

# The Urgent Need to Abolish Parental Alienation and Strengthen Co-Parenting

By Robert Garza

Parental alienation is a deeply destructive and manipulative behavior that often emerges during or after a separation. It involves one parent undermining the child's relationship with the other parent, which has become a growing issue in family law. This behavior not only causes profound emotional and psychological harm to children but also violates the fundamental rights of the alienated parent. Parental alienation is a form of emotional abuse that disrupts families, damages children's mental health, and fuels long-term estrangement. Immediate action is required to abolish parental alienation, protect the integrity of families, and prioritize the best interests of children.

## The Emotional and Psychological Toll on Children

Children subjected to parental alienation endure severe emotional distress, as they are manipulated into rejecting one of their parents. This forced estrangement distorts their perception of reality and creates feelings of confusion, guilt, and fear. Over time, this emotional manipulation can lead to anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and difficulty forming healthy relationships in adulthood. The long-lasting psychological impact of parental alienation cannot be overstated.

At its core, parental alienation weaponizes a child's mind, often forcing them to internalize false narratives about one of their parents. In many cases, the child feels obligated to choose sides, which leads to cognitive dissonance and long-term emotional trauma. The manipulation makes children question their own perceptions, further confusing them about who they can trust. As these children grow older, they carry unresolved psychological baggage into adulthood, which may impact their ability to develop meaningful relationships or trust others.

The scars left by parental alienation affect the child's ability to navigate the world, leaving them emotionally compromised. Children need the love and guidance of both parents, and denying them that bond is akin to stripping away part of their identity. It also sets a dangerous precedent that relationships can be discarded and manipulated for personal gain.

## The Profound Impact on Alienated Parents

The effects of parental alienation do not stop with the children. Alienated parents often suffer a deep emotional toll as well. Being unjustly excluded from their child's life is devastating, especially when there is no legitimate reason for the estrangement. The alienated parent experiences grief akin to mourning a loss, as their bond with the child weakens or vanishes altogether. Many alienated parents describe feelings of helplessness,

frustration, and emotional anguish as they struggle to maintain a relationship with their child.

This forced exclusion is a violation of a parent's fundamental right to maintain a loving and healthy relationship with their child. For many parents, the damage inflicted by parental alienation is irreversible, leaving deep emotional wounds that may never heal. Missing important moments in a child's life—birthdays, graduations, family events—creates a void that often cannot be filled. The lost time, trust, and connection between parent and child due to parental alienation can be devastating. Courts must begin to recognize the gravity of this issue and act quickly to intervene before the damage becomes irreparable.

The financial toll is significant as well. Alienated parents often face protracted legal battles, forced to spend thousands of dollars in attorney's fees and court costs to reclaim their time with their child. This situation drains families of both financial resources and emotional energy. For many, the cost of fighting these legal battles leads to emotional exhaustion and financial ruin, further distancing them from their children. This is why timely intervention by the legal system is so important—it can prevent these situations from escalating.

### The Failure of Family Courts to Address Parental Alienation

Despite its widespread and damaging effects, parental alienation is often overlooked by family courts. Legal systems tend to focus primarily on physical custody arrangements rather than on the emotional and psychological abuse that may be occurring. This lack of recognition can lead to protracted legal battles, as courts fail to address the root issue and instead focus on the logistics of shared custody and visitation. This oversight allows the alienating parent to continue their manipulation unchecked, further harming the child and damaging the relationship with the alienated parent.

One of the main reasons parental alienation is difficult to address in court is that it often operates in a gray area. The alienating parent may disguise their actions as protective or caring behavior, claiming to act in the child's best interests. This subtlety makes it difficult for judges and legal professionals to detect the manipulation that is taking place behind the scenes. Without clear signs of abuse or neglect, courts may view these cases as standard custody conflicts and fail to take decisive action.

This failure to act has profound consequences for the children involved. The longer parental alienation is allowed to persist, the more entrenched the child's rejection of the alienated parent becomes. Over time, it becomes increasingly difficult to repair the parent-child relationship, and the emotional damage to the child deepens. Courts must evolve to recognize parental alienation as a form of emotional abuse, and they must take swift and decisive action to prevent it.

### Strengthening Co-Parenting Relationships

While it is crucial to abolish parental alienation, we must also focus on strengthening co-parenting relationships and fostering healthy family bonds. At its core, parental alienation arises from unresolved conflict between parents. To prevent parental alienation from occurring, we must promote a culture of cooperative co-parenting, where both parents are encouraged to remain actively involved in their child's life. This approach benefits children by allowing them to maintain meaningful relationships with both parents, even after separation or divorce.

