

Parental Alienation IS A “Disease” Caused By Divorce

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One of the most troubling, if not **THE** most troubling occurrence in divorce cases with young children is one parent alienating a child from the other parent. “Parental alienation” isn’t recognized as a psychological disorder, but virtually every judge in the Family Court has seen it. On many occasions, the court reacts with half measures, which permits the alienation to take root. The recent case of [M.J.G. v. M.G.](#) in the Appellate Division of the New Jersey Superior Court illustrates what can be done by alert courts to prevent alienation from becoming permanent. In M.J.G., the Family Court actually transferred custody of a 15 year old girl from the mother to the father because it found that the mother’s actions in repeatedly violating court orders for parenting time and failure to follow the court appointed mental health professional’s recommendations “materially and substantially” affected the relationship between daughter and father. The Appellate Division affirmed the trial court’s findings, stating that the mother’s contentions on appeal were “without merit.”

The perpetration of alienation of a child from a parent is an old tactic, employed by mothers and fathers alike. Sometimes, the alienating parent insidiously plants ideas in a suggestible child’s mind. Other times, the parent goes even further and plants and constantly reinforces false ideas of sexual abuse supposedly committed by the other parent. The goal of the alienating parent may be revenge on the other, or it may be a manifestation of some mental illness, but the net effect on the child is the same: A child of divorce becomes an embittered soldier in the service of one parent against the other and graduates to adulthood with a maladaptive behavioral predilection which will pollute the rest of that child’s life, his or her marriage (and divorce?) and the lives of the next generation of children as well.

Attorneys and, more importantly, the overworked Family Court judges, must be alert to this aberrant behavior and instantly squelch it. Time (and money) wasted by interminable motion practice, experts, Guardians *ad litem*, and delayed litigation all permit the pernicious practice of alienation to take root and affect children who grow to hate an innocent parent at the behest of an alienator. In M.J.G., the trial court got it right, and so did the Appellate Division. As responsible adults, we can only hope that the damage done to the 15 year old child in M.J.G. is reversible. The focus for the future must be to

stop alienators as soon as they start inculcating the hatred which is their currency of choice.