

PARENTAL ALIENATION SYNDROME (PAS)

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PAS has been practised for as long as marital or relationship conflicts have occurred. It is the conscious action of one parent turning against another to oust the other parent from the affection, love and respect or regard of their children. It works more effectively when used against younger, passive children and less so with older, more assertive children. It is unlikely to occur in a stable, harmonious relationship between parents who encourage the children to regard the other parent similarly, and work together to bring up their children appropriately with socialized standards of behaviour. Where marital disharmony does occur PAS is not necessarily a consequence, as many parents consider their parental role as of the greatest importance. They will encourage the former partner to participate in guiding and caring for their children, and afford them equal importance in the upbringing. Such parents engender the important principle that whilst parents may not be able to love one another it does not mean that their love for their children is any the less. Sometimes the parted couples can even establish a friendly relationship towards one another which is desirable for their children. To achieve this some parents need guidance from an outside professional. In this way, despite the marital split, parenting patterns persist.

Why Does PAS Occur?

PAS occurs as a result of a relationship in conflict, to which must be added the pathological condition of the alienator. He/she suffers from the need to control totally the process of rearing the children after an acrimonious separation. It is known to be most common in females. Sometimes this results from the need to retaliate against the former partner who may have been the rejector of the relationship. Depths of early childhood experiences and alienation from his/her own parents also play a part.

Depriving a former partner of positive contact with his children is a powerful weapon. Some alienators go so far as to accuse the former partner, often unjustly, of physically, emotionally and even sexually abusing the child or children merely to get their own way. This results in the involvement of social workers, the police and leads to the humiliation of the alienated parent, often unjustly. Under these circumstances, most alienated partners often give up the fight to seek contact with their child. The alienating parent will often use this against him by informing the child: "You see how little he cares for you"; "Wasn't I right about him?" The child will more often than not fail to understand the lack of logic of what takes place and support the mother's position since she is present most of the time and has usually been the main carer. Sometimes a new partnership has emerged. It is then the object of the alienator to promote the affection and closeness of the children with the new partner and to forget the role of the alienated parent, usually the father.

In the very rare instances there occurs poor parenting by one partner or even criminal activities such as paedophilia. Such parents should be removed from the parenting role at least until they have been treated for their problems.

Who is Most Likely to Practise PAS?

More than *75 per cent* of mothers practise PAS, as against *25 per cent* of men who alienate. Partly this is due to the view, despite the changes in social and cultural norms, that the mother is the centre of family life. Hence an alienating mother feels she has the greater input and responsibility in caring for the child than the father. Mothers who are on their own feel it is only right that they should have the main or only right to make decisions concerning their children. They will, therefore, use any weapon, fair or foul, to make certain that they have the ultimate power over their children. Among the weapons used are accusations by the mother that the father is unfit to care for or even spend any time with the child. This may be due to allegations of sexual misconduct, alcohol or drug misuse, immorality or poor mental state or lifestyle or possibly criminal involvement. Due to the closeness of the mothers and children, the children will often believe the worse of the other parent.

Such mothers alienate themselves from the real needs of the child in order to maintain their total contact and to eliminate the contact and relationship with the other parent. When litigation is threatened, the alienating parent becomes even keener in her determination to have complete control. She will say to the child: "See what your father is doing now? He is trying to have me imprisoned". This turns the child against the father even more as he sees the mother as the "victim". Hence, she has involved and continues to involve the child in her battle with the father and the process of programming and brainwashing the child until the child sees matters as the programmer sees them and turns against the father. The child's behaviour, therefore, becomes increasingly more difficult when the father is present and the child may even refuse to go with him. Sometimes in-laws, allied to one or the other, may influence matters further. Hence the child uses the same hostility and acts accordingly. The mother in turn is deeply gratified to have achieved her objective and may even disclaim that she is doing anything to influence the child and may state that she is actively encouraging the child to cooperate. The result is that the child will behave in an inimical, unfriendly and hostile way towards the alienated person, usually the father. In this situation, the mother may well believe her own lies. Some mothers overindulge their children in order to provide their children with the view that "mother offers them most". This is combined with persistent denigration of the other parent.

It is of interest to note that many parents who seek to programme their children in the above way have often been subjected to the same treatment themselves. They are, therefore, very familiar with the techniques that can be used effectively. They are perpetuating a vicious and destructive pattern to the next generation.

