

IS GRANDPARENT ALIENATION ELDER ABUSE? CHILD ABUSE?

Glenn Ross Caddy Ph.D., A.B.P.P., F.A.P.A.

There is no question but that unless there is legitimate reason to prevent the grandparents and children from enjoying a complete family life together [such justification may be the true psychological pathology or physical abuse of the children by the grandparent[s], that the alienation of children from their loving parents by one or both parents is pathological and constitutes child abuse. This is simply because grandparents play an important role for the children in defining the depth and family and the support system of love inherent in the family just as uncles and aunts and cousins contribute to the breadth of the family surrounding the support, love, and well-being of the children. These people are far more than friends, they are blood and they are love.

Tragically, it is common with alienation that when one set of grandparents or both sets are the victims of alienation the entire family on at least one side is estranged and splintered. The children who suffer this alienation have no context of cohesiveness or normalcy in of extended family life. They do not learn or know normalcy and they suffer profound emotional consequences therefrom. I have treated people in their 30's and 40's who came to realize in the context of the therapy that they were the victims of parental [and grandparent] alienation and their suffering has ranged between confusion and unimaginable psychic pain and psychopathology.

Joshua Coleman, Ph.D.

Small children often form attachments to their grandparents that are as significant, if not more significant than those they form with their own parents. In many cases, grandparents—even those who were an intimate and involved part of their grandchildren's lives—are suddenly denied contact because of a conflict between the parent and the adult child or the spouse of the adult child.

Currently in the US there are few ways to successfully remediate this situation once it occurs. This is because parents in the US have complete authority over determining whether or not a grandchild can have contact with a grandparent. Children, from this perspective, are viewed as a kind of property over which the rights of the individual parent are ascendant over the rights of the grandparent. While most people would be sympathetic to a parent's decision to restrict or deny contact with an abusive grandparent, my clinical experience shows that most grandparents are denied contact, not because of their abusive behavior, but because of a recent or longstanding conflict between the parent and adult child or the adult child's spouse. However unfortunate and painful those conflicts, the decision to end an attachment to an otherwise loving and involved grandparent is something that should be considered in a far broader context than the rights of the parent. If parental neglect can and should be considered a form of child abuse, certainly a parent's decision to end a loving and attached relationship between a grandchild and grandparent should also be considered a form of abuse.

Jerome Singer, M.D. Pediatrician

We all recognize child abuse? Or, do we?

A child came into the hospital with bruising on the head and torso. Another child had x-rays that showed multiple old and new fractures. And still another, an infant, had bleeding inside the skull from being shaken. These are the kinds of histories that the hospital Child Abuse Committee I chaired reviewed. It is easy to recognize this kind of abuse.

We know that children will all experience pain whether from an accidental fall, sports injury, auto accident, or the myriad of ways that kids get hurt. But, when the pain is inflicted willfully we call this child abuse. Society sometimes goes so far as to view corporal punishment or spanking as abuse.

So, we can safely say that intentionally causing a child pain is abuse.

Not all abuse is so obvious. Emotional abuse is not captured on a physical examination or x-ray. When a close loving grandparent is removed from a child's world, the child feels emotional pain. We all age, and we all die. Grandparents die everyday. If their grandchild was close, we see the emotional pain this causes. We can try to explain death to a child. We can tell them about the "cycle of life".

When the loving close grandparent is still alive and purposely extracted from the child's world, and this separation is intentional, it inflicts pain.

Why isn't this a form of child abuse? It intentionally inflicts pain on a child.

We must protect our children and respect parents' rights. But, we must also recognize child abuse in all of its many forms.

John Killinger

I agree that Grandparent Alienation is BOTH child abuse AND elder abuse.

CHILD ABUSE

The parents of this country would rise up en masse if they suddenly learned that the government had passed rules limiting the amount of vitamins and nutrients children can receive in their food or the number of books they can read in school. Yet parents who keep their children away from the grandparents are limiting by 50% the amount of grandparent love, knowledge, and interest those children are going to receive in the most formative years of their lives.

ELDER ABUSE

Citizens would be angry with a neighbor they learned was keeping an elderly person locked up in a room in their home and limiting the food, water, and company that person received. Yet parents who prevent grandparents from seeing their own grandchildren, their flesh and blood, are seriously delimiting the joy, happiness, and well-being of those grandparents.

Annie died on March 1, almost 3 months ago. My life would be vastly different — I would be comforted — if I had regular access to my grandchildren and could SEE with my eyes the future of our progeny. But alas. . .

Retired Psychotherapist ACSW, DCSW

This is actually a deeper question than it initially appears on the surface. It entails the understanding on what is abuse and who is in question of being abused. Abuse means that a person is treated regularly and repeatedly with cruelty and/or violence. The effects of Grandparent Alienation/PAS is cruel to the actual child touched by alienation and also the 'child' that lives in every person within this sad and painful interaction. The grandchild suffers the sadness of not knowing the gifts of the absent grandparent or at least having the opportunity to sort through and ultimately benefit from healthy resolution of the family emotional quagmire.

