

Dr. Gary J. Kneier, Ph.D.
Suite 500, 609 – 14th Street NW, Calgary, AB., T2N 2A1
(403) 444-9022

PARENTAL ALIENATION TREATMENT **(Refusal of Access by a Child)**

- I. Orientation:** The alienation of a child from one parent is a growing and serious problem. The child demonstrates resolute refusal to visit the access parent, and/or strong fear, aversion or other reactions in doing so. The alienated parent (usually father) is convinced this is due to sabotaging efforts or attitudes on the part of the favored parent. The favored parent is convinced the alienation is due to unwise or disturbed behavior on the part of the alienated parent. While either or both of these things can be factors in the problem, there is usually a third factor. This is the child's reaction to loyalty conflicts, which have become intolerable. In extremely polarized divorces, where the parents are in intense conflict about the children, a last resort for the child's mind is to make one parent good and the other bad. This simplifies the child's intolerable loyalty conflict, which stems from trying to love two people who are at war with each other. Parental reactions and behavior contribute to and amplify this process. The alienation establishes peace for the child, but at great cost. It results in the loss of one parent, an escalation in parental conflict, and a number of internal emotional problems for the child.

In the **Thoughts & Musings** section, you will find Dr. Kneier's major paper discussing his theory about the nature, causes, and treatment of this serious problem.

- II. Treatment Processes:** Treatment for this difficult problem is a combination of mediation and counseling for the parents and the child. Both parents usually need help to deal with their side of the problem constructively. Sometimes treatment must be mandated by the court. If possible (which is not always the case), it is good for the parents to have joint sessions, in order to devise a unified approach to the problem. When joint meetings are not possible, separate sessions can be held. It is almost always necessary to help the child. The child's perspective and feelings must be understood, and a way back to the alienated parent needs to be found. The way back usually requires some difficult things of both parents, and sometimes of the child. Often, the first bridge back to an alienated parent occurs in my office.

It is helpful if the treatment of the family is done on a "**without prejudice**" basis, such that no evidence or evaluation is generated. However, while it is important to keep treatment and assessment roles quite distinct, if necessary a **clinical report**

about the treatment and the outcome can be furnished. These things are always made clear at the beginning of the treatment.

III. Results/Outcomes: The clear goal of treatment is achieving a good relationship between the child and both parents. With parents who really want to solve the problem, this can usually be accomplished. With parents who are entrenched in conflict with the other parent, or who are engaging in alienating behavior, the court may need to add its influence.

IV. Costs and Duration: Fees are \$300 for joint sessions (50-60mins.) and \$200 for individual sessions. The duration of treatment is difficult to predict. Most cases will take at least 5 to 10 sessions. But some situations can go on longer.