

Have you Ever Wondered how are you going to get through to Child Victims of PAS? How are you going to teach them Critical Thinking so they Can see for themselves what is Really going on?

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Short Communication

We have long discussed what is it that we can say or do to help kids who are victims of Parental Alienation turn their attitudes around about the targeted parent. The problem stems from so many areas that for the purposes of this newsletter we will discuss it from the emotional development level.

It seems that children of PAS are stunted in their emotional growth the moment the alienation tactics start. This stunting is primarily associated with parental relationships as the children did NOT get a chance to grow through the proper stages of emotional development like normal children with their parents. But for many, we see that this emotional stunting bleeds into the rest of their lives. For some this emotional stunting might have been as early as 2 years of age while others it did not occur until their teens. This makes handling how to approach each child different in every case, as we have different levels of emotional maturity to deal with. What this means is that as we talk to these alienated children, we have to remember what age each one was at when the abuse started and talk to them on that level. We slowly build upon this emotional age level as we talk until they mature to the level of their present age, no matter how old they are today.

If a child began to be alienated at age 8 from a parent but is now 16 or even 32, we would want to talk to them as if they were still 8 years old. I do not mean like they are a baby still but in relation to where their emotional development became stunted. So for example, an 8 year old is just beginning to find out about the world and learning about responsibility. They are open to new ideas but can easily be brainwashed with wrong ideas that they will believe whole heartedly if told to them by a parent. They also need to know that feeling guilt or shame is normal and how to move on from this by pointing out the good they do have within. It is also normal for them to be selfish, rude, controlling and just as important for them to express their negative feelings but understanding boundaries of appropriate expression. Thus if we want to speak to the 16 years old who is emotionally an 8 year old, we might say things like "You know that it is okay to make a mistake and have believed something that turns out to not be true, we are only human and all make mistakes. Sometimes though we have to accept that things are not as they seem and be willing to open up to other ideas." We can also say things that encourage them and build their self-esteem like, "I am very proud of the things you have accomplished. You are a great student, you work hard at your after school activities. I could not ask for a better child than you". By bringing the conversation to their emotional level, we are helping them to complete the emotional developmental process and move on to the next stage of emotional development.

Furthermore, many alienated children who are now adults say they wish the other parent had told them they loved them, needed them and that they had stuck it out or showed their love to them more. What these victims fail to remember is that the other parent usually did tell them they loved them and needed them, but the they, the child, rebuffed them or that the other parent completely blocked them from communication. These victims choose to selectively forget this fact when they decided to take sides. When asked if they thought it would hurt the other targeted parent, they would say, "Well, yeah, I knew they would be hurt" but they thought that they would get over it and keep trying. This shows an inability to actually understand the consequences of their own actions. They knew it would hurt but did not realize the depth it would go and that it would tear their relationship apart with the targeted parent. Why? Because they were not taught empathy and are stuck emotionally guarding their pride and shame. They also did not realize that the alienator was going to continue to do damage which they would not be able to stop. Maybe it is this one point where they need help to realize that at some point or on some level, they knew what was going to happen and did not attempt to stop it. But instead just expected the targeted parent to take the abuse, and for it to just blow over. They did not understand or fully comprehend that the bullying of the targeted parent really was doing harm.

These victims are emotionally stunted and have no comprehension that their bullying of the target parent has to stop. Using critical thinking and the following tool, we can teach them about how dangerous bullying is. I have taken a teacher's bully lesson and applied it to helping teach children and even adults, critical thinking about what their own actions, words and behaviors do. There are two versions, one that a therapist could use and one that a parent could use. It is just one possible in the arsenal of tools we need to have on hand to help these kids break through the "Ties That Bind" (Amy J. Baker) and the Borderless Boundaries (Joan T. Kloth-Zanard) that ensnare these kids to be caught in the "Shared Delusional Disorder" (Dr. Craig Childress) with the alienating parent.

Teaching Critical Thinking using the Bully Story and a Piece of Paper

Therapist: I want you to take this piece of paper and crumple it up, stomp on it and really mess it up but do not rip it. (After the child(ren) have done this). Now I want you to unfold the paper, smooth it out and look at how scarred and dirty it is. Now I want you to tell it you are sorry and try to fix it. As you can see, you have left a lot of scars behind. Those scars will never go away no matter how hard you try to fix them. This is what happens when you bully another person. You

may say your sorry but the scars are there forever. When you do this to your (targeted) your mother/father, well, they are special, in that they love you unconditionally, and have a small special supply of clean paper that they will let you start again with a fresh piece of clean paper, (Therapist hands the child/ren from a piece of clean paper from a very small pile). But this pile as you can see is only so big and eventually, they run out of paper and are like the original piece scarred and hurt forever.

The parents version

Parent: (Pulling from a small pile of about a dozen pieces of paper. If this is not being done in person, describe the small pile of paper or direct the child to take 12 pieces of paper and put them in front of them)

I know you will think this is odd but I want you to do something silly for me. Take a piece of paper and crumple it up. Now I want you to stomp on it, yell at it, call it names, tell it you hate it, tell it you do not want to see it or have anything to do with it. Now, I want you try to unfold the paper and smooth it out. Look at how scarred and dirty it is. Now I want you to tell it you are sorry and try to fix it.

As you can see, you have left a lot of scars behind. This is what happens when we are mean, nasty and hateful to another person. You

may say your sorry but the scars are there forever. When you do this to me or your “other parent”, well, we are special in that we love you. In my case, I love you unconditionally. But we only have a small supply of fresh clean paper to give you to start all over with again. (Parent hands the child a fresh piece of paper or tell the child to take a fresh piece of paper from their small pile). But this pile of paper as you can see is only so big and eventually, it will run out and all you will be left with is the scars and hurt forever.

This is a great example of a tool that can be used to help victims of PAS and possibly even alienators to critically think to understand how their behavior and words hurt others. With these type of tools and scenarios, we have a chance to help the victims learn and think critically. They have a hands on feeling of what has happened to them and to the targeted parent. Teaching critically thinking is very important at any age, the trick is doing it so that it opens the persons mind up and gives them a new perspective. And if we can help create a new view, then we might just be able to move them forward in a positive way through their own grief and anger process.