The Likely Consequences to the Alienated Person and the Children

Children hate to see their parents in acrimony because it reduces their sense of security and they feel in jeopardy. The successful indoctrination, programming and brain-washing of a child leads to bitterness, sadness and anger in the unjustly accused parent and prevention of the parent in

exercising his/her rights, obligations and love for the child. He/she will either give up the right, or there will be an acrimonious conflict wherein the child suffers confusion and ultimately alienation towards one of the parents. This may go on for many years.

Fear is sometimes induced in the child towards the alienated parent. This is ultimately often translated into attacking and humiliating them. Fear induction is especially likely to be successful with younger children. Eventually such children consider the alienated parent to be “bad”, “inadequate” and of little value to them. Such parents eventually are forced to play a peripheral role or no role at all, except as financial providers. When mother’s economic position is greater than father’s, for instance, there is a desire to eliminate father even from the role of provider. Some fathers become so desperate as to contemplate suicide or use alcohol or drugs as a means of escape. This merely verifies the picture which mothers frequently inculcate in their children — that their father is an alcoholic or drug addict. Some children, seeing the once stable parents embroiled in this kind of warfare, turn against both parents and become depressed, underachieve at school or turn to delinquency.

Only later in life do children sometimes become aware of the wrong which has been done and the way they have been used as “pawns” and programmed against all the opposing “reality”. Then the antagonism of the maturing adult turns against the alienating parent, as they grow up and become aware through maturity and learning to think for themselves that the alienated parent has suffered a great injustice at the hands of the alienator and themselves. As a consequence they feel a sense of desperate guilt, which can become a helpless kind of regret this has no way of being assuaged if the parent has died or has vanished.

How is PAS Carried Out?

Parents who use PAS often see themselves as “victims” and like to think their children see them as “victims”. They tend to seek revenge and will encourage the children to believe that the other parent is at fault, by claiming that “she”, the victim and programmer, has been cruelly and unjustly treated. They will also assuage and engender the view that their former partner suffers from a number of moral and personal problems. Slandorous or exaggerated statements are made constantly to the child about the alienated parent. Alienating parents will over-state or even create vices such as: “He’s an alcoholic, drug taker, womaniser, has no sense of responsibility, drives dangerously, etc.” All such statements and many more, are repeated to the child continually. Of all such statements the most damaging to the alienated parent is that of sexual or physical abuse, when there are no justifiable reasons for such allegations being made. The repercussions can be that the alienated parent can be judged guilty by allegations alone, and often has to undergo a painful investigation and suspicion to disprove such allegations. However, where this is substantiated by a court there should be no question of removal of access to the child in question until treatment has been undergone and it is felt safe by all involved for contact to continue.

Intervention in the form of therapy is usually necessary in order to counteract false allegations. Such help will be met with a mixture of hope by the alienated parent and often resentment, and lack of co-operation by the alienator and often by the alienated child. The alienator will use or

promote anything which will achieve their objective of hurting, denigrating and if possible eliminating the alienated parent's control or contact with the child.

Other ways of carrying out the process of alienation via programming and thereby brainwashing children can be seen by:

- (a) Observing the behaviour and listening to the statements of children towards the alienated party.
- (b) By noting the control the alienating parent seeks and obtains in order to eliminate the alienated parent.
- (c) By noting the marital disharmony as well as the acrimony when the parents separated subsequently.
- (d) By noting the contradictory statements and behaviour demonstrated by the programmed child when interviewed.
- (e) By taking note of the character assaults which the alienating parent makes which are often not verifiable: eg. that the former partner is immoral, lacks parenting skills, drinks heavily, uses drugs, is emotionally unstable or unreliable or is dishonest, etc.
- (f) By noting the unchildlike statements made which have been programmed by the alienating parent.

Another manifestation of PAS is the child being totally under the influence of the alienating parent, by believing and repeating what the alienating parent says, in attacking and humiliating the other party, and refusing to have contact or very limited contact with the alienated person.

There are many other direct as well as subtle ways in which the process of programming and brainwashing is carried out. Here are some of them:

- (1) Encouraging the child to disobey and show a lack of respect for the alienated parent.
- (2) By promoting an alliance between the child and alienator against the other parent.
- (3) Showing opposition to the other parent's child-rearing methods and communicating this to the child.
- (4) Bribing and overindulging the child to create comparative poverty of enjoyment with the other parent, when they are with that parent.
- (5) Suggesting and actually changing the surname of the child to reduce the influence and memory of the other birth parent.
- (6) The programmer playing the part of a "martyr" claiming how badly they were treated by the alienated parent.
- (7) Making the child afraid of the alienated parent.
- (8) Encouraging the child to hate being with the other parent.
- (9) Showing the other parent to be bad.

