster he or she was made out to be.
5. **Attaining a Milestone** – Becoming a parent, graduating from college, getting married, and similar lifetime milestones create an emotional desire to reconnect with the targeted parent or create the impetus to reexamine the narrative from a new perspective.
6. **Therapy** – Discussions with a neutral and caring third party may lead to questioning the assumptions and the narrative from the family and can result in a desire to rethink the past and be open to a different future.
7. **Intervention of Extended Family Member** – A trusted relative encourages the child to question and rethink his or her harsh stance toward the rejected parent.
8. **Intervention of a Significant Other** – An important and trusted significant other encourages the child to question and rethink his or her harsh stance toward the rejected parent.
9. **Seeing the Alienating Parent Mistreat Others** – The child witnesses the alienating parent's harsh and cruel treatment of other people and comes to realize that the targeted parent may have been a victim in the family drama
10. **Discovering that the Alienating Parent was Dishonest** – The alienated child has the opportunity to witness unambiguously dishonest behavior on the part of the favored parent, which creates a crack in the armor of that parent's supposed perfection.
11. **Becoming a Parent** – Having one's own child allows the alienated child (as an adult) to realize the importance of both parents for the health and well-being of a child and questions why the favored parent insisted on the child's rejection of the other parent.

What the Targeted Parents did Right:

1. They became educated and informed
2. They never gave up
3. They saw the alienation from the child's perspective
4. They respected the child's pace
5. They didn't expect an apology

Amy J. L. Baker and Paul R. Fine, editors, *Surviving Parental Alienation, a journey of hope and healing* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowan & Littlefield, 2014) pgs. 120 to 127.

ELEVEN ARGUMENTS FOR FAMILY COURT JUDGES TAKING ACTION IN CASES WHERE PARENTAL ALIENATION IS PRESENT

1. Parental alienation is child abuse.
2. Parents are not replaceable.
3. Children, even teens, do not have the cognitive maturity to choose to eliminate a parent from their life.
4. Their identity development could suffer.
5. Formation of healthy adult relationships could be impaired.
6. Research suggests that they do not really want the relationship to end.
7. Alienation can have long-term negative effects.
8. There are barriers to natural reconciliation.
9. There can be disadvantages to waiting for spontaneous reconciliation.
10. Reconciliation with alienated children can be successful.
11. The fallacy of children who do well in school

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<https://www.familyaccessfightingforchildrensrights.org/dr-amy-baker.html>]