

Identifier	Parental Alienation	Estrangement
Cause of Rejection	Driven by psychological manipulation, coercion, or indoctrination by one parent	Caused by the rejected parent's actual harmful, abusive, or neglectful behavior
Child's Justification	Inconsistent, vague, exaggerated, or uses adult-like language not age-appropriate	Aligned with documented history of trauma, abuse, or neglect
Child's Behavior	Rigid, black-and-white thinking; excessive hatred; no guilt or ambivalence	Fearful, avoidant, cautious; mixed feelings are often present
Relationship History	The rejected parent previously had a loving, involved, and healthy relationship	Longstanding pattern of mistreatment, abandonment, or poor parenting
Aligned Parent's Behavior	Aligned parent interferes, badmouths, or rewards rejection of the other parent	Aligned parent may support the child's boundaries or help protect them from harm
Siblings' Responses	Siblings often mirror the rejection, even if their experiences with the parent differ	Siblings may have different relationships based on their individual experiences
Rejection Timeline	Sudden, coincides with separation, divorce, or custody dispute	Develops gradually over time as a result of mistreatment or trauma
Professional Approach	Requires intervention to reduce coercive influence and restore attachment	Prioritizes protection and trauma-informed care for the child
Risk of Mislabeling	Often dismissed as “child's choice” or misunderstood as estrangement	Estrangement may be mischaracterized as alienation if the abusive history is ignored
Primary Concern	Emotional abuse through coercive control and identity distortion	Safety, protection, and healing from legitimate harm