

## False Domestic Violence Accusations Can Lead To Parental Alienation Syndrome

By David Heleniak

Parental Alienation Syndrome (PAS) is a pattern of thoughts and behavior that can develop in a child of separated parents where the custodial parent causes the child, through manipulation and access blocking, to unjustifiably fear and/or hate the other parent. PAS is more than brainwashing, in that the child comes to actively participate in the degradation of the target parent, coming up with original (often ludicrous) reasons to fear/hate him or her.



Domestic violence (DV) restraining orders are a perfect weapon for an alienating parent. Typically, in addition to removing an accused abuser from the marital home, a DV restraining order also "temporarily" bars the accused abuser from seeing his or her children, and "temporarily" gives the accusing parent exclusive physical custody. And temporary, in the Family Court, has a funny way of becoming permanent.

Obtaining a restraining order based on a false allegation of domestic violence gets the target parent out of the house and out of the picture. A father who can't see his kids, for example, is unable to rebut the lie "Daddy doesn't love you anymore. That's why he left you." Nor can he rebut the alternate lie, "Daddy is dangerous. The wise judge said so. That's why he can't see you."

Often, if an accused abuser is allowed to see his or her children, it is in a supervised visitation center. As Stan Rains observed in "Supervised Visitation Center Dracula,"

The demeaning of the "visiting" parent is readily visible from the minute that a person enters the "secured facility" with armed guards, officious case workers with their clipboards and arrogant, domineering managers.... The child's impression is that all of these authority figures see Daddy as a serious and dangerous threat. The only time a child sees this type of security is on TV showing prisons filled with bad people.

Not only does visitation in a visitation center send the clear message to the child that the "visiting" parent is a bad person, if children decline to see their parents under such a setting, they are generally not forced to do so. More perversely, if a child is encouraged by the custodial parent to refuse to see the target parent, there will be no significant repercussion to the targeting parent, and, generally, the child will not be forced to see the target parent.

The more time a child spends away from the alienated parent, the worse the alienation will become. As psychologist Glenn F. Cartwright remarked in his article "Expanding the Parameters of Parental Alienation Syndrome,"

the old adage that time heals all wounds, such is not the case with PAS, where the passage of time worsens rather than heals the affliction. This is not to say that time is unimportant: on the contrary, time remains a vital variable for all the players. To heal the relationship, the child requires quality time with the lost parent to continue and repair the meaningful association that may have existed since birth. This continued communication also serves as a

reality check for the child to counter the effects of ongoing alienation at home. Likewise, the lost parent needs time with the child to ensure that contact is not completely lost and to prevent the alienation from completely destroying what may be left of a normal, loving relationship. Time used in these ways helps to counter the negative effects of alienation.

The alienating parent, on the other hand, requires time to complete the brainwashing of the child without interference. The manipulation of time becomes the prime weapon in the hands of the alienator who uses it to structure, occupy, and usurp the child's time to prevent "contaminating" contact with the lost parent, depriving both of their right to spend time together and furthering the goal of total alienation. Unlike cases of child abuse where time away from the abuser sometimes helps in repairing a damaged relationship, in PAS time away from the lost parent furthers the goal of alienation. The usual healing properties of time are lost when it is used as the primary weapon to inflict injury on the lost parent by alienating the child.

Along these lines, Dr. Richard A. Gardner, who coined the term "Parental Alienation Syndrome" in 1985, maintained: "If there is to be any hope of their reestablishing a relationship with the targeted parent, PAS children must spend significant time with him (her). They must have living experiences that will demonstrate that the PAS parent is not noxious and/or dangerous."

A parent willing to falsely accuse the other parent of domestic violence would probably be willing to poison a child against him or her. Add to this the problem that a judge willing to "err on the side of caution" by entering a DV restraining order based on a dubious false allegation would probably not be willing to do what was necessary to prevent the development of PAS.

PAS is heart-wrenching and, tragically, common. If the DV restraining order system could be reformed so that only real victims obtained restraining orders and only real abusers were thrown out their houses, I predict that the number of PAS cases would be greatly reduced. Let's try to get there.

---

*David Heleniak is a civil litigation attorney in New Jersey and the Senior Legal Analyst for [True Equality Network](#). He is the author of "The New Star Chamber: The New Jersey Family Court and the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act."*

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution\_Noncommercial\_No Derivative Works 2.5 License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.5/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 543 Howard Street, 5th Floor, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA.