

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE PARENTAL ALIENATION SYNDROME AND BONA FIDE ABUSE AND/OR NEGLECT

Unfortunately, the term *parental alienation syndrome* is often used to refer to the animosity that a child may harbor against a parent who has *actually* abused the child, especially over an extended period. The term has been used to apply to the major categories of parental abuse: physical, sexual, and emotional. Such application indicates a misunderstanding of the PAS. The term *PAS* is applicable only when the target parent has not exhibited anything close to the degree of alienating behavior that might warrant the campaign of vilification exhibited by the child. Rather, in typical cases the victimized parent would be considered by most examiners to have provided normal, loving parenting or, at worst, exhibited minimal impairments in parental capacity. It is the *exaggeration* of minor weaknesses and deficiencies that is the hallmark of the PAS. When bona fide abuse does exist, then the child's responding alienation is warranted and the PAS diagnosis is *not* applicable.

Programming parents who are accused of inducing a PAS in their children will sometimes claim that the children's campaign of denigration is warranted because of bona fide abuse and/or neglect perpetrated by the denigrated parent. Such indoctrinating parents may claim that the counteraccusation by the target parent of PAS induction by the programming parent is merely a "cover-up," a diversionary maneuver, and indicates attempts by the vilified parent to throw a smoke screen over the abuses and/or neglect that have justified the children's acrimony. There are some genuinely abusing and/or neglectful parents who will indeed deny their abuses and rationalize the children's animosity as simply programming by the other parent. This does not preclude the existence of truly innocent parents who are indeed being victimized by an unjustifiable PAS campaign of denigration. When such cross-accusations occur—namely, bona fide abuse and/or neglect versus a true PAS—it behooves the examiner to conduct a detailed inquiry in order to ascertain the category in which the children's accusations lie, i.e., true PAS or true abuse and/or neglect. In some situations, this differentiation may not be easy, especially when there has been some abuse and/or neglect and the PAS has been superimposed upon it, resulting thereby in much more deprecation than would be justified in this situation. It is for this reason that detailed inquiry is often crucial if one is to make a proper diagnosis. Joint interviews, with all parties in all possible combinations, will generally help uncover "The Truth" in such situations. Stahl (1994) and Hysjulien, et al. (1994) make reference to the complexity of some PAS evaluations.