- (10) Instilling in the child the view that the other parent wants to take the child away from the programmer and even to kidnap the child.
- (11) Making the child feel anxious, rejected and insecure if the child does not comply with the programmer.
- (12) The programmer encourages the child to keep secrets while spying and reporting on the alienated parent.
- (13) Moving away or living some distance from the alienated parent.
- (14) Sowing the seeds of not obeying the alienated parent.
- (15) Showing negative non-verbal communication such as turning the body away when speaking of the alienated parent or making derogatory faces about the alienated parent, when speaking on the telephone.

It is vital that a professional such as a clinical psychologist or psychiatrist be involved as soon as possible to deal with PAS. This is to prevent the damage caused by PAS from becoming impervious to improvement. The professional must be aware of PAS, and also its origin.

Both parents and the child must be evaluated individually with the professional being aware of the presence and effect of PAS on all concerned. Sometimes unannounced home visits are indicated. Having established that none of the parents are a danger to the child, efforts must be made to develop a voluntary "*modus vivendi*" on who should have the children and when, thus avoiding PAS by either parent. One must term this a "two-step plan". If the initial process of voluntary help being provided with both parents and the child is ineffective, a more firm approach must be adopted, including the involvement of the legal system.

Interviews with all members of the warring factions should be insisted upon by the court. Frequently there is much opposition to this by one party or the other. Only the court can insist on all being done as the professional (expert witness) requests. Failure to co-operate with the expert witness indicates to the court what the next step needs to be. It is preferable for one expert witness to deal with both parties, rather than each have their own who will side with their particular position rather than considering the overall complexity of the problems and the concern over the child's needs. This is not always possible however in an "adversarial" atmosphere.

Interviews and tests used must be carried out sensitively and impartially. Videotaping may be used when allowed by the participants. When this is not allowed, who objects and why should be noted! The videotapes can be studied by all involved in seeking to make the best possible decisions.

Where PAS continues by one or both parties, legal sanctions need finally to be found with the alienating parent being given psychological treatment and, failing this, being forced to discontinue such behaviour. When this fails in the extreme, such parents should lose custody of the child, and the child placed with co-operating in-laws who permit full contact of the child with the previous alienated parent. It is also possible that the alienating parent could be fined or imprisoned with the alienated parent being given regular contact and even custody of the child.

This would need to be done with the greatest of care since the children have often been programmed so fully against the alienated parent. What is required is a period of deprogramming, with the help of a clinical psychologist. In this way the child may be allowed to understand the following:

1. Why the programming occurred.
2. What can be done to gradually improve and cement the child's relationship with the alienated parent. Therapists involved in helping such children should seek to develop a greater insight into such children concerning PAS.

What is the Judicial Recourse?

There is an increase in the alienated parent turning to the legal profession and the courts if all other methods have failed. They feel justice must surely prevail when an independent Judge is made aware of PAS. This is now common in the United States, but less so in the UK. Judges are naturally influenced by a number of traditions and are unaware in many cases, of the effects of PAS. These traditions are:

1. Mothers on the whole, are thought more suitable than fathers of having custody of the children.
2. The older children should have the final say about whom to be with. This does not, however, consider the programming which the alienated parent has carried out beforehand.
3. In the case of a younger child, many Judges again favour the mother as main custodian or sole custodian, all things being equal. If they favour the other parent they may well be viewed as unfair.
4. Sometimes Judges will recommend family therapy or some involvement of psychiatrists, paediatricians or clinical psychologists to assess and treat the conflict between opposing parents.

These professionals also often fail to respond to the PAS which has eliminated or reduced the role being played by the alienated parent. They, too, may put too much emphasis on what children say they want, being unaware of PAS.

It is vital that decisions are made which are fair and just for all concerned. PAS cannot be allowed to prevent one capable but hostile parent from depriving another stable and capable parent of their parenting role. Any parent who practises PAS must ultimately be dealt with severely by the court. PAS is a kind of brainwashing which leads to suffering for all concerned, either in the short or long-term. Both parents must be viewed as having the right and the obligation to play a vital role on the care, guidance and love provided for their children.

The judiciary must realize that many potential litigious parents who have been the victims of adverse brainwashing of their children give up the fight. They do this for a variety of practical reasons including:

1. The feeling that they are doing more harm to their children than good by fighting over them.
2. Lack of financial resources.
3. The view that they simply do not think they can win against a determined, alienating former parent
4. It takes much determination and is extremely time consuming, when one is already fully stretched in earning a living in order to provide for the children.

It is unfortunate that many children view the fact that a parent does not fight for them in the courts, as a rejection of them by that parent. It is time to redress the balance.