

Alienation is just one piece of the puzzle: Understanding and responding to the needs of the polarized child

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In the process of evaluating a polarized family, one must consider many mutually compatible hypotheses including these (in the order presented):

Questions that must be asked	Associated interventions
<p>1. Incidental temporal and proximal factors</p> <p>Is the child's resistance temporary and short-lived or consistent and chronic?</p> <p>Is the child's resistance event- time- or place-specific?</p>	<p>(a) Does changing the time or place reduce the child's resistance?</p> <p>(b) Might transitional objects reduce the child's resistance?</p> <p>(c) Might contact with absent parent/sibs/friends via distance media reduce the child's resistance?</p>
<p>2. Child-specific factors</p> <p>Is the child saying and doing what the proximal parent needs to hear and see? (Chameleon child)</p> <p>Is the child's resistance due to temperament?</p> <p>Is the child's resistance due to diagnosable social, emotional, behavioral, and/or cognitive differences?</p>	<p>(a) Multiple interviews in different relationship contexts are necessary</p> <p>(b) Psychological evaluation of the child will help to consider parent-child "fit" and "mis-fit" questions</p>
<p>3. Parent A-Child Dyadic factors</p> <p>Is the child's resistance due to a relationship AFFINITY appropriate to development and culture?</p> <p>Is the child's resistance due to Parent A's overly permissive parenting?</p> <p>Does the child resist all separations from Parent A (but manages separations from others)?</p>	<p>(a) Watch for affinity clues in shared characteristics, interests, habits.</p> <p>(b) Might encouraging Parent B to express interest in ("teach me") shared interests and activities reduce the child's resistance?</p> <p>(c) Co-parenting can help reduce discrepant parenting practices and thereby reduce the child's resistance.</p>
<p>Is the relationship enmeshed?</p> <p>Is the child adultified?</p> <p>Is the child parentified?</p> <p>Is the child infantilized?</p>	<p>(a) Help Parent A redirect needs being foisted upon child to alternate healthier resources (e.g., psychotherapy, religion, book group, pet)</p> <p>(b) Get Parent A supports (e.g., substance abuse program) so that the need the child is fulfilling is relieved.</p>

	(c) Have a “graduation” event to thank the child for supporting Parent A but now ready to move on.
4. Parent B-Child dyadic factors	(a) Evaluate Parent B’s risk of danger
Did the child ever have a healthy relationship with Parent B?	(b) Evaluate child’s ability to advocate for self
Has the child directly experienced Parent B as insensitive, unresponsive, abusive or neglectful?	(c) Parent B in individual therapy, substance abuse treatment, medication consultation
Has the child vicariously experienced Parent B as insensitive, unresponsive, abusive or neglectful?	(d) “Reunification” therapies involve entire system in anxiety management and graduated exposure.
	(e) Supervised/therapeutic contacts
5. Co-parental factors	(a) Script F2F encounters at transition
Does the child anticipate and avoid her parents’ F2F encounters, e.g., at transition?	(b) Avoid F2F transitions – transition through school? Child therapy?
	(c) Involve trusted, safe surrogates at transition
6. Systemic factors	(a) Co-parenting can help to diminish “cultural” discrepancies so as to reduce the child’s resistance.
Is the child’s resistance an effort to avoid culture shock?	(b) Any adult’s pressure (e.g., bribery, threats) is a selfish and destructive act that speaks to that person’s willingness and ability to put the child’s needs first.
Is the child’s resistance due to Parent A’s pressure?	(c) Alienation calls for prompt, forceful, and salient consequences for the alienating adult and systemic “reunification” interventions
Has the child’s relationship with Parent B been damaged by exposure to Parent A’s unwarranted negative words, behaviors, and/or emotions about Parent B?	(d) Intensive residential interventions and custody reversal are among possible interventions in extreme circumstances.