

# *Fear Me Out Podcast*

## Episode 42

Hosted by Clinical Psychologist - Dana P. Saperstein PhD.

*Guest Speaker*

## **Kristi Miller - Parental Alienation**

**Kim Fauskee** 00:00

Here's a quick reminder, before we talk about the episode you're about to listen to, is if you're a follower or a new follower, we would really appreciate you going to iTunes and giving us a rating and a comment. That not only helps us in terms of knowing what you want to listen to, and how well we're doing, but also moves us up in the podcast stratosphere. So others that haven't heard our podcast, get exposed to it. So again, if you're liking our podcasts and are continuing to listen or new to the podcast and want to listen to forthcoming episodes, then please go to iTunes and spend a minute or so giving us a rating. And then also, we do have an email address. So if you do have comments, or suggestions in terms of content or topics that you want to hear, or potential guests, that would be of interest to you. Dana and I are all ears. So let us know. So anyway, this specific episode that we're going to address this week if you're a divorced parent, separated parent, a co parent, somebody that CO parents with a narcissist, this is right up your alley. We're going to talk about parental alienation in my simple terms and using your children against your other co parent. Dana probably has a little bit better explanation and what we hope for you to get out of this episode.

**Dr. Dana** 01:48

Just to put it in simple terms, it is using your children as a weapon. And doing what you can to use your children to hurt your spouse, which should be obviously recognized as a horrible situation. But you'd be surprised how many people have felt so much bitterness or, or such a feeling of entitlement to harm somebody that they have been abandoned by or have left a relationship that actually happens way more than anybody understands. So hopefully listening to this episode will give you an idea of how it works and what it's all about and what to look for, and what to do about it if it's something that you are facing in your life.

**Kim Fauskee** 02:29

And so Dana and I, not always being the expert on all topics or any topic for that matter, are going to be joined in this conversation by Kristi Miller, who is a licensed marriage and family therapist that specifically deals with families and unfortunately deals in this area quite a bit. So I hope you enjoy this conversation with Kim, Dana and Kristi.

**Dr. Dana** 03:07

There are two basic motivating forces: fear and love when we're afraid we pull back from life. When we're in love, we open up to all that life has to offer with passion, excitement, and acceptance.

**Fear Me Out 03:26**

Coming to you from our studio in Santa Barbara, California. This is the fear me out podcast. We're not your typical Self Help Program. Our show takes a deep dive into those psychological issues that affect us on a daily basis. We hope to shift your perspective and have you experiencing emotions differently. Now here are your hosts Kim Fauskee and Dr. Dana Saperstein.

**Kim Fauskee 03:50**

All right for me. There are some topics that we talked about on this podcast that chat my hide, and this is one of them. How parents fuck up their kids is beyond me, when society will always do that for you. And the next thing is why did it take till 1985 Till psychologists actually figured out a name for this problem. Don't answer that question. Anyway, we're blessed to have on the podcast as another expert in this discussion, Kristi Miller and that's with a K in an eye and not a C and a Y. Kristi is a licensed marriage and family therapist that has a specialty in dealing with with high conflict family issues and with teenagers and is also the author of establishing boundaries with kids. So welcome Kristi. Thanks for being here.

**Kristi Miller 04:50**

Thank you. Thanks for having me.

**Kim Fauskee 04:53**

So the topic of conversation today is parent parental alienation syndrome. Fancy Name a fancy name called pass, apparently, right? Which most people or most parents actually do is pass it on to their kids. Yeah. So anyway, I'm going to ask one of the experts here, what is parental alienation syndrome?

**Kristi Miller 05:15**

Well, I'll take that one, I'll pretend to be an expert. I do have a little disclaimer that there are a very robust handful of professionals who actually are specialists in this matter, I think the rest of us, you know, kind of fall back from there, I feel experienced and educated on the matter, but not sure I'm an expert. So that's my only disclaimer. What I want to say about her way, after that introduction, you're gonna do that everyone's everyone's gonna stop listening right after,

**Kim Fauskee 05:48**

well, she's not an expert, so forget it.

