

The Twelve Most Common Mistakes Alienated Parents Tend to Make with Their Children

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There are at least twelve common mistakes that alienated parents tend to make when feeling angry and in contact via phone, letter writing, social networking, or in person with their alienated children. Here are some suggestions to help offset this from occurring in your family. They are:

1. When in contact with your children don't trash, bash, berate, put down, or persecute their other parent. Doing so, you are modeling abusive behavior to your children. This will ultimately backfire on you. Your children will likely feel very uncomfortable and have less respect for you. Additionally, this kind of behavior on your part will likely push them further away from you.
2. Don't challenge or dispute your children's loyalty to the alienating parent. Choosing to do so will only create more resistance. Remember, the greater you challenge your children's loyalty to the other parent, the more your children will resist. Be encouraging and focus on the positive aspects of their relationship. For example, stated in a warm and sincere manner, "It's wonderful that you and your father have such a fun time together."
3. Don't discuss any legal information. It's important that your children do not hear any references to court actions or any other legal information. This includes not showing them any legal or court documents. Don't be surprised if your older children or teens insist that you share legal information with them to help sort out what is true and what is not. Keep in mind that legal information including the difficult language, what court orders actually mean, and so on can be difficult for most adults to comprehend, never mind children and teens. Confusing court documents may encourage children to take sides; redirect them instead.
4. In spite of sounding counter-intuitive, don't make demands. For example, "What you should do is treat me with respect instead of treating me with such disrespect. I'm your parent so don't talk to me that way." Even though your likely intention is to attempt to control the situation with your alienated child and provide some prompt remedy, what it really says to your alienated child is this: "You don't have the right to decide how to deal with your issues and feelings." Remember, your child is a victim, as well. Your child has not intentionally created PAS; your child has been drawn into it by his/her other parent.
5. Don't interrogate. For example, "What did your mom say to you to make you say that to me?" Although you may have good intentions to get to the bottom of the issue and find out what was said or done to make your child react the way he/she has to you, it will backfire. What it really says to your alienated child is, "Not only your mother but you must have messed up here." This will only make your children feel worse and they will likely reject you more. Please note: It is perfectly okay to clarify any misconceptions that your alienated children may have about you or your situation. For example, if your child says, "Daddy says you never loved him or us," you can say, for instance, "Sorry sweetie, the moment we met, I fell in love with your father. You and your brother were loved from the moment we knew you were going to be born. I will never stop loving you no matter what." Whenever the need arises to clarify any misconceptions that your alienated children may have about you or your situation, remind them of specific memories you have about them or of other people, places, times, or things related to their misconceptions. This would be a great time to share any photographs or videos you may have of those times.
6. Don't moralize. For example, "The right thing to say to me is....", "You really should", "It's wrong to". Although the likely intention is to show your child the proper way to deal with the issue, the meaning of the message is, "I'll choose your values for you." This will backfire too.
7. Don't pretend to act like a psychologist. For example, "Do you know why you said that to me? You're just copying your mother. That's what she always says, you know." Even though your likely intention is to help prevent future issues by analyzing your child's behavior and explaining his/her motives, what it really says to your child is, "I know more about you than you know about yourself."

And, that makes me superior to you." It'll backfire because your alienated child will not feel like a social equal which will likely push him/her even further away from you.

8. Don't yell, scream, nag, coax, lecture, or give ultimatums. All children don't like to be yelled or screamed at. Nor do they like to be nagged, coaxed, lectured, or given ultimatums by their parents. They feel disrespected and tend to counter it by disrespecting the parent back. The same holds true for alienated children but generally to a greater degree. For example, "How dare you speak to me in that tone of voice. If you do that again, then I don't want you to come around here anymore." This kind of behavior on your part will likely induce fear in your alienated child. The child may interpret these types of messages as truth, whether you mean it or not. Your children may actually use this as a way to avoid seeing you again. It'll make it much more difficult for you and your alienated child to repair the relationship.
9. Don't use guilt trips. For example, "You wouldn't really treat me the way you do now if I earned as much money as your father does." Although your likely intention is to help your child see the wrong in his/her thoughts, feelings, and actions, what it really says to your child is, "I am imposing a penance for your past mistakes because you and your other parent are at fault." Imposing guilt on the rampage also backfires.
10. Don't deny your children's feelings and only justify yours. For example, "Oh, that's not true. You don't really feel upset. If anybody should feel upset, it should be me." Alienated children need to have their feelings validated just as much as anybody else does. Although it's quite unlikely that your children will validate your feelings due to the level of PAS that is occurring, please don't let that stop you from role-modeling it to them. It will be of help in repairing your broken relationship.
11. Don't be stubborn and child-like. Apologize for mistakes you have made now and in the past. As you're aware, alienated parents undergo a vast array of negative emotions including anger. Although it may be very difficult to do, it's not impossible to apologize to your alienated children when you have intentionally, unintentionally, or unknowingly done something wrong now or in the past. We want to teach our children to be responsible, caring, and accountable people when they grow up. What is stopping us from role-modeling that to them? It's okay to say, for instance, "I realize that there were many times when I had to work evenings and weekends and I wasn't able to go to your school concerts and soccer games. I apologize for not being there."
12. Don't react or over-react when your children treat you with criticism, contempt, defensiveness, or stonewalling. It's very important to learn to be proactive and active rather than reactive and over-reactive with them. As difficult as it will be, it is so very important for you to do your very best and develop a hard shell like a tortoise! If you were to react or over-react, then your alienated children will likely feel no need to ever want to repair the fragmented relationship.

Sometimes an alienated parent will unleash anger on his or her children and forget that they are victims, too.