

Parental Alienation Syndrome (PAS) Fact Sheet

What is PAS?

PAS is an unproven theory developed by psychiatrist Dr. Richard Gardner that claims that in high-conflict custody cases one parent can indoctrinate the child or children to emotionally reject and "turn against" the other parent.¹ In simple terms, PAS is when one parent tries to turn the child(ren) against the other parent.

Gardner argues that PAS can translate into a variety of behaviors ranging from distrust and anger towards the other parent to false allegations of physical and sexual abuse. Gardner asserts that the vindictive parent will essentially alienate their children from the other parent so extremely that they will either convince the child that they have been abused or that the children will "develop" memories of abuse on their own. While theoretically any parent can have PAS, in fact it is a label given overwhelmingly to mothers.²

Why should we be concerned about the increasing use of PAS?

Accusations of PAS are increasingly being used in custody trials with the attempt to undermine a mother's credibility when she accuses the father of domestic abuse or sexual abuse of their child(ren). **When a mother is accused of PAS it can often lead to the mother losing custody of her children. Fathers who batter are twice as likely to seek sole physical custody** of their children as non-violent fathers are.³ And when **fathers** choose to fight for custody (regardless of accusations of abuse) they are **awarded custody 79% of the time**.⁴ By removing the child from their non-abusive parent, we are putting countless children at risk of suffering more abuse. Furthermore, successful accusations of PAS which lead to paternal custody, encourage mothers *not* to disclose abuse in custody proceedings. *In a recent study 65% of women reported that they were advised by attorneys, mediators, advocates and others not to report abuse due to the risk of losing custody.*⁵

The bottom-line on PAS:

Mothers who are desperately trying to protect their children from further abuse are being cruelly punished for their efforts. The most devastating consequence of this disturbing trend is that children are needlessly being subjected to further abuse.

What can you do about PAS?

Let us know if you've been charged with PAS in a NYS court. Help us improve the court system so it protects children and stops blaming mothers.

¹ Dunne & Hendrick, (1994). The parental alienation syndrome: analysis of sixteen cases. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, (21) 21-38.

² Ibid

³ Report of the American Psychological Associations Presidential Task Force: Violence and the Family

⁴ California Center for Protective Parents, www.protectiveparents.com.

⁵ Stahly, 2003, www.protectiveparents.com/research

The Voices of Women Organizing Project (VOW) is a grass roots organization of survivors of domestic violence working to improve the many systems battered women and their children turn to for safety and justice. (November, 2003)