**Kristi Miller 05:52**

So parental alienation syndrome is the end result actually, of one parent using systematically, behaviors that force a child into the rejection of the other parent. So the syndrome has to do with the child's rejection of a parent. Parental alienation is more of a set of strategies that occurs in a relationship, a family relationship, usually two or more people. And that's though, you know, we've got lists of the specific kinds of strategies and behaviors, but that's generally what the alienating parent uses to coerce the child into rejecting the parent. So it's actually different. Parental alienation is different than parental alienation syndrome.

**Kim Fauskee 06:51**

And so why don't parents do this?

**Kristi Miller** 06:54

That's the million dollar question. I'm, I'm just gonna say it off the bat. And I think most people will agree with me that generally in the group, there is a person who eat generally the alienating parent who has either narcissistic personality disorder and are strong traits, borderline personality disorder, and are strong traits, or any antisocial disorder are strong traits. And they they're not mutually exclusive. They can be combinations of all of those.

**Kim Fauskee** 07:32

Is it happened predominantly in couples that are divorcing? Or is it common with couples that are still living together? In cohabitating,

**Kristi Miller** 07:44

it can happen in intact families, it's less likely. And you know, the targeted parent generally has more agency and influencing contact with the parents. So it's, excuse me with the child. So it's more difficult for the child to be manipulated to the level they need to be to completely reject the parent, but it can happen, large majority happens post divorce or during divorce when there are custody issues.

**Kim Fauskee** 08:17

So how, as therapists How do you guys find out about this, how does it come about? I'm sure a child doesn't come in and say, I think I'm a victim of parental alienation syndrome, or a parent comes in and says, I think I'm a perpetrator of parental alienation syndrome. So how does it come about that you guys get involved in dealing with the former or the latter of this issue?

**Dr. Dana** 08:46

Well, I can say from my experience, Kim, that, generally speaking, it's very unusual for a narcissistic or borderline, or anybody with a personality disorder to come to therapy. So usually, it's the spouse that comes to talk about what's happening, and very quickly is able to identify that there one or 20, how many children they have one or all of their children is being conditioned to reject them and to look at them as being the reason for the demise of the relationship and to really turn them profoundly against the parent.

**Kim Fauskee** 09:24

So if you're the child that's having this happen to them, what are some of the traits that the child starts to? Show?

**Kristi Miller** 09:39

So that's a complex answer to a really great question. Are you asking, Do children are aware that they are being alienating toward their parent?

**Kim Fauskee** 09:58

I guess my assumption would be that they probably aren't. Because they've been manipulated so much to believe that whatever that parent is telling them is true, they have no reason to doubt that. But as

obviously, as therapists, they end up in your practice for a reason, whether it's court ordered, or people are going through divorce or whatever. So there must be some common traits or attributes, or something within their narrative that they start telling you that you're like, Okay, I'm clueless, into what may be going on here. So I guess for the listening audience, if they're aware of this maybe going on in their own household or aware that it's going on in a household to somebody they know, how, what signs would they see in a child that this may be something that's happening to them?

