17 Strategies For Combating Parental Alienation Syndrome

Beyond the High Road: Responding to 17 Parental Alienation Strategies without Compromising Your Morals or Harming Your Child is a great book for anyone who has, or is going through divorce. It gives helpful ways to communicate to your child and your ex-spouse in difficult times. Every divorce goes through some comments to the children that are not appropriate, this book gives wonderful advice of how to deal with those types of situations when you are on the receiving end.

This is especially helpful for those that believe there is a degeneration campaign going on against you by your child’s other parent. This book gives helpful ideas of what to say and do when confronting difficult situations with your Parental Alienation child. This book is only for those that still have contact with their child.

1. Badmouthing

Badmouthing is the most common parental alienation strategy. Here are some instances of situations that target parents might find themselves. Here are ways to respond correctly without harming your child.

Alienating parent says harmful statements in front of the child directed towards Target parent.

High Road Response:
• “I see you are really hurt/angry/upset. I am really sorry that you are feeling that way. Actually, there are some things that are going on between us that are making me feel hurt/angry/upset also. How about if we go out for coffee some time and try to hash some of this out so that we can get along better for the sake of (insert name of child)?”

Child tells you that Mommy/Daddy says you don’t love us anymore?

High Road Responses:
• I wonder if that was upsetting to hear. Can you tell me what that was like for you when Mommy/Daddy said that?
• “I want you to know that I love you very much. You are my special daughter/son and I cherish our relationship. I don’t want you to think for a moment that I don’t love and care for you.”
• “It may be hard for you that I moved out of the house. That makes you feel like maybe I am divorcing you not just divorcing Mommy/Daddy.”

Dad/Mom told me that the reason he/she left is that you had an affair?

High Road Responses:
• “You know, I have my own side to this. At some point maybe we can talk about this but for right now what you need to know is that Mommy and Daddy could not get along well enough to stay married and we are going to live in two homes but we both love you and will be taking care of you.”
• “Sometimes it is easier to think that something is all one person’s fault but that is not really the case.”

Help your child to develop critical thinking skills.
This happened to me quite a few years ago when my child was 5 years old. His mother was upset because I remarried and had another child. My now alienated son came over and said his mom only has to share her love with me, so she has lots of love for me. I responded to this with I have enough love to love all my children the same. I liked the responses this book gives but at the time this book didn’t exist.

2. Limiting Contact

Limiting Contact can be from picking up the child 15 minutes early to not allowing the child to go with you for your scheduled visitation. Let your child know that you are trying to contact them, “I thought we were going to get together last week but you couldn’t come.”

Second document on your time and consult with an attorney.

Thirdly think of creative ways to counter the alienating parent’s limited contact plan. Some creative ways are disabling the doorbell or have a family ritual going somewhere right before pick up time and returning home just in time for the child to leave with the other parent.

The alienating parent in my situation would always come 15 minutes early to pick up our son. I started a ritual of going to Dairy Queen or to the park. This worked for a while until the alienating parent started to make our child feel guilty about not being there when she arrived. My child started getting very anxious when it was getting close to go home and started not wanting to leave the home. The last hour before the alienating parent was always the worst for my son. He started to get anxious which in turn made him upset. Sometimes he would frantically look for his clothes that he wore from his mom home they day he arrived. I would tell him that we will take care of it not to worry. I always sent home the clothes he came in and he would wear some I had bought him home.

This would work for quite a while until I didn’t have any clothes left. Then I would ask her for the clothes back since he doesn’t have anything to wear while visiting. My son was never packed with any clothes, diapers, etc, when visiting. I have always provided him with those things when he would visit, although our court papers required her to pack a bag when visiting.

3. Interfering with Communication

Alienating parents expect to easily access the child when with the target parent but don’t like to reciprocate access.

High Road Responses:
• “Did you get the card I sent to you?”
• “I tried calling last night but you couldn’t come to the phone.”
• Avoid assigning blame or even mentioning the other parent. Just let it be known that you have been trying to communicate.
• Be creative. Take your child shopping for cards and small gifts then take them to the post office together. This way your child with know that you are trying to send gifts, and cards even if they don’t arrive.
• AVOID this type of statement: “This way you know that I am telling you the truth and Mom/Dad is lying about my not sending cards and letters.”

