



Don't Believe Everything You See

Is there anything worse than exploiting video of children in pain on social media before confirming the whole story?

Jan 17



Photo by Jakob Owens on Unsplash

There has been a recent and disturbing trend that is influencing not just the general public, but important decision-makers who affect the lives of families. Over the last few months, some children in the U.S. and Brazil who have been poisoned against a parent by their other parent (a.k.a. alienated from them) are recording and posting videos to social media intended to shock their viewers and hurt their parents. And activists who should know better are credulously boosting the videos' reach without proper context.

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The children who are doing this were found by a court or third party (e.g., a psychologist) to have adopted a false belief that their rejected parent **never loved them, abandoned them, is unsafe or unfit**. It is not easy to get a child to adopt this belief because even the most severely abused children **rarely fully reject their abusers**. The alienating parent must engage in many coercively controlling behaviors involving the child in order to weaponize them in this way. When the child comes to fully accept a false or grossly exaggerated impression of a parent, this is an indication that the **child has been abused** by their preferred, or alienating parent.



Effective interventions for severely abused children involve protecting them from the abusive parent, such as implementing temporary no-contact orders and **out-of-home placement** (e.g., foster care) until the abusive parent is deemed to no longer be a threat to the child. This intervention approach is no different for **severely alienated children**, as the destruction of their parental bond to a loving and safe parent is a threat to the child's health and well-being. Despite what a minority of critics have claimed, parental alienation is *not* just a legal defense used by abusive parents (particularly fathers) to deflect allegations of abuse and maintain custody of their children. **Less than half of parental alienation cases** involve any allegation of abuse, and courts have been found not to transfer custody to parents who have findings of abuse and are still a risk to their children.

Yet the videos in question are being circulated by child and domestic violence advocates to communicate a very different story. The videos depict strong protests by alienated children who have been ordered to return to the care of an alienated parent found by the court to be safe and *not* abusive. The children in the videos report unverifiable and horrific allegations of abuse toward the alienated parent to justify their hysteria about returning to their care. To an outsider who does not understand parental alienation, these crying, frenzied children can be very convincing. I mean, who would question a child's allegations expressed with such urgency and emotion, right?

Yet it's never that simple. False allegations of abuse are common in child custody disputes, despite a widely circulating *opinion* that all allegations of abuse should be believed when made by mothers and children. For example, over a third of **allegations of sexual abuse in Australia** were found by the courts to be deliberately misleading and untrue, and only around **10 percent of abuse allegations** (of all forms) in that country were found to be substantiated. These determinations were made after a careful investigation of the evidence by professionals armed with both sides of the story.

When a video of a crying, hysterical child who is "desperate" because they are terrified to return to the care of their allegedly abusive parent goes viral, we must beware. As the old saying goes, a lie is halfway around the world before the truth can get its boots on. It's an inversion of justice to jump to the conclusion that the parent the child is rejecting in the video is actually abusive. Unless we have access to the entire case file for the family, which includes all the investigative evidence from both sides of the matter, we are in no position to take sides. It's shameful that professional associations, such as the Federal Council of Psychology in Brazil, have succumbed to such media manipulation and are ignoring the **scientific evidence regarding parental alienation and family violence**. We hope everyone wears their critical thinking caps when consuming this latest propaganda strategy being promoted by advocates to push their gender-biased agenda regarding parental alienation and domestic violence.

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