**Kristi Miller** 10:52

Yeah, so you know, we would look at parental alienation in terms of mild, moderate and severe. So when we hang out in the mild category, we can see anything from you know, one parent kind of being a little disparaging about the other parent in front of the children, we could see kind of mild, pushing away from one parent or, you know, kind of stronger alignment toward another parent, that would be some of the things we would see kids preferring to be with one parent over another. And it's and then, you know, the manipulation piece is not necessarily that apparent. There are, you know, in the treatment and assessment world, for parental alienation, we have all these checklists. And there's this four or five factor checklist, where we just dive right in when we're trying to assess a child and where they are. And it's, I mean, we'll call them factors of alienation. And that's what we would look for with kids, they're not necessarily going to be able to articulate it, but when they describe kind of their relationships landscape, you're going to be able to pick out some of these and when is, if at one point, they had a prior positive relationship with a parent. And now they don't, that's, you know, it was just like night and day, all of a sudden, they've kind of turned against them. That's a red flag, that's a red flag. And that's one of the biggest red flags that and absence of abuse and neglect. So those two things coupled together, and a child is completely splitting, meaning one parent is all perfect, and the other parent is completely, just garbage. And that's not human nature. Kids will not do that. And that's an important difference when we're talking about estrangement versus alienation. Because estrangement is almost exclusively the child's reaction to being abused or maltreated, there's something that's actually happening that the child is trying to control. We can get into that more if you want. And it gets very complicated with the alienation pieces, there's actually nothing there. They're coming up with just this sort of nonsense. Reasons why they don't want to be with the parents, you know, wood floors are scratched, or the car smells like coffee, or I don't like the food they can, you know, it's things like that.

**Kim Fauskee** 13:39

So, Dana, when you have a parent and a child, in your practice that date, this is potentially going on? How do you get the parent to understand this, especially like Chrystia talked about if they have a personality disorder? How do you get the parent to understand that there? This is actually child abuse?

**Dr. Dana** 14:05

The the, you're talking about the person with a personality disorder, or the person that's well,

**Kim Fauskee** 14:09

we were talking about that I guess? It happens quite a bit, I guess, with people with personality disorders, not saying that doesn't happen if you don't have personality disorder, but there's a higher preponderance of it with people with personality disorders, I'm assuming Yes, with it. So again, if you're

trying to treat this or to figure this out, and you have both a parent and child in here, how do you how do you how do you do that? Because it just seems like the spin would continue.

**Dr. Dana** 14:41

Well, first of all, people with personality disorders don't usually go to therapy. And if they do, it's very brief, because you can't ask somebody like that to take responsibility for their behavior, because they'll find that as a threat. And if you have a personality disorder, there's no way in the world you can take responsibility for anything negative. So on the very rare occasions where somebody is actually willing to come in to talk about their situation with their kids, and they have a personality, sort of what I tried to do is minimize the damage as much as possible by actually inflating the person's sense of superiority by trying to teach them how to be better parents, I'm usually supremely unsuccessful at doing that, because there's complete denial on the part of the person that's creating the problem with people that are being even as you're boosting their ego. Well, I mean, again, I do the best I can but, you know, if you have a personality sorter, you're really good at reading people. And I think they can tell that I'm not being 100% genuine in my regard for them. But if it's somebody that's being victimized, a husband or a wife, or a, in a situation like that, there's not a whole lot of explaining, that's necessary, because a person has already figured out that, that they're being discriminated against, and their kids are being used as a weapon to hurt them. And it's a really scary situation, because parents don't want to, they don't want to increase the damage being done. So they can't exactly tell their kid Hey, you, your mom, or your dad as a, you know, as a narcissist is, you know, delusional and using all of their influence, you know, to try to turn you against me. So oftentimes, it becomes a legal situation where the lawyer takes the place of the parent in terms of trying to keep the balance in custody and all that. All that stuff is a really tricky situation, I think you probably know more than I do. Because I don't work with a ton of I don't work with a gentleman and I work with a few adolescents. So mostly, I'm working with a disenfranchised parent. And I see how sad and scared and awful that can be, because

**Kim Fauskee** 16:46

so you're working with the parent that doesn't have the personality disorder, per se, right? Yeah, that is saying, hey, this person's alienating me against my child. Well, it's usually using

**Dr. Dana** 16:57

my kid as a weapon to hurt as much as possible. Because there's no holding back when it comes to what a parent is capable of doing, if they feel like they need to hurt the person that they were in a previous relationship with.

**Kim Fauskee** 17:09

So there's obviously somebody listening right now that resonates with what you were just saying, right? So so how do you help that person?