4. Interfering with Symbolic Communication

Children need symbolic communication with absent parent to maintain positive feelings. Examples of these are pictures and talking about the absent parent. If you believe your child doesn’t have any
pictures, give the other parent a picture of you in front of your child. Also ask for pictures if you don’t have any of the other parent in your home. Children will see if the other parent refuses.

5. Withdrawal of Love

An alienating parent will punish the child for having any positive feelings for the target parent by withholding love from the child. You might notice your child being anxious to avoid the alienating parents disapproval.

High Road Responses:
• “You seem awfully worried about disappointing Mom/Dad.
• “Is it hard for you when Mom/Dad is disappointed or angry with you? How about when I am angry or disappointed in you?”

AVOID Saying:
• “You seem more worried about not having Mom/Dad mad at you than you seem about not having me mad at you”

This can be seen as being competitive of the alienating parent and critical of your child.

6. Telling Child Target Parent Doesn’t love Him or Her

Telling a Child that the target parent doesn’t love them is horribly destructive. To help combat this show and tell your children how much you love them, but be sincere.

High Road Response:
• “Sometimes when parents’ divorce, children may come to believe that one of their parents does not love them anymore. You may wonder about whether I love you and I want you to know that I do and that I always will. What do you think we can do to make sure that you know that I love you?”

7. Forcing Child to Choose

This is used by having the child communicate things that aren’t appropriate for him to discuss with the target parent. For example calling and telling the parent they aren’t coming for visitation. Try not to allow your frustration show to your child. But do document all of these instances.

High Road Responses:
• “I am sorry that we couldn’t be together last week. I was really looking forward to being together. I had some special things planned but then you called and said that you decided not to come. I felt disappointed that we could not be together. I am wondering how that was for you. I know sometimes it must be hard to leave one home to go to the other. You might be involved in an activity and really be in the swing of things or maybe you worry that you will be missing out on something special going on there if you spend time with me. How can I help you with that?”

Don’t put too much guilt on your child but you do want them to understand there are consequences to actions. Explain to the child that these types of decisions are better to be made by the moms and dads not the children and that you try to speak with the other parent.

My Child has 2 alienating parents, a mother and his step-dad. This started happening when my child was in kindergarten, not about visitation until he was a teenager but about adult problems like forgetting a coat and other things that he didn’t have any power over. It was very frustrating,
because each time I would say, “This is something I need to talk to your mom or step-dad about.” Then the phone would be handed off to the alienating parents and at the end of the conversation I would ask his mom/step-dad not to have our child call about these types of situations because he doesn’t have any power to do anything about it. The words always fell on deaf ears.

8. Creating the Impression that Target Parent is Dangerous

This is not something to take lightly. If you hear something like this being said to your child it needs to be corrected right away. Be calm, try not to be aggressive/hostile. It is best to act as if it is a misunderstanding.

High Road Response:

• “Hi (insert name of other parent). I just heard you tell (insert name of child) that I (insert deed that suggests you are dangerous). You know, I really remember that pretty differently than you do. I remember….. We both did our share of silly things in our youth. Remember when we... I am glad we are both more careful and responsible now.”

The best way to combat this is to play it safe when your child is with you. Pay your bills, wear seat-belts, drive the speed limit, etc. Think ahead.

9. Confiding in the Child

Alienating parents confiding in a child is difficult to know for sure. But you can tell this is happening through verbalization and actions of the child.

High Road Response:

• “I may be off here but it seems like you are developing some funny ideas about me that you must be getting from somewhere else, not based on what I am telling you or what you know to be true about me. You know, sometimes when parents get divorced one parent may talk to the children as if they were adults and not children anymore. That might feel pretty good for children, to be so important, to be trusted, and to have adult things shared with them. However, it also might feel scary or strange to be a part of adult conversations and business. I am going to respect that you are still a child—even though you are quite mature for your age—and will not be sharing adult matters with you. I hope that if you ever hear anything about me that makes you feel uncertain of my love for you or my best intentions towards your mom/dad, that you come to me and check it out with me. I will do my best to explain things without burdening you with too much information.”

