

THE SIX TACTICS OF PERSUASION

The following six tactics of persuasion are used by alienating parents to sell their alienation message to their children. This creates psychological cohesion with them and disaffection with the targeted parent. Because alienating parents are such effective salesmen and are so compelling in their use of persuasion tactics, it is likely that legal and mental health professionals who come into contact with them will also find them likable and believable. This may explain in part why alienating parents often seem to prevail in court. With all of these tactics, the child must be unaware of the role of the alienating parent. The reason these tactics are effective is the child is convinced that he or she is willingly making his or her own choices at each step.

1.

The rule of reciprocity. The rule of reciprocity dictates that a person will generally feel obligated to reciprocate when given a gift or favor. The alienating parent can do this by reminding the child of everything he or she has done for the child and signaling that something is expected in return (loyalty, preference, rejection of the other parent). Moreover, the child's sense of indebtedness can be increased if the alienating parent creates the appearance of going to battle for the child. The rule of reciprocity may also explain why alienated children are pressured to refuse gifts from the targeted parent and the extended family of the targeted parent, as that would create an indebtedness toward them.

2.

The rule of consistency and commitment. Once a choice has been made or a stand taken, we will encounter personal and interpersonal pressure to behave consistently with that commitment. If the alienating parent can create a situation in which the child will betray the targeted parent (be rude, lie to, spy on, reject, and the like), the child will come to believe that the targeted parent must be unworthy. The very act of betrayal creates inside the child an identity as someone who doesn't love or care for the other parent. If the child puts the betrayal in writing, this can further enhance the negative feelings, as people tend to believe that they mean what they write. This may explain the frequency of alienated children being encouraged to write letters of rejection to their targeted parent.

The Commitment also must be perceived to be the result of free will. The external pressure must not be detectable. This, of course, fits well with the independent thinker phenomenon seen so frequently in alienated children who go out of their way to deny any external influence on their thoughts and feelings about the targeted parent. Another aspect of commitment is that it should be incremental. The alienating parent can achieve that outcome by asking the child in small incremental steps to move in that direction. If the alienating parent can convince the child to make a small act of betrayal or unkindness to start with, it is more likely that the child will engage in a larger act of betrayal or unkindness later. Each step solidifies the child's commitment and moves that child in the desired direction.

1. **Endorsement of the social group.** People naturally look to others to understand how to behave especially in a novel or uncertain situation. If the alienating parent has activated the social group to rally behind them (through the vilification of the targeted parent) and has them endorse their alienation message, the child will be likely to find the necessary cues for how to behave (i.e., believe that parent). This rule may also explain why younger children become alienated following the alienation of their older brother or sister: they are following the cues of their relevant social group.
2. **Social influence and likability.** Important elements of likability are physical attractiveness, similarity, and flattery. Alienators may have good looks, humor, warmth, and an ability to project kindness, success and competence. Another aspect of likability that may be particularly relevant for alienation is similarity. The more similar the child feels to the alienating parent, the more likable the parent will be to the child. If the alienating parent is able to enhance the child's sense of being more like that parent than the targeted parent, the stronger their alliance will be. Another way to enhance similarity is to create the feeling of being on the same team, working toward the same goals.
3. **Authority.** Research has consistently demonstrated that individuals are highly susceptible to the dictates of authority figures. In families affected by parental alienation, the child comes to respect and honor the authority of one parent while

disregarding the authority of the other. This may be because the alienating parent knows how to play the role of the all-knowing and all-powerful authority better than the targeted parent.

4. The appearance of scarcity. With respect to alienation, this refers to the potential for the alienating parent to become scarce (i.e., withdrawing their love), creating a heightened demand for their affection. When an object is perceived as scarce or having the potential to be taken away, it becomes more desirable and attractive. The alienating parent can activate this trigger simply by becoming aloof or indicating disapproval or disappointment in the child. The fear of loss increases the child's desire for that parent.

Amy J. L. Baker and Paul R. Fine, editors, *Surviving Parental Alienation, a journey of hope and healing* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowan & Littlefield, 2014) pgs. 81 to 85