

## THE PARENTAL ALIENATION SYNDROME AS A FORM OF CHILD ABUSE

It is important for examiners to appreciate that a parent who inculcates a PAS in a child is indeed perpetrating a form of *emotional abuse* in that such programming may not only produce lifelong alienation from a loving parent, but lifelong psychiatric disturbance in the child. A parent who systematically programs a child into a state of ongoing denigration and rejection of a loving and devoted parent is exhibiting complete disregard of the alienated parent's role in the child's upbringing. Such an alienating parent is bringing about a disruption of a psychological bond that could, in the vast majority of cases, prove of great value to the child—the separated and divorced status of the parents notwithstanding. Such alienating parents exhibit a serious parenting deficit, a deficit that should be given serious consideration by courts when deciding primary custodial status. Physical and/or sexual abuse of a child would quickly be viewed by the court as a reason for assigning primary custody to the nonabusing parent. Emotional abuse is much more difficult to assess objectively, especially because many forms of emotional abuse are subtle and difficult to verify in a court of law. The PAS, however, is most often readily identified, and courts would do well to consider its presence a manifestation of emotional abuse by the programming parent.

Garbarino and Stott (1992) consider the PAS to be an example of what they refer to as “the psychologically battered child” and describe it specifically, by name, as one form of child battering. Rogers (1992) identifies five types of psychological maltreatment: rejecting, terrorizing, ignoring, isolating, and corrupting, and then describes how each of these types may be seen in the PAS. Accordingly, courts do well to consider the PAS programming parent to be exhibiting a serious parental deficit when weighing the pros and cons of custodial transfer. I am not suggesting that a PAS-inducing parent should automatically be deprived of primary custody, only that such induction should be considered a serious deficit in parenting capacity—a form of emotional abuse—and that it be given serious consideration when weighing the custody decision. In this book, I provide specific guidelines regarding the situations when such transfer is not only desirable, but even crucial, if the children are to be protected from lifelong alienation from the targeted parent.