This situation has happened to me before but I did not know how to handle it at the time so I avoided it. I did try to explain my side of the story at one time but this was fruitless for my relationship with my son. I think it did more harm than good. This book would have been helpful at the time.

10. Forcing the Child to Reject the Targeted Parent

Have you ever gone to a school open house or your child’s sports activities or a school play and your child avoids or is rude to you? As target parents we should try not to allow this to happen by standing close to the alienating parent so the child doesn’t have a lot of space to choose. Try to be as friendly as possible to the alienating parent. When the alienating parent is gone here is a great response to give to your child.

High Road Response:
“Sometimes it seems like it is hard for you to know where to stand or who to look at when we are all together. I want you to know that as far as I am concerned, you do not have to choose between us. I know you like to be near and talk with Mom/Dad as well as me. Is there anything I can do to make it easier for you? It is important to me that you show your respect for me, even when we are all together. I know it may be hard but it is not good for you to be rude or disrespectful towards me. You probably will not feel good about yourself when you behave that way.”

Unfortunately this was a strategy used often and at an early age with my son. It is an awful situation. It is especially heartbreaking to watch your child's face when they are so young (kindergarten for mine) you can actually see the stress and struggle that is going on inside. This book's advice would have been most helpful at those times.

When the Parental Alienation become more severe I consulted my lawyer. He told me what Parental Alienation was and thought this was happening to my parent/child relationship. I took steps to ask for more visitation and then no to court to stop the abuse. The Alienating parent became more aggressive in her alienation. A Guardian Ad-litem, a lawyer for kids, (so ridiculous in my opinion) was appointed for my son her response was these types of things are normal. So I stopped the court proceedings realizing that no one was going to help my son and had my ex spouse write up papers, thinking that perhaps if she feels the control she will stop. This didn't work.

Once when going to pick up my son my ex-spouse and her husband sat down with my child and I, asking him to tell me all the things that he wants to say to me that he feels he can't say. It was horrible, I sat there looking at my son, watching the pain of his face of having to degrade me to my face. Those two sat their encouraging the demise of a relationship and it disgusted me. I finally got up and said, you can talk to me later about this and we left for our visitation. My son was 11 years old at the time. It took until just the past year (a senior in high school) for the complete rejection of me on his part to take place.

11. Asking Child to Spy on Targeted Parent

The best thing to do is preventative. Don't talk about things that around or in earshot of your child that you don’t want to tell the other parent. You need to be upfront with the other parent. If you get a raise you need to tell the other parent. Be honest. If you get a new job and it doesn’t include a raise, this book provides excellent advice on the appropriate steps to take.

High Road Responses to snooping and a new job:
• “I am so excited. I got a new job. Unfortunately, I will not be making any more money than I make now but the work will be more interesting to me and I will be closer to home so I can be home earlier to spend more time with you.”
• “I sense that you are looking through my private papers. I am wondering what you are looking for.”

AVOID Saying:
• “I know Mom/Dad really want to know about this so I am telling you so you can pass it on to him/her.”

Prevention when it comes to snooping is best. Lock up file cabinets. Set up some bills to go to a post office post while your children are staying with you.

12. Asking Child to Keep Secrets from Targets parent

Keeping secrets like spying causes psychological distance between you and your child.
High Road Responses:
• “I think you have known for a while that (insert information that was kept secret) even though I just found out about it now. That is like keeping a secret from me. Some things are OK to have as a secret from me. Can you think of something like that? (Wait for child to come up with something such as who he or she has a crush on) but some things are not OK to have as a secret from me. (Repeat the thing that was kept as a secret from you). Do you know why it wasn’t OK to have this as a secret from me? (Wait for child to explain or tell child that it hurt your feelings, made it hard for you to make plans, or whatever the actual consequence was of the secret). I am sorry that you felt that you had to keep that a secret from me. I wonder what I can do so that you don’t feel like you have to keep secrets from me in the future. Do you have any ideas?”

This is something that could be said to the other parent in front of the child but you have to be careful not to come across as accusing.
• “You know, I think (insert child’s name) was looking for some information she thought you wanted. Next time you want to know about my work schedule or salary, you can just ask me. I did get a new job but it did not involve a raise, which is the reason I did not mention it to you. Here is a copy of my pay stub so you can see, just in case you would like a copy for your records.”

