



## ALL IN THE FAMILY

Legal blog on all aspects of Family Law and Divorce in Massachusetts and Rhode Island

### 10 Things I Know About Parental Alienation

BY LYNETTE PACZKOWSKI • JULY 1, 2025

1. Parental alienation involves a parent manipulating a child in a way that causes the child to fear, disrespect, dislike, and reject the other parent. It is often more complicated than it seems, and it is not always to blame for a child's reactions to divorce and other custody disputes. But, when present, it can have significant and lasting impacts on the child and the family.
2. Children affected by parental alienation tend to display severe oppositional behavior towards the alienated parent; this is more than mere displeasure or stated preferences regarding parenting time.
3. When parental alienation is present, the child often lacks justification for their behavior towards the alienated parent.
4. Not all contested custody matters involve parental alienation. Parental alienation is more than demonstrating frustration (even in front of the child), more than disagreements about how much parenting time each parent should have, and more than expressing concerns about things that happen during the other parent's parenting time. Parental alienation involves targeted, ongoing behavior intended to disrupt and break the child's relationship with the other parent.
5. Examples of conduct that may represent parental alienation include consistently speaking ill of the other parent to the child, making false statements and representations about the other parent to the child, telling the child that the other parent is to blame for the breakdown of the parents' relationship or for the struggles and problems the parent (and by extension the child) is experiencing, conveying to the child that they need to be "saved" from the other parent, referring to the other parent as "bad" or "dangerous," interfering with communications between the child and the other parent, and forcing the child to choose sides between the parents.
6. If you are concerned that alienation is occurring, document everything.
7. If you believe alienation is occurring, consider options like family therapy to help address your concerns and to work on your relationship with your child.
8. Do not forget that your child's feelings may not be the product of alienation and may be a natural reaction to the stressor of a significant life change or a response to things you have said and done. Approach the situation

with an open mind to understand what your child is experiencing and what your child needs to work through the situation.

9. When parents put their child in the middle of a custody battle, no one wins.
10. If you are struggling with a former partner or with establishing a “new normal” for you and your child, you are not alone. When you are not sure how to navigate the situation, pick up the phone and [consult with an experienced family law attorney](#) who can help.