



# NPRA

## NEWSLETTER

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### Parental Alienation Defined

By Suzanne Silver, L.C.S.W.

Parental alienation is when one parent makes it their mission to alienate their child from the other parent. I have discovered in every case I have worked on since 1994, the child and the alienated parent ultimately suffer the most.

A child internalizes this dysfunctional triangle and what results is mistrust. Children often times question authority and disrespect the parent who is being alienated. Further, this can potentially instill issues concerning loyalty. As the child may believe loving the alienated parent is not safe and thus is bad. These are all essential ingredients that are vital in raising a healthy child; trust, loyalty, understanding and respect.

Sometimes the alienated parent is forced to cancel visits, which is detrimental to the child and teaches him or her things as: a parent's word is not sacred and authority figures can be unreliable, irresponsible, inconsistent and untrustworthy. As the child is growing up, they formulate a fixed belief that unreliable behavior is acceptable and begin to reciprocate similar behaviors toward that parent. As a result, the relationship between the parent and child becomes superficial and the child transfers this

*continued on page 2*

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 1 "Parental Alienation Defined" by Suzanne Silver, L.C.S.W.
- 1 "Checkmate: What Happens When Children are Pawns in the Game of Divorce." by Karen J. Wagner
- 2 Continuation of Parental Alienation Defined
- 2 Continuation of "Checkmate"
- 2 **How to Join the NPRA**

### Checkmate: What Happens When Children are Pawns in the Game of Divorce

By Karen J. Wagner, NPRA

I work with children of divorce; a title that sadly depicts a child as less than an individual and more as an outcome. I have found many similarities between the manipulation of children during divorce and the strategies used on the chessboard. With this concept in mind, I would like to use this comparison to draw a clearer picture of the Family Court system in the US.

Imagine a **child** in the front line, just as the **pawns** are set out, in front of the key power pieces, i.e. the **king**, or **father**, and the **queen**, or **mother**. We can assign other metaphorical properties to the **bishops** as **judges**, the **knights** as **guardian ad litem** and the castles as **court appointed psychologists**. My first observation must be to point out the cruelty and inappropriateness of setting the child out as the first line of both defense and offense, to be manipulated by the very people that should be protecting them.

The game of chess can also be called 'Attack the King' and statistically it is usually the fathers that get attacked in the game of divorce, although sometimes these roles of king and queen are reversed and it is the mother getting attacked. The king on a chessboard has limited movement, one square at a time and as many fathers will attest, they also find themselves thwarted and limited as to where and when they came make a move. The queen on the other hand, enjoys a wide range of movement, just as the mother in family court is often afforded a larger scope of options than the father.

Some of the moves that the queen makes have a devastating effect on the chessboard because of her virtually uncompromised power to move anywhere she wants. In the divorce game, mothers are very powerful when the court grants protective orders, supervised or limited visitation and child support orders.

*continued on page 2*

behavior onto future relationships.

The courts do not know how to address parental alienation and have a view, which is based on an old traditional value system of favoring the mother, when often times the father is clearly the more competent parent. Fathers are left in complete bewilderment and devastation when they realize their parental rights are extracted from them. Often times the unresolved issues following the divorce can lead a parent to alienate the other parent as well as displace their feelings of hurt, anger and resentment onto the child.

This can only be repaired through sanctions made by the courts to the parent who is alienating the child from the other parent. The court system requires reformation. To accomplish this, new judges need to be employed who possess a set of beliefs and who can be objective and sensitive to both parents. Besides this, placing the needs of a child first is a significant start to reformation.

**Suzanne Silver, L.C.S.W. is an Ordained Minister and Certified in Advanced Studies for Psychodynamic Psychotherapy at NIP. She is a Clinical Member of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy and the National Association of Social Work. In addition, she has worked for over 13 years as a clinician in various psychiatric facilities. She has also counseled many of the post 9/11 victims and their families and lastly, is currently working at an EAP on Wall Street where she provides extensive direct crisis interventional counseling. She can be contacted at [Suzanne.L.Silver@mhn.com](mailto:Suzanne.L.Silver@mhn.com)**

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#### Checkmate continued from page 1

The king must rely on all the other pieces of the chessboard to protect him and guide him to a 'win'. In chess, the bishops stand on either side of the king, and furthering the comparison, fathers are often 'flanked' by the judges in the court system; the legal system in general is there to both protect and advise the king, but it can severely limit his movement as well. The bishops slice up the chessboard into diagonal spheres of influence similar to how many family court judges segment the roles of parents within their jurisdiction.

The knights act as a more agile component in the game and GALS, or Guardian Ad Litums, many times move with equal agility in both avoiding conflict and moving in less than straightforward moves by going 'over the heads' of concerned parents with recommendations that could completely miss the mark regarding the children involved. Many parents have experienced the helplessness associated with having a child evaluated by an outside person who has legal

weight in the court system.

Castles move on the chessboard in a straightforward path either forward or laterally. Comparing them to the court appointed psychologists, their role in the divorce game can greatly influence an outcome in the court system. Just as the castles can be great allies because of their unique ability to save the king when he is cornered, psychologists as well as qualified child advocates often hold sway over many people involved in family court when it comes down to 'expert testimony' and the eventual outcome of the child's welfare.

Back to the pawns, the children on the front line. You can see how they must weather the machinations and strategies of divorce seemingly out in the open, exposed, unprotected and often used to block, defend, or testify against the very people put on earth to protect them; their parents. My grandfather, a chess master, taught me that pawns are the most important and powerful pieces on the chessboard. An exciting strategy in chess is to move a pawn to the opposite side of the chessboard and exchange it for a king. I propose that in family courts one way to 'king' a pawn, or in other words, exalt the child in a divorce, is to give that child equal access to both parents. Children who have two involved parents enjoy increased resiliency (the capacity to cope) and have a much better chance at healthy physical, mental and emotional development.

Unfortunately, I have witnessed and researched many divorce 'battles' where the children are sacrificed, as are most pawns, in order for one parent to win the game.

The traditional game of chess is black and white; there are clear winners, even in a draw. The modern game of divorce is much greyer and in my opinion, everyone loses, especially the children.

**Karen J. Wagner is a co-founder of the NPRA**  
**[www.wagnerconsultingservices.com](http://www.wagnerconsultingservices.com)**

#### How to Join the NPRA

Joining the NPRA is easy. Please visit our website at [www.npra.info](http://www.npra.info) for more information.

You can contact the NPRA founders at the following telephone numbers and emails:

**Dr. Monty Weinstein 718-382-1293**  
**[Drmonty1@aol.com](mailto:Drmonty1@aol.com) [www.familyunity.com](http://www.familyunity.com)**  
**Karen Wagner 678-480-1550**  
**[HappyChildren@comcast.net](mailto:HappyChildren@comcast.net)**

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