



"Become your 'true self', by reaching out and getting help!"

A Nonprofit Organization Supporting Survivors of Domestic Violence
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WHEN FAMILY LAW BECOMES A TOOL OF PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE AGAINST MEN

Recognizing female-perpetrated legal and post-separation abuse

Domestic violence is not limited to physical assault, and women can abuse men. After separation, a woman may continue a pattern of coercion by using children, allegations, financial pressure, and court procedures to control or psychologically harm a former male partner. This is sometimes described as **legal abuse, litigation abuse, post-separation abuse, or coercive control through the courts.**

The concern is not a mother's legitimate use of the legal system for protection. Abuse occurs when legal processes are deliberately manipulated to punish, intimidate, financially exhaust, discredit, or sever a safe father's relationship with his children.

Examples of possible legal and psychological abuse

A female former partner may:

- Repeatedly file meritless motions, emergency petitions, police reports, or protective-order requests to force the father to spend money and continually defend himself.
- Make knowingly false or materially exaggerated allegations that the father is violent, mentally unstable, addicted, neglectful, or dangerous to gain an advantage in custody or parenting time.
- Describe ordinary disagreements or appropriate parenting decisions as "abuse" while withholding relevant context or contradictory evidence.
- Interfere with parenting time and then characterize the father's distress, repeated requests for contact, or emotional reaction as harassment or instability.
- Tell the children that their father is dangerous, does not love them, or abandoned them; pressure them to reject him; monitor their communications; or punish them for enjoying time with him.
- Withhold school, medical, counseling, or activity information and later claim that the father is uninvolved.



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- Make repeated child-protection or professional complaints that are unsupported, even after previous claims have been investigated.
- Seek unnecessary supervised visitation or psychological evaluations as a means of humiliation, delay, or financial pressure.
- Provoke reactions through threats, blocked contact, or public accusations and then selectively submit texts, recordings, or social-media posts without the surrounding context.
- Use a new partner, relatives, professionals, or community members to reinforce a misleading narrative and socially isolate the father.

These behaviors can produce anxiety, depression, traumatic stress, helplessness, financial devastation, reputational injury, and profound grief associated with disrupted parent-child attachment.

Parental Alienating Behaviors by a Mother

A mother may psychologically abuse a father and harm the children by deliberately interfering with a safe, loving father-child relationship. This is sometimes called **parental alienation**, although courts and clinicians should focus on specific behaviors and evidence rather than automatically applying a label.

Examples may include:

- Repeatedly telling the children that their father is dangerous, unstable, abusive, selfish, or does not love them.
- Blaming the father for the divorce, financial problems, court proceedings, or the mother's emotional distress.
- Pressuring children to choose between their parents or treating affection for their father as betrayal.
- Rewarding rejection of the father or withdrawing affection when children speak positively about him.
- Blocking telephone calls, messages, school contact, medical information, special occasions, or parenting time.
- Scheduling activities during the father's parenting time and making the children feel that visiting him causes them to miss important events.
- Interrogating children after visits and encouraging them to search for negative information.
- Sharing adult accusations, pleadings, financial disputes, or court documents with the children.
- Asking children to spy on, record, or report private information about their father.



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- Referring to a stepfather or new partner as the children's "real father" while minimizing the biological father's role.
- Making unsupported allegations to courts, police, schools, therapists, or child-protection agencies to portray the father as unsafe.
- Interfering with court-ordered contact and then claiming the children independently refuse to see their father.
- Changing schools, doctors, therapists, activities, or residences without giving the father information.
- Encouraging siblings to unite against the father or dividing the children by allowing one child contact while pressuring another to reject him.

Dividing Children From Their Father

When a mother recruits children into an adult conflict, the children may become instruments of control. They can feel responsible for protecting their mother, afraid to express love for their father, or pressured to repeat a narrative they do not fully understand. A child's rejection of a parent may appear unusually absolute, use adult or legal language, or lack a proportionate explanation.

Possible consequences include:

- Grief and disruption of attachment
- Anxiety, depression, anger, guilt, and confusion
- Loyalty conflicts and fear of displeasing the preferred parent
- Loss of extended paternal family relationships
- Distorted memories or beliefs about the father
- Difficulty trusting others and forming healthy relationships
- Identity problems because rejecting a parent can feel like rejecting part of oneself
- Long-term regret if the child later realizes that the relationship was unnecessarily destroyed

The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry warns that long custody disputes and pressure to choose sides can harm children. It also recognizes that, in rare cases, a child may reject a parent with encouragement from the other parent. [AACAP: Children and Divorce](#)

Careful Evaluation Is Essential

A child may resist contact for many reasons, including actual abuse, fear, developmental needs, parental conflict, poor parenting, disrupted attachment, or alienating conduct. A safety-based refusal should never be dismissed as alienation without investigation.



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The Association of Family and Conciliation Courts and the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges recommend assessing all possible causes—including domestic violence, maltreatment, denigration, high conflict, and parental alienation behaviors—before reaching a conclusion. [Joint Statement on Parent-Child Contact Problems](#)

The coalition supports protecting children from genuine abuse while also recognizing that intentionally destroying a safe father-child relationship can itself constitute serious psychological and post-separation abuse.

Men experience intimate-partner abuse

The CDC reports that:

- **45.1% of U.S. men** reported psychological aggression by an intimate partner during their lifetime.
- **42.3%** reported physical violence by an intimate partner.
- **24.6%** reported severe physical violence.
- ****26.3%—approximately 31 million men—****experienced sexual violence, physical violence, or stalking by an intimate partner and reported at least one related adverse impact.
- **14.5%** of men reported PTSD symptoms, **21.1%** reported injury, and **5.8%** needed legal services because of intimate-partner violence.

These figures measure male victimization and should not be interpreted as proving that every perpetrator was female or that women and men experience identical patterns or consequences. They nevertheless demonstrate that male victims are a substantial and often underserved population. [CDC National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey](#)

Responsible evaluation in family court

A lack of substantiation does not automatically prove that an allegation was intentionally false. Courts and evaluators should examine patterns, corroborating evidence, chronology, credibility,



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prior findings, communications, parenting-time records, and the child's independently expressed experiences.

Michigan custody law directs courts to consider domestic violence and each parent's willingness to support the child's relationship with the other parent, while protecting reasonable actions taken for safety. [Michigan Child Custody Act, MCL 722.23](#)

Coalition position

Male victims deserve to be heard without ridicule or gender-based assumptions. A fair system must protect genuine survivors, investigate allegations carefully, preserve due process, identify coercive use of legal procedures, and protect children's safe relationships with both parents.

This information is educational and is not a determination that abuse, alienation, or false reporting occurred in any particular case.