**Dr. Dana** 17:18

Well, I help them, first of all, by helping them realize that what they're experiencing is real. And they're not inventing it, and it's probably even worse than they realize. Because it's hard to imagine, the things that a parent will say to a kid without the other parent around, and how and how necessary it is for a narcissist or borderline person to hurt the person that has either left them or they have left, because for

some reason, they can't ever give up, wanting to hurt the person that they were married to, or were in a relationship with. And they don't even consider their children to be people. They're just objects to manipulate. So they're pretty much capable of unspeakable things and, and most people that are being victimized understand that it's a really awful, difficult situation. And you have to use every means. So you can, especially legally, try to redeem yourself in that situation. I've even worked with a family once where the mom eventually left the dad. And they had two children and the dad was using the kids as a weapon to hurt the ex spouse and he spent probably \$500,000, punishing his wife for a year before he finally kind of gave up and, and realized that he wasn't gonna get his way. But a year of extreme, really hurtful stuff really damaged the children. One of them actually became a heroin addict during the process of trying to figure out how to continue her relationship with her parents. It was really sad to see.

**Kim Fauskee 18:51**

And that was kind of a nice segue. I was gonna ask Christie. I mean, there's some obvious downsides for the kids, and especially if that victimization perpetuates over a long period of time. What are those kids susceptible to down the road?

**Kristi Miller 19:09**

So Amy Baker, who is one of one of the leading experts in the world, I would say for parental alienation. She did a study of adults who had been alienated as children. And the findings. It's heartbreaking, actually, because these kids were forced to deny half of themselves, they had to kill half of themselves in order to survive. And that is a living death, just like the targeted parent has to do as well and the thing that the necessary brain growth When that occurs, their executive functioning places in their brain actually don't function well, because they were not given the essential tools of growing up relationally. So, all this symbolic communication between that parent and child isn't there, the contact, they, they vilify that part in themselves that feels guilty for not having a relationship is just, it's tragic. So you can imagine what would happen, they still, if they're lucky, I think we'll be able to find a place to work on that. unpack that. At some point. Sometimes it's not until the alienating parent dies. Sometimes it's when they're older and feel less controlled by that person, that they can actually start to think for themselves, but it's a lot of irreversible damage. So you know, they will perpetuate the same cycle in their families, drugs, alcohol, you name it, just so they do not have to deal with them.

**Kim Fauskee 21:12**

This PTSD fall into this category

**Kristi Miller 21:15**

of degree. Absolutely, yeah. As you look at these kids brains, and they look like Vietnam vets.

**Kim Fauskee 21:23**

Is there in? Maybe this is a rhetorical question. But is there a common age where this happens? More so than not? I mean, it's I'm sure it can start at any age where the kid can be manipulated as old enough to have that ability. But does that happen more with adolescents and teenagers? Or is it across the board?

**Kristi Miller 21:47**

You know, I think it's less noticeable when children are infants and toddlers, because they're very malleable, we can pick them up and put them where we want, you know, they aren't thinking for themselves, they're not entering into the critical thinking realm, you know. So when they start to have ideas for themselves, or they start to really develop different, more sophisticated relationships, that's when they can be more easily manipulated. But I wouldn't say that an alienating parent targets a certain age of kids, it's I would say, it's more circumstantial, more circumstantial than that.

**Dr. Dana** 22:26

You know, Kim, one of the things I think that's really important to mention is that the more sensitive the child is sort of, from a genetic perspective, you know, being a really highly sensitive person, the deeper the damage is inside of that child. Because the kids walk around feeling all the pain in the family to begin with, and then are forced to make a choice about who they're going to support. And they can feel everybody's pain really acutely. And it just takes them down way, way, way deeper than somewhat of average sensitivity. So that's another thing that's important in measuring the depth of the damages that takes place within a child.

