

A Family's Heartbreak

A Parent's Introduction to Parental Alienation

A Book Review

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As Michael Jeffries notes in his book, A Family's Heartbreak, "...a key factor that is characteristic in all parental alienation families is the alienating parent's real or perceived fear of abandonment."

As a student of relationships and lecturer in Family Studies, I have found myself often looking at the emotional and behavior changes experienced when a couple breaks up. There is a myriad of emotions that surfaces when a married, co-habiting or other relationship breaks down. Fear, anger, and depression are those feelings which become heightened when the reality of separation become evident.

As Dr. Steven Fischer had written thirty years ago in his book "Rebuilding Relationships," the person dumped from the relationship often immediately feels the victim. As the victim, it then becomes his or her conscious or unconscious right to seek retribution. As my students in Marriage and Family have noted, "to get even."

Jeffries with Dr. Davies well explores the many natures of the Parental Alienation phenomenon. Through his journey through marriage dissolution and the unfortunate loss of access to his child, Jeffries mirrors what so many parents have suffered, when they've left their marriage. Nearly 35 percent of parents experience some sort of alienation, many are themselves victims of high conflict divorce. Jeffries' journey through this personal hell is one in which he has emerged educated and accepting of this horror which has stolen the hearts of his child.

Davies argues that Parental Alienation is pathological, that it is based on the alienating parents' personal backgrounds where they, too, had been victims of a parent's abandonment or loss. This loss suddenly surfaces as a pharmacological rush, seizing sudden control through brainwashing the children against a targeted parent as a punishment for those earlier wrongs.

Jeffries and Davies' book is well written with a unique intertwining of the parent's experience and the therapist's explanation of a parent's changing world as Parental Alienation charts its course in family dissolution.

That courts are now addressing the presence of alienation and alienating behavior is truly a sign of the times. However, improved child outcomes necessitate an educated judiciary and legal system. A Family's Heartbreak will be an important tool for such achievement.