Co-parenting requires open communication, mutual respect, and a shared commitment to the child's well-being. When both parents can set aside their personal differences and work together, the likelihood of parental alienation is reduced. Positive co-parenting relationships offer stability and security for children, helping them feel loved and supported by both parents. Educational programs for separating or divorcing parents can provide essential tools for maintaining healthy co-parenting relationships, such as conflict resolution skills, effective communication strategies, and the ability to prioritize the child's needs above personal grievances.

Encouraging parents to actively cooperate in raising their children can prevent alienation from taking root. A strong co-parenting framework helps prevent one parent from monopolizing the child's attention or manipulating the child's perspective of the other parent. Creating a supportive environment where both parents are seen as essential to the child's development fosters emotional security and reduces the risk of parental alienation.

#### Legal Reforms: The "Time Taken Time Back" Law

One of the most important steps toward addressing parental alienation is through legislative reform. In Texas, the "Time Taken Time Back" law (Texas Family Code 157.168 (a)) addresses a fundamental liberty: the right of parents to maintain meaningful relationships with their children. This law must be adopted in every state to protect parents from being unjustly separated from their children. It seeks to fix the issue of lost time due to precautionary court decisions by allowing alienated parents to regain time with their child without the burden of additional hearings or filings.

As it stands, many parents who lose time with their children due to precautionary court decisions are forced to prove why they should be allowed to "have" that time back. This process often involves lengthy court proceedings, which can cost thousands of dollars and delay reunification for months or even years. The "Time Taken Time Back" law shifts the burden of proof from the alienated parent to the court system, simplifying the process of restoring parent-child relationships and preventing unnecessary delays.

This law is not only about fairness—it's about healing. It acknowledges the emotional and psychological damage caused by lost time and gives parents the opportunity to rebuild their relationships with their children. Additionally, this law frees up resources in family

courts, Child Protective Services, and District Attorney offices by reducing the need for repeated hearings. By adopting this law nationwide, we can prevent further waste of judicial resources and ensure that children have the opportunity to maintain strong, meaningful relationships with both parents.

### The 3 Strike Law for Interference with Child Custody

Another crucial piece of legislation is the “3 Strike Law for Interference with Child Custody,” which also needs to be adopted across the country. This law is designed to deter parental alienation by holding parents accountable when they interfere with the other parent’s right to maintain a relationship with their child. Under this proposed law, interference with child custody results in an immediate \$500 penalty for the first and second offenses. On the third offense, the violation is elevated to a State Jail Felony.

This law serves as a powerful deterrent against parental gatekeeping and manipulation. It recognizes that a parent who interferes with child custody is not only violating the other parent’s rights but is also harming the child’s emotional and psychological well-being. By implementing penalties for repeated offenses, the law encourages both parents to cooperate and ensures that the child maintains access to both parents.

### Addressing the Root of the Problem

Parental alienation often stems from deeper systemic issues within the family law system. Financial burdens such as child support, legal fees, and court-mandated programs can create a situation where families are unable to afford the full legal process, leaving temporary custody orders in place indefinitely. These financial challenges often prevent families from reaching a final trial, allowing parental alienation to continue unchecked. In many cases, the alienating parent may use the child as a bargaining chip to manipulate court outcomes or avoid legal responsibilities.

To address this root issue, we must streamline legal proceedings and reduce the financial burden on families. Providing more accessible legal services, reducing court fees, and simplifying the custody dispute process can help prevent parental alienation from escalating. Families should not have to choose between financial stability and fighting for their parental rights.

### Conclusion: The Urgent Need for Action

Abolishing parental alienation is not only necessary but urgent. The emotional and psychological harm caused to children, the violation of parental rights, and the failure of the current legal system to adequately address this form of emotional abuse demand immediate attention. By educating legal professionals, intervening early in custody cases, enacting appropriate legislation, and providing support for affected children and families, we can prevent further damage and rebuild trust within families.

The “Time Taken Time Back” law and the “3 Strike Law for Interference with Child Custody” are critical steps in this process. These legal reforms ensure that parents are not unjustly cut off from their children and that those who attempt to manipulate the system face real consequences. We must prioritize the emotional well-being of children, ensuring they have access to both parents and that their relationships are not sabotaged by manipulation or legal delays.

Moreover, strengthening co-parenting relationships and fostering a culture of collaboration rather than conflict will help prevent parental alienation from taking root in the first place. By addressing these issues at both the legal and societal levels, we can create a system that truly upholds the best interests of children and supports the long-term stability of families.

The time to act is now. We cannot afford to allow parental alienation to continue to harm children and parents alike. With the right tools, education, and legal reforms, we can work together to end this destructive practice and give families the opportunity to heal and thrive.

This chapter outlines the emotional, legal, and systemic challenges of parental alienation and the solutions necessary to combat it. By focusing on both reforming family/criminal law and supporting healthy co-parenting practices, we can ensure that the best interests of children remain at the forefront of family/ criminal law decisions, bringing about the change that families so desperately need.