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The Child's Response to Parental Alienation

When a relationship breaks up, the anger and sadness between the parties can prevent them from protecting the most vulnerable parties to a divorce or child custody action- the children. No matter where you live in New Mexico or the United States, the focus in a custody dispute needs to remain on determining what is in the best interest of the children. Sadly, in cases involving parental alienation, not only do one or both parents often engage in behavior that damages the children, they can create a situation in which the children themselves are contributing to the alienation against one parent.

While parental alienation often begins with one parent (the aligning parent) trying to interfere with the relationship between the other parent (the rejected parent) and the child, the behavior of all of the parties can exacerbate the situation. Children involved in nasty custody battles in which parental alienation is taking place may feel abandoned by the rejected parent and may push that parent away. Even if the children's feelings of rejection are based on misinformation provided by the aligning parent, the rejected parent may actually pull away from the children, which can contribute to the children's feelings of abandonment.

A variety of factors can influence children's response to potential alienation, including the children's age, their cognitive capacity, their overall temperament and whether or not the children have external support to help them deal with the emotional duress of a custody battle. No matter the cause, counseling and therapy will almost always be required to help children and parents deal with the cause and effects of a heated custody dispute. Unfortunately, one or both parents will often refuse to participate in therapy, at which time the courts must step in to order any counseling necessary to stop the abusive behavior that causes parental alienation and protect the best interests of the children. Consulting with an experienced child custody attorney is essential to identifying your responsibilities and protecting your rights in any custody dispute.

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