



Psychiatry & Behavioral Science Section – 2010

I9 Parental Alienation: Past, Present, and Future

William Bernet, MD*, Vanderbilt University School of Medicine, 1601 23rd Avenue South, Suite 3050, Nashville, TN 37212-3182; Joseph N. Kenan, MD*, 436 North Roxbury Drive, #201, Beverly Hills, CA 90210; and James S. Walker, PhD*, Vanderbilt University School of Medicine, 1601 23rd Avenue South, Suite 3050, Nashville, TN 37212-3182

By attending this presentation, attendees will understand the long history of the concept of parental alienation, the difference between “parental alienation” and “parental alienation syndrome,” and reasons why parental alienation should be included as a mental condition in DSM-V and ICD-11.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by helping to clarify the meaning of “parental alienation,” a very important concept that has been immersed in controversy and misunderstanding.

Parental alienation is a serious mental condition in which a child – usually one whose parents are engaged in a hostile divorce – allies himself or herself strongly with one parent and rejects a relationship with the other parent without legitimate justification.

James S. Walker, PhD, will present “Parental Alienation *Past*: A Brief History of the Concept of Parental Alienation.” Parental alienation was described in legal documents in the 18th century and in psychiatric and psychological professional literature since the 1940s. The prevalence of parental alienation increased in the 1970s when it became more common for fathers to seek custody of their children. In the 1980s, the phenomenon of parental alienation was “discovered” and described independently by six researchers, one of whom was Richard Gardner, MD. It is important to understand the difference between “parental alienation” and Gardner’s concept of “parental alienation syndrome.”

Joseph N. Kenan, MD, will present “Parental Alienation *Present*: Typical Clinical and Forensic Presentations of Parental Alienation.” Two clinical vignettes will be presented, one representing the clinical practice of psychotherapy and one that was identified in a forensic evaluation. The typical attitudes and behaviors of the family members (the preferred parent, the alienated parent, and the child) will be described.

William Bernet, MD, will present “Parental Alienation *Future*: Parental Alienation in DSM-V, ICD-11, and Beyond.” Considerable research – primarily in the Grounded Theory Method – has established that parental alienation is a valid concept, and that it causes serious psychological symptoms for many children and their families. The prevalence of parental alienation in the United States is about 1%, and the condition occurs throughout the developed countries of the world.

The speakers and the audience will discuss: Should “parental alienation disorder” be considered a mental disorder in DSM-V? If not a full-fledged diagnosis, should “parental alienation disorder” be included in the appendix of DSM-V, Criteria Sets and Axes for Further Study? If not a mental disorder, should “parental alienation relational problem” be a V-code in the chapter of DSM-V, Other Conditions That May Be a Focus of Clinical Attention?

Parental Alienation, Divorce, DSM