**Kim Fauskee** 23:02

So I was thinking about this parental alienation can also happen as an adult child of parents, I mean, when you're talking about somebody that may be empathetic, or an HSP, were or hasn't stood up to their parents and been manipulated all through their lives. I mean, they could be in their 30s, 20s 30s or 40s. And still have this go on. If you think

**Kristi Miller** 23:28

about it, it's like a cult, right? The cult leader is still in their minds. That is how their brain structures were developed. Right? That's the central core of their thinking processes. And if that voice has not been devalued, in a way, through unpacking, and lots of, you know, clinical help, they still are programmed to believe what they were taught.

**Dr. Dana** 23:57

You know, Kim, my parents got divorced in my early 20s. And my father went on with his life and went on to create another family, but my mom did not. And so she tried to turn me against my father for a great number of years after they got divorced. And then I always say to my mom, you know, you've been divorced for a really long time. It sure doesn't seem like you've ever gotten divorced. And you've actually got to the point where I said to my mom, if you mentioned my father's name in my presence one more time, that will be the end of our relationship, because I'm tired of hearing this crap. And I'm done. You know, listen to you rail about how we victimized you. And that, you know, you can talk to whoever you want to, but I'm off the table in terms of that conversation moving forward. My mom said, Well, you can't tell me who to talk about or what to do. And I said, No, I can actually. And if you mentioned his own name one more time, we're done forever, because I'm, you know, tired of this crap and I don't want to hear it anymore. So we can happen. I mean, she kept it up until I was in my 30s when I finally They just said, Hey, um, you know, one more, and we're done forever.

**Kim Fauskee** 25:04

Yeah. But I mean, you were your therapist, by that time, you've had therapy at that time. Right? So you had the backbone to stand up to your mom and tell her tell her no more, right? Yes. Which I don't think is the rule, but more the anomaly. Because, you know, it took me until I was bigger, stronger and more knowledgeable, to stand up with my father. And just, you know, even though it's still affected me, psychologically didn't affect me physically at that point. So I can, you know, see at that point that I had to grow into a man's body to finally not suffer the physical abuse anymore, but still suffered the psychological abuse until I finally said enough, at that point. Yeah. So Chris, you had mentioned that, that there's a lineage that generally follows that if it was purposely traded upon you growing up that the possibility that you perpetrated upon your kids as well?

**Kristi Miller** 26:04

Yes, that's, I would say that that's a common template, good, bad or otherwise, for, you know, our family of origin, how we're raised and what we see modeled and what we're taught. This is no different. If we're not taught to do this differently, then we will repeat it.

**Kim Fauskee** 26:27

So it's interesting, because I think the lines of good versus bad get blurred here. Because you would think if, and maybe it's an addict's mind a little bit that, you know, you're doing it, but it's not hurting anybody? Or is it? Or is it that you don't even know you're doing it? Because I'm sitting here, and I know the two of you very well, and you know me very well, that we would never perpetuate this upon our kids. Right. So it's interesting to me that somebody could actually consciously do this to their children and not feel and I get it. We talked about people with personality disorders that don't have empathy and don't feel those things. But how that actually happens in a home where somebody doesn't have a personality disorder, or somebody has personality disorder, and somebody stands by and watches and lets it happen.

**Dr. Dana** 27:22

Think about a malignant narcissist, though, Kim, they take great delight in hurting people on purpose. So there's not even a I guess it's fuel for the fire, right? There's no hesitation because if you garner your sense of power and admiration by hurting people on purpose, it's a natural outgrowth of that.

**Kristi Miller** 27:39

Well, and I also think in support of the alienating parents agenda. The denigration campaign is something that is repeated over time. Like this is not something that happens overnight. This is coercive, long term, patterned behavior. That's how they get the results they need. And so there's a whole campaign that's launched by both child eventually which when they're entered into the syndrome piece of it, they are also a member of that denigration campaign. And they'll tell anyone who listens how terrible their mom or dad is. And then the alienating parent is doing the same thing. So people around them are also under the influence of this experience. And no one knows what to do about it generally, because we're taught to listen to the children. Right. And when we were being trained, we were taught to really listen to the children because the children are telling the truth, at least I was. So it's really sort of counterintuitive to be looking at a situation like this and hearing from the mouths of babes, that this parent is absolutely 100% Terrible, and say, but are they? You know, we don't want our children to be maltreated, but, but it's just the system is unrecognizable to so many people.



