



Handling Parental Alienation as a Medical Emergency

Parental Alienation More Resembles a Medical Crisis than
a Divorce Proceeding. Triage is Essential.

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In recent years, many of my cases as a therapist have involved parental alienation (PA). As I work with these cases, I have noticed an element in this family crisis that helps explain why PA cases are unique and what is required for starting a successful therapeutic intervention.

In many divorce cases, spouses fight in family court for their positions, with or without their lawyers. The cases of PA, however, differ in that the children of those divorced spouses are living in a state of high emotional risk. Those children are dragged into their parents' conflict and cannot express their authentic voices.

Considering the triangle of family court, therapists and alienated children, and the legal process which can sometimes take years, it's vital to change the existing way in which PA cases are handled in the family courts. It is no longer a divorce case per se but a rescue mission. The children's wellness is the prime issue and not the conflict between the parents.

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SENSE OF URGENCY

The essence of the process is that cases of PA should be handled like urgent medical cases. In a medical emergency, the first step is to go through the emergency room. After triage, the patient is moved to the proper experts for further treatment.

Similarly, in PA, the first step should be to sort and evaluate the situation in family court and immediately transfer children to treatment to stop further deterioration of the children's health and to start the healing process. The legal system must separate these cases from the day-to-day divorce cases, handling them through different and separate channels and procedures.

Based on the evaluations and recommendations of the social workers who have the historical experience of the families, the judges will have the background and facts that enable them to identify whether a divorce case has either the potential of developing PA or that it already exists.

These cases should be transferred to therapists specializing in this field to start a therapeutic intervention. Once the intervention is in process, the judicial system is backstage, fully informed of progress and ready to apply legal sanctions according to the therapists' recommendations whenever necessary.

Dalia Erel is a family and couples therapist who specializes in PA. Her website (in Hebrew) is www.daliaerel.co.il.

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