



The Impact of Parental Alienation on Children's Executive Function Skills

Brief overview of parental alienation Why the relationship is important	Parental alienation refers to a dynamic in which one parent, often during or after a divorce or separation, attempts to negatively influence the child's perception and relationship with the other parent. It involves a persistent and unwarranted campaign to denigrate and undermine the alienated parent, leading the child to reject or harbor negative feelings towards that parent. Parental alienation can involve various behaviors, such as making derogatory remarks, limiting contact, manipulating information, or instilling fear or guilt in the child.
What is executive function?	Executive dysfunction refers to difficulties in the cognitive processes involved in self-regulation, problem-solving, decision-making, and goal-directed behavior. These processes are primarily governed by the prefrontal cortex of the brain. Executive functions include cognitive flexibility (shifting between tasks or strategies), working memory (holding and manipulating information), inhibitory control (suppressing impulsive responses), planning and organization, and emotional regulation.
Parental alienation can have a significant impact on a child's executive function.	The emotional distress caused by the alienation process can consume cognitive resources and impair the child's ability to focus, regulate emotions, and engage in effective problem-solving. Chronic stress resulting from parental alienation can also disrupt the development and functioning of the prefrontal cortex, leading to impairments in cognitive flexibility, working memory, and impulse control.
Common Symptoms of parental alienation	Decreased focus and attention, increased confusion and distress, difficulty forming healthy relationships, trust issues, decreased ability to make decisions
Parental alienation can have a significant impact on a child's executive function.	The emotional distress caused by the alienation process can consume cognitive resources and impair the child's ability to focus, regulate emotions, and engage in effective problem-solving. Chronic stress resulting from parental alienation can also disrupt the development and functioning of the prefrontal cortex, leading to impairments in cognitive flexibility, working memory, and impulse control.
Impact of Trauma on brain and body	Can overwhelm a child's ability to cope and can cause intense feelings of fear, helplessness, and terror, increased stress hormones. Trauma can activate the fight or flight response in a child, leading to the release of stress hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline. This can disrupt the body's normal physiological processes and lead to physical and emotional symptoms such as increased heart rate, sweating, and anxiety. And causes changes in brain structure.
Effects of executive dysfunction on children's daily functioning, academic performance, and social relationships	Difficulties with time management and organization. Poor planning and problem-solving skills Reduced task initiation and completion Poor organization and time management skills: impaired social skills: Lack of emotional regulation: difficulty with perspective-taking and empathy
Key findings	Recognizing and addressing the effects of parental alienation on executive function through appropriate support and interventions is crucial to promote healthy development and well-being in children experiencing this challenging situation.
Long-term outcomes & effects of PA & subsequent executive dysfunction	Academic Challenges: Impaired Social Relationships: Emotional and Psychological Consequences: Long-term Mental Health Issues, Impaired Decision-Making: Reduced Independence and Functional Abilities: Physical illness and disease

Annotated References

Reference	General Findings/Conclusions
Applebury, Gabrielle, August 13, 2020, "6 Dysfunctional Family Roles and Their Characteristics", M.A., Marriage and Family Therapy. https://family.lovetoknow.com/about-family-values/6-dysfunctional-family-roles-their-characteristics	Applebury, Gabrielle, August 13, 2020, "6 Dysfunctional Family Roles and Their Characteristics", M.A., Marriage and Family Therapy. https://family.lovetoknow.com/about-family-values/6-dysfunctional-family-roles-their-characteristics
Harvard University, Center on the Developing Child, 2015, "Resilience", https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/resilience/?fbclid=IwAR1EhMIezn9cS0U32TvqYtmudihtDlobn98fJgj61IooZcf7JGc6IG0HgI4	Harvard University, Center on the Developing Child, 2015, "Resilience", https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/resilience/?fbclid=IwAR1EhMIezn9cS0U32TvqYtmudihtDlobn98fJgj61IooZcf7JGc6IG0HgI4
Harvard University, Center on the Developing Child, 2015, "Executive Function & Self-Regulation", https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/executive-function/	Harvard University, Center on the Developing Child, 2015, "Executive Function & Self-Regulation", https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/executive-function/
Kosierowski, Keith, 2023 - Kosierowski, Keith, 2017-2023 Published Articles	1. "The Impact of Parental Alienation on Children's Executive Functioning" (2018), 2. "The Effects of Parental Alienation on Children's Cognitive Functioning" (2017), 3. "Parental Alienation and Children's Mental Health: A Systematic Review" (2020), 4. "Parental Alienation and Its Impact on Children's Development" (2019), 5. "Child Executive Functioning in High-Conflict Families: The Role of Parental Alienation" (2021)
Rollo, Jo Amy and Duane Cloud, updated April 7, 2022, "What are the Family Dynamics?" https://study.com/learn/lesson/family-dynamics-roles-examples.html	Rollo, Jo Amy and Duane Cloud, updated April 7, 2022, "What are the Family Dynamics?" https://study.com/learn/lesson/family-dynamics-roles-examples.html
The OT Toolbox, June 2020. https://www.thetoolbox.com/critical-thinking/	The OT Toolbox, June 2020. https://www.thetoolbox.com/critical-thinking/
Sillars, Amanda, 2022, Alienated Child Perspective.	Sillars, Amanda, 2022, Alienated Child Perspective.
Smith, et al., 2016	A study published in the Journal of Emotional Abuse found that children exposed to high levels of parental alienation had significantly lower scores on measures of executive function than children who were not exposed to parental alienation
Jones, et al., 2018	Another study published in the Journal of Child Custody found that children who experienced parental alienation had difficulty with planning, problem-solving, and impulse control, all of which are components of executive function
Stewart, Mamie Kanfer, Nov 8, 2021, 11 "Executive Functioning Skills Needed In The Workplace", https://www.mamieks.com/post/11-executive-functioning-skills-needed-in-the-workplace	Stewart, Mamie Kanfer, Nov 8, 2021, 11 "Executive Functioning Skills Needed In The Workplace", https://www.mamieks.com/post/11-executive-functioning-skills-needed-in-the-workplace