

The Parental Alienation Syndrome
...a frequently missed diagnosis

“Allowing PAS to flourish in a child is its own form of child abuse since it prevents that child from sharing a warm relationship with a parent who actually loves him or her ... this can only have serious consequences I on the child’s development as he or she is encouraged to adopt a distorted vision of reality—a process that undermines the very basis for psychological health.”

Richard A. Gardner, M.D.

These are hard times for families that have been split in two by divorce. They are made harder when a high-conflict custody dispute transforms two parents into adversaries. Or when a divorce is finalized, custody determined, but the calls and visits of the noncustodial parent become intolerably irritating to the custodial parent.

Undermining and undercutting a parent to the children in these situations is not new. Nor is the pain the children suffer.

What is new is the children’s way of responding to a programming parent. Increasingly, children themselves are choosing one parent by attacking the other. If this costs them the pain and suffering of losing a parent, at least they can hope to restore something like normalcy to their lives. But they really may not have much to support this attack.

And so begin some unusual complaints that have a sad and plaintive quality—for those who can “hear” between the lines: “Yes, Dad, I hate her. Last night she wouldn’t let me watch TV until I finished my chores. I want to live with you. It’s more fun here.” or “Please don’t make me go with him this weekend Mom. He always makes too much noise chewing his food.” Children who can give no substantial or believable reason for hating a parent may have parental alienation syndrome (PAS).

But how do you diagnose a PAS?
What do you do about it if it is diagnosed?

Courts are in turmoil over these cases. Contradicting testimony of litigants, as well as mental health professionals who should be in accord, but instead are often attacking one another’s positions, make it difficult for courts to untangle fact from fiction.

Fortunately for these families, there are guidelines for diagnosing and treating this disorder.

In the following extracts from his book **The Parental Alienation Syndrome: A Guide for Mental Health and Legal Professionals**, Richard A. Gardner, M.D., Clinical Professor at Columbia University’s College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York City, defines and illustrates the PAS and its signs and symptoms.

With proper diagnosis and intervention, these relationships may be restored. But first PAS must be recognized ...

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