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## **Estrangement via Parental Alienation**

Co-parenting is never easy, whether you are involved in a child custody dispute as part of a divorce in New Mexico or a paternity action somewhere across the country; the issues are often the same. Unfortunately, when custody disputes get really heated parental alienation can occur.

Although parental alienation is a broad and controversial topic, the main premise is that parental alienation occurs when one parent tries to turn a child, or children, against the other parent by doing things like making negative comments against the other parenting, interfering with visitation and encouraging the child to point out the other parent's faults. Some cases can be quite extreme with false allegations of child abuse used to sever the relationship between the child and parent.

The parent trying to alienate the child is often called the aligning parent because that parent is trying to align the child with him or her against the other parent. In turn, the alienated parent is often called the rejected parent. Rejected parents can be quick to believe they are the victims of parental alienation, however, they often do not realize that their behavior may be contributing to the alienation taking place between the parties.

For instance, aligning parents may create alienation because they, rightly or wrongly, have a deep distrust of the rejected parent and they have convinced themselves that the rejected parent does not really care for the child. This distrust may lead the aligning parent to say terrible things to the child about the rejected parent and to try to prevent any contact between them. In such a case, the rejected parent may respond by withdrawing from the conflict entirely or by rejecting the child as reprisal for the aligning parent's actions. Rejected parents may also contribute to alienation by having a very harsh or rigid parenting style or being overly critical of the child. When a rejected parent's behavior contributes to the alienation, those actions sometimes lead to estrangement.

Obviously the issues involved in a parental alienation case can get complicated quickly. Anyone involved in a custody dispute where one or both parties may be contributing to parental alienation should contact an attorney immediately before the damage done to the parent child relationship is irreversible. This is particularly important in cases involving false allegations of abuse.

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