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Parental Alienation vs. Parental Alienation Syndrome

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As most of you know, Parental Alienation Syndrome was first defined and described by New York Child Psychiatrist, Richard Gardner, MD in 1984. Since Dr Gardner's landmark contribution into the literature of Parental Alienation, there has been much debate and discussion.

As part of this discussion and debate, the use of the word "syndrome" has garnered the most attention.

The expert debate about it being a syndrome versus it not being a syndrome has droned on and on, and has largely become a distraction from the indisputable fact that children do become alienated from a once loved parent. No one debated that.

While most experts would agree that the symptoms within the child, first described by Gardner, do meet the criteria for a "Syndrome," most have elected to eliminate the use of the word in an effort to eliminate the distractive qualities that characterized the debate.

We agree with this and see this debate as a major distraction from the issues, and a disservice to the parents who are trying to save their children from its dynamic.

Consequently, most in the field simply refrain from using the word "Syndrome" in an effort to avoid spurious debate about what is really a non-issue. **We therefore include PA and PAS in our materials and discussion in an effort to be historically accurate, however our focus is not to feed this debate.**

Therefore the term Parental Alienation currently has two meanings. First, it refers to the overall dynamic of a child becoming alienated from a once loved parent, through no fault of that parent, but due primarily to in improper influence of the other parent. This first meaning then describes this entire dynamic. The second use of the term refers more to the specific behaviors engaged in by the alienating parent, that result in the child becoming alienated.

We hope this brief explanation clarifies an area that had been heretofore confusing and inconsistent.