

New England Psychologist

Long term results of parental alienation to the alienated child

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What are the long-term effects of parental alienation on the child who has been alienated?

The results are devastating for the alienated child and can last a lifetime. Not only does the child miss out on a lifetime of having an enjoyable and fulfilling relationship with the parent they have been conditioned to reject, they also develop some serious pathological behaviors and attitudes that carry in to their adult lives.

Following are descriptions of some of these disturbing effects:

- **Splitting:** This is the psychological phenomenon of seeing people as either “all bad” or “all good,” or “black or white.” Everything is polarized and the person has an inability to see shades of gray. Think of the borderline personality disordered person who has to split in order to cope with relationships and life in general. This is not a disorder you want your child to possess and leads to endless problems.
- **Difficulties forming and maintaining relationships:** Alienated children struggle with developing healthy relationships because they have been conditioned to “get rid of people” whenever they experience a perceived threat. Since most people are flawed, the alienated child would need the skill of knowing how to accept flaws in others in order to maintain the relationship. Skills such as flexibility, acceptance, forgiveness, do not exist when you reject people outright for minor infractions, as alienated children have been trained to do. Whenever someone causes a perceived threat to this person, he/she is triggered to remember, “I know how to handle this,” and they proceed to reject the other person easily. Their mind tells them, “You just hurt my feelings. I’m going to close you out and now you’re done.”
- **Lack of ability to tolerate anger or hostility:** Alienated children as adults (and as children) have a very low tolerance for any kind of anger or hostility, which are always interpreted by the person as abuse. They have a difficult time when someone is upset with them. Alienated children as adults have a very difficult time owning their part in a problem, taking responsibility, or making amends to others. They actually get panicked or triggered by any type of perceived disapproval. In order to have healthy relationships, a necessary level of tolerance for others’ negative feelings is essential.
- **Conflict with authority figures:** Because these individuals have learned how to go around an authority figure with a “campaign of denigration,” they will carry this habit into their adult lives. You can see this in the workplace if the alienated child has a boss he/she doesn’t like. He/she will create a crusade against this manager by rallying coworkers against the boss with a smear campaign.

• **Unhealthy entitlement to a sense of rage:** They have been rewarded for being hostile and angry towards one of their parents, and this rage stays there and can be triggered at any time. Yes, the psychological damage to a child who is trained by one parent to reject another parent has serious and profound negative effects on that child's ability to form any type of healthy intimate attachments in adulthood.

Obviously, it is important to interrupt the alienating process during childhood by removing the child from the alienating parent and rewarding the child for attachment-enhancing behaviors toward the rejected parent, before it is too late.

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