

THE PARENTAL ALIENATION SYNDROME AND “PARENTAL ALIENATION”

There are some who use the term parental alienation instead of parental alienation syndrome. Generally, these are individuals who know of the existence of the parental alienation syndrome but want to avoid using it because it may be considered in some circles to be “politically incorrect.” But they are basically describing the same clinical entity. There are others who will use the term parental alienation syndrome but strictly avoid mentioning my name in association with it, lest they be somehow tainted. Unfortunately, the substitution of the term parental alienation for parental alienation syndrome can only result in confusion. Parental alienation is a more general term, whereas the parental alienation syndrome is a very specific subtype of parental alienation. Parental alienation has many causes, e.g., parental neglect, abuse (physical, emotional, and sexual), abandonment, and other alienating parental behaviors. All of these behaviors on the part of a parent can produce alienation in the children. The parental alienation syndrome is a specific subcategory of parental alienation that results from a combination of parental programming and the child’s own contributions, and it is almost exclusively seen in the context of child-custody disputes. It is this particular combination that warrants the designation parental alienation syndrome. Changing the name of an entity because of political and other unreasonable considerations generally does more harm than good.