**Kim Fauskee** 29:12

So I think you make an important point there that this doesn't occur just situationally they occur, it occurs over time. That's right. And they build up this great scenario over that to where like you were saying that not only the victim believing them, but the people surrounding the victim believing that story as well. That's right.

**Dr. Dana** 29:34

As an aside, Kim, I just want to say that I've had the experience of a parent, being incredibly critical of the other parent, and not because the person has a personality disorder, but because they have been profoundly victimized by the person's being unfaithful to them or in some way, something that creates an enormous amount of resentment and bitterness. And so, I don't want to say that it only happens For people with personality disorders, sometimes this happens with people that have been truly victimized by their partner, and are really, really bitter. Under those circumstances, I have felt that I've been able to help the husband or wife get to a place where they really recognize the damage that they might be doing to their kids based on their own bitterness and their own resentment. And usually, under those circumstances, a person can kind of learn to control their behavior and keep it separate from their children. So I don't want to say that it only happens. You know, with people with personalities, that's a predominance. But but there are exceptions to that rule

**Kim Fauskee** 30:36

that somebody is looking for the ultimate retribution. Yeah, short term. Well, I

**Dr. Dana** 30:40

i mean, all of us have a little four year old inside of us that wants to get revenge if we feel like we're not being properly treated. And some people have less control impulsively over their pain than others. And I mean, part of the work and therapies learn how to manage your impulses in a less destructive, self destructive and other destructive way. So that's all possible with somebody with a personality sorter, but it's entirely possible with someone who goes to therapy and really understands that they're in a bad place, and that they really don't want their pain and bitterness to spill out into their children's lives.

**Kim Fauskee** 31:16

Before we started the podcast, I think I had thrown out the reference that I think the statistics say that it happens in 15% of the families and you both scoffed at that statistic that it's well more than that, and maybe the 15% is the ones that can actually count it either admitted to it, or the court forced them into you know, that that label. But I mean, realistically, in both of your practices and what you've seen, how often does do you think it actually does occur?

**Kristi Miller** 31:53

Well, I think, you know, because I specialize in co parenting mediation, and many of the people who come to me are in the middle of discussing custody and child sharing, and all of that, I think a significant portion of my practice, contains maybe the potential for this maybe mild alienation. And then I would say probably, out of those couples, probably Lee 5%, would be categorized as being moderate to severe alienation cases. So I

**Kim Fauskee 32:33**

think, just so everybody's clear, maybe to go through again, what those three stages are, what they contain in there, so people understand what they may or may not be doing.

**Kristi Miller 32:46**

Yeah. So you know, what might be helpful is if I kind of go through some of the alienating behaviors that you'll see from kids, please. And there are eight that are, you know, these are general and you can have some you can have none, you can have mild, you can Okay, so just like

**Kim Fauskee 33:06**

somebody's listening, right, check, check, check, check,

**Kristi Miller 33:09**

crazy rigid about this, just be open when you listen to it. So the campaign of denigration that I talked about where it's this person is bad systematically, always, in all these ways. With the kids, you're going to be hearing these kinds of outrageous reasons why they don't like the parent, you know, they're going to be kind of absurd, or weak or, or kind of frivolous doesn't make sense. You're like, wait, what, you wouldn't reject a parent because of that. This is an important lack of ambivalence toward parents. So what that means is, in healthy relationships, we will be able to acknowledge the good and the bad. Okay, kids who are being alienated, aren't allowed to see any good in the other parent. And they're not allowed to see any bad in the other parent. So there's this rigidity, the splitting, we call it in the biz, and the independent thinker phenomenon, which is where the kids are saying, Dad, this doesn't have anything to do with what mom's saying, you know, this is all my this is my reasoning. These are my ideas. And then another point that follows that is they are using the exact language the alienating parent uses against the spouse. So they cannot take that on as their own thinking. Sadly, and this is where we start to get really pathological about with the kids is the kids show no remorse or guilt for how badly they're targeted parents are being treated, or for how badly they are treating that targeted parent.

