

# ***What is Parental Alienation?***

- **Parental Alienation** is a distinctive family response to divorce in which the child becomes aligned with one parent and preoccupied with unjustified and/or exaggerated denigration of the other parent.
- In severe cases, the child's once-love-bonded relationship with the rejected, or target parent, is destroyed.
- Since first being identified by Dr. Richard Gardner, much controversy has surrounded the issue of parental alienation as to whether it is really an identifiable syndrome. Debate continues to rage, but it is not our intention to enter into that debate. Whether it is identified as Parental Alienation Syndrome (PAS), simply as parental alienation, or as multitude of other related psychiatric disorders, it is simply our intention to address the problem.
- Claware and Rivlin, in a study published by the American Bar Association (ref. 5), claim that PAS was practiced to varying degrees by 80% of divorcing parents, with 20% engaging in such behaviors with their children at least once a day. J.R. Johnston found (refs. 6, 7 & 8) that 43% of children examined were in strong alignment with an alienating parent and 29% in mild alignment. These figures approach Gardner's estimate that 90% of the children he assessed in custody evaluations exhibit varying degrees of PAS.
- Parental alienation is destructive, irrespective of the gender of the alienating parent, and is considered to be a form of child abuse.
- According to *Statistics Canada* there were 69,088 divorces in Canada in 1998. If the average family size is 3.1 persons as cited in the 1996 census, with a minimum of 1.1 children per family, approximately 75,000 children were affected by divorce in 1998, not including the children of common law marriage. If parental alienation occurred in only 20% of these divorces, then 15,000 children are affected annually and possibly up to 60,000 when we apply the higher percentages suggested in some studies.