The inner child of the controlling or controlled adult child suffers from the loss, whether conscious or unconscious, of their biological parent, their accurate history and the ability to create internal peace and harmony through resolution. Step-grandparents suffer from their social/familial dismissal and the accompanying negative impact on their identity, loss of a dream and the budding awareness of their personal powerless position. Lastly, the estranged grandparent's inner child suffers from the sense of rejection and abject sadness at losing their relationship with their biological child, as well as their grandchild, and the dream of a close parental/child connection with all. Their history is in question and at risk for distortion and their inner child is in turmoil at the upheaval. Grief is everywhere! Therefore, the answer to your question is, "Yes", cruelty in so many forms and effecting child aspects of everyone involved.

J. Michael Bone, PhD

If there is any tragedy that has befallen life in the modern world, it is the loss of the extended family. In the mid 1940's an excess of 85% of families were extended families, meaning that there were three generations of a family living under one roof or very nearby. As we fast forward to as long ago as the mid 1970's this number falls to only 11%, meaning that grandparents are only an every day part of children's' lives in very small numbers. While I do not know the exact statistic of the disappearance of the extended family in 2014, I would guess that it must be less than 3%. What does this mean? Unfortunately, this means a great loss of sharing of life experience as well as a loss of wisdom that only this experience can yield. When we add to this the fact that marriages are as likely to end in divorce as they are to survive into the senior years, one can easily see how the fragmentation of the family has led to an overall loss to our young people.

It is well accepted and understood that grandparents provide a perspective and balance that only experience can yield. While the world has changed and continues to change at unprecedented speed, it is the wisdom of experience that can best provide balance to this change. Therefore, when parents divorce and children find themselves suddenly in two households, very often the resources that grandparents bring to grandchildren are diminished, or in the case of parental alienation, destroyed altogether.

Pascal J. LaRuffa, M.D. FSAHM

(Fellow-Society for Adolescent Health & Medicine)

Over many years as medical director of two boarding schools, an inpatient treatment center for addicted youth, two universities, and all the public schools in our suburban community, I was often faced with the responsibility of guiding many teenagers and young adults through their emotional pain. Most of those frustrated and depressed students were faced with the monumental task of dealing with their education and the demands of everyday life. It was upsetting to realize that the majority of their problems centered around the perceived lack of love and encouragement from home. This fomented their feeling of helplessness to cope - without the armamentarium needed to survive in our complex world. Many had turned to alcohol or drug abuse to ease the pain, or sexual promiscuity to feel wanted, physically and emotionally. This behavior did not cure the problems, but intensified them. Often, the situation would escalate to the point of self abuse.

I saw many cases where grandparents blamed the son-in-law (or daughter-in-law), and the other set of grandparents laid the blame in reverse. Sometimes, it was the adult parent(s) who blamed one or more grandparents. Try to imagine the feelings and confusion in the child (or children). Now, they had to deal with arguments and attitudes from one set of parents - two sets if divorced - and four grandparents - maybe six. How can the child be expected to deal with all

this, and try to make the best of life on his own? This is abuse of the worst kind: mental, emotional, and social. That's where I would work with the children, as their coach and mentor. The adults - I referred to family therapy. It was crucial for the son or daughter to have someone on their side, who would be non-judgmental and keep everything strictly confidential.

Psychology Today PAS

There is now scholarly consensus that severe alienation is abusive to children (Fidler and Bala, 2010), and it is a largely overlooked form of child abuse (Bernet et al, 2010), as child welfare and divorce practitioners are often unaware of or minimize its extent. As reported by adult children of divorce, the tactics of alienating parents are tantamount to extreme psychological maltreatment of children, including spurning, terrorizing, isolating, corrupting or exploiting, and denying emotional responsiveness (Baker, 2010). For the child, parental alienation is a serious mental condition, based on a false belief that the alienated parent is a dangerous and unworthy parent. The severe effects of parental alienation on children are well-documented; low self esteem and self-hatred, lack of trust, depression, and substance abuse and other forms of addiction are widespread, as children lose the capacity to give and accept love from a parent. Self-hatred is particularly disturbing among affected children, as children internalize the hatred targeted toward the alienated parent, are led to believe that the alienated parent did not love or want them, and experience severe guilt related to betraying the alienated parent. Their depression is rooted in feelings of being unloved by one of their parents, and from separation from that parent, while being denied the opportunity to mourn the loss of the parent, or to even talk about the parent. Alienated children typically have conflicted or distant relationships with the alienating parent also, and are at high risk of becoming alienated from their own children; Baker reports that fully half of the respondents in her study of adult children who had experienced alienation as children were alienated from their own children.

Every child has a fundamental right and need for an unthreatened and loving relationship with both parents, and to be denied that right by one parent, without sufficient justification such as abuse or neglect, is in itself a form of child abuse.