**Kim Fauskee 34:53**

And is that because they haven't developed empathy yet or Are

**Kristi Miller 35:00**

can't afford to, we can't afford to, that's the piece of we come back to the basis of survival for the kids that they have been placed in a situation where at all costs, they do not want to lose the love of the alienating parent. They have to absolutely cut off the other half.

**Dr. Dana 35:21**

They've been brainwashed, they've been

**Kristi Miller 35:23**

brainwashed.

**Kim Fauskee 35:24**

He goes back to the cult you were talking about, okay, really?

**Kristi Miller 35:27**

Yeah. And they're also the borrowed scenarios that I kind of referenced before. And then, you know, the wider group of rejecting close family members and friends, and just basically cutting everybody off and spreading the poison. So those are things we will be seeing from kids in, you know, some large form some small form so mild, you'd see some of that, generally, it starts with resisting or rejecting conflict, I mean, contact, those are the things when it starts to not get normal, for example, when co parents come in, and they're saying a child does not want to go to dad's house, no matter what, that's not normal. Right? So we need to immediately get very curious about that and ask much more, and really run it through our lists of alienating behaviors and see what's going on.

**Kim Fauskee 36:30**

Is physical abuse. Any part of this are part and parcel with parent alienation? Or is it potentially a side effect in some of those? Instances?

**Kristi Miller 36:42**

Yeah, so I'd like to talk just a little bit about that, if I may, okay, the abuse is a very clear indicator, on many levels here. So statistics show, and it's in the research, it's also in my experience, that it's the alienating parent, that actually is showing physical sexual abuse, concurrently with alcohol and drug use. So that, again, is on a spectrum. Okay. It's rare for the targeted parent to be the one who is showing abuse at all for the children. One of the reasons why that's a clarifying piece, many people will say, Well, you know, if they probably don't want to go see the mom, because she probably did abuse that child. And what we're seeing is when children are even massively, abused, systematically abused by a parent, they tend to cling on closer to that parent, then they do move away from it. That's how children respond to being abused by parents that's untreated. Okay, so alienation is very different. And I think you could see it's flip flopped, right? They are clinging on very desperately to the parent who actually is doing the abuse, which is the alienating parent. And they are systematically moving away from the targeted parent. It's more complex. So the treatment, we have to know this, if we're going to be treating the children and the targeted parents, it's a very different treatment approach. So it would be abuse specific treatment, if there was if there were abuse between the targeted parent and the child, we would be, you know, really working with each of them to mend, heal and move forward with it would be alienation specific treatment with a child who has been alienated, which usually only happens between the child and targeted parent.

**Kim Fauskee 38:56**

So a question that I haven't asked yet. But is it more common for men to do this to their children or women? I'm sure you've both have seen both. But I my assumption is it's probably more men, percentage wise than it is women, but maybe I'm

**Kristi Miller 39:12**

wrong. It's gender neutral, really. So

**Kim Fauskee 39:15**

it's, so you see an equal amount of both that are?

**Kristi Miller 39:20**

Yes, yes. And, of course, there's research on this too. For years when it first started, it was definitely slanted in one direction where the women were the alienating people against the fathers.

**Kim Fauskee 39:38**

So that was primarily again, assuming that this was retribution against the husband finally for divorce or leaving me for somebody else or whatever the reason was, right.

**Kristi Miller 39:48**

And so now knowledge has expanded research has expanded treatment and assessment and all that has expanded and we're seeing it's very much gender neutral. It is however, still along and kind of more binary gender lines. And I, and I know that, you know, I don't like to hang out in gender specific stuff. But this is where the research is right now that women tend to show their aggression and coercion in more indirectly aggressive ways, where males tend to be more directly aggressive, as well as indirectly aggressive. So that's kind of where we're at. There's a little bit of a different flavor when a father's alienating parent, compared to when a mother is the alienating parent.