13. Referring to Targeted Parent by First Name

This is done to devalue you as in the eyes of the child. Some kids do this just for experimentation so you be positive the other parent is the source.

High Road Responses:
• “Please refer to me as Mom/Dad and not by my first name and I will do the same. It may be confusing for (insert name of child) to have us start calling each other by first names.”
• “No matter what other people call me, to you I will always be Mom/Dad.”

It might be appropriate to talk with the other parent but try to be non-accusing.

14. Referring to a stepparent as Mom or Dad and Encouraging the Child to do the same

High Road Responses:
• “I know you have special feelings for (insert first name of stepparent) and it may be easier to just call him/her Mom/Dad but for now I would like to be the only person you call Mom/Dad. Why don’t you and (insert first name of stepparent) come up with a special name that only you call him/her.”

It might be appropriate to talk with the other parent but try to be non-accusing.
• “There must be some mix up but the teacher seems to think that (insert name of stepparent) is the Mom/Dad, not me. Let’s try to be clear about this. Thanks.”

15. Withholding Medical, Academic, and Other Important Information for the Targeted parent?
Keeping targeted Parent’s Name off of Medical, Academic and Other Relevant Documents

This marginalizes that target parent and must be kept in check. Call the school be every polite and calm, the book gives a great response. Be proactive and involved with the teachers. Going in to discuss how the child is doing every once in a while is great. It will help you know the special events that happen at school.
High Road Response to school:
• “Sometimes in divorce situations, it can get complicated for everyone to keep track of both addresses and keep both parents informed. If it is all right with you I would like to call every once in a while to make sure that I have everything I need and to see if I can be of any help to you.”

I didn’t realize how important this was until after reading this book unfortunately my name was never on the school records (starting in Kindergarten). I did call to get the report cards. And meet with his teacher when I could. My child once came over and said that his mom had to go into school so I could get the report cards. His tone was one of, I have no rights. I said nothing.

16. Changing Child’s Name to Remove Association with Targeted Parent

Some alienating parents will use a different name for the child, like the mother’s maiden name instead of the father’s last name. One way to help this is to have it written in the court papers that the parents are to refer to the child by their legal name. Also politely correct the alienating parent in front of the child. Lastly here is a good response to give to your child.

High Road Response:
• “It must be confusing to have your parents refer to you with different names. How can I help you to use your real name so it is not so confusing for you and everyone else?”

A couple of years ago my now alienated son, had to get a colonoscopy my ex-spouse informed me of this ahead of time. When I got the bill in the mail my son’s last name was his step-dad’s last name. My ex-spouse said this was a typo and that they are correcting it. It was not just on one bill but many doctor bills including his insurance. It was a horrible blow to a parent to see. On top of this my father was dying of cancer and it was almost more than I could bear. This was also the year that I saw my son for one day, at my dad’s funeral.

17. Cultivating Dependency

Children of alienating parents often talk about the alienating parent as if they are perfect. Alienating children are also very dependent on the alienating parent. The dependency is what makes Parental Alienation Syndrome cultic. Signs are an obsession of getting the parents’ permission or approval or adopt ideas from the alienating parent without questioning or understanding them. To combat this try to get your child to become a thinker. Allow your children to make their own decisions in ordering food at restaurants, picking out their own clothes to wear or books to read. Critical thinking skills along with independence can help your child not succumb to Parental alienation as easily. Occasionally ask your child if he/she is doing something just to please your or if they are just doing it to please you will help create independence. (Prepare yourself for them to quit whatever you are asking.)

In my dealings with Parental Alienation Syndrome this was early in my sons’ life. If I was to give him a haircut, he would have to call his mom first to see if it was okay. On one trip we had together he kept of saying over and over, “(Step-dad’s name) told me this or that”.. So much you would think the man was the smartest man in the world. Everything he did at his mom’s or used at his mom’s house was the best. According to my son, they bought the best toothpaste you can buy, Pepsodent. As my son got older he would become very anxious if his mother didn’t answer the phone when he called. There are so many different ways this was apparent my list could go on and on. I didn’t think about making my child a critical thinker.