**Kim Fauskee 40:37**

So I asked at the end of this question, I'm going to ask you, Christie, because I don't know if attorneys are sending you clients or if the court is sending you clients. But again, I asked Dana, that question about if you're sitting in front of these families, whether it's mother and father, whether it's one or the other, and the child, I don't even know where you start to deal with this issue. I mean, is it first that you have to get the parent to understand what they're doing? Or you have to get the kid to understand what's happening to them? Or is it simultaneous?

**Kristi Miller 41:12**

It's such a complex experience, like Dana said in the beginning, because it really does depend on I think, the severity, generally, I wouldn't see the parents with the child, unless I'm doing family therapy. And then I think it's contraindicated anyway,

**Kim Fauskee 41:33**

is it because the child is less apt to actually speak freely in front of their parents?

**Kristi Miller 41:38**

Yeah. And in my opinion, you know, there's real victimization, potentially, you put this child in a situation where you expect them to be safe enough to have insight and critical thinking and compassion. And that's everything they've had to deny for the last X amount,

**Kim Fauskee 41:55**

you know, so you don't have your fontanelles fused before that happens.

**Kristi Miller 42:00**

Right? Yeah. So you know, generally, when I get a referral from an attorney, it is a couple who are in conflict about the co parenting piece. And this is where it usually gets very sticky, because usually there has been alienation happening. And I don't mean offense to anybody in the court system. When I say this next thing, we still don't know how the hell to handle this.

**Kim Fauskee 42:30**

Oh, that doesn't surprise me at all. I mean, I was thinking about when I was doing a little bit of the research on it myself, I was thinking, Man, this is another one where you don't want to put it in the courts hands. And again, I'll say it. Because I don't think you ever want to put anything in the courts hands and let them make a decision for you. But I fully understand where you're where you're coming from, because they don't have to deal with it. And they're just going to shirk it off to somebody else and give us an opinion. And we'll go from there. That's right. You know,

**Dr. Dana 43:04**

there's a twist on all of this that I feel really compelled to mention. And that said, occasionally, the person with a personality disorder labels the other person as being the alienating parent. Because sometimes when kids become teenagers, and are more capable of really understanding the nature of the narcissistic parent as an example, they start to withdraw from that family from that household. And a lot of times it get to the point where they actually don't want to live with that person anymore. There's a family that I've been working with for a long time, where there were their three children, two of them have already rejected one of the parents, because they figured out where this person was coming from. And actually, the oldest son got to a point where he was feeling suicidal, because of the way that he was feeling and living at his one of his parents houses. So we went over to the other parents house and the narcissistic person has used parent alienation syndrome as a weapon against the other person that believes that they've been brainwashed, if that makes sense. Into hating the dad, it's a dad and a mom. The dad has a personality sorter the mom does not. And the kids don't want to live with the dad because he's recognized very clearly how destructive he is and how self involved he is. But he can't take any responsibility for himself. So it's the mom, that's, you know, at fault, the mom and me, of course, for you know, agreeing with the kids that they have the right to make their decision and live where they want to live. So there's a bit of a twist on this and that sometimes narcissistic person will use it as, as a weapon to try to harm the other parent.

**Kim Fauskee 44:50**

So hypothetically, if we use the number 30%, if it happens in 30% of the households, there's a percentage of that 30% That goes untreated under detect it. And people just go on with their lives. The kids grow up. Right? Is there a chance? And maybe both of you, Dana, probably because you do see more adult children on their own. But is there a chance at some point, they actually recognize this, that this actually happened to them. And then either you're like, wait a minute, you know, I'm 25, or I'm 35, I'm 45. And now all of a sudden, I'm figuring this all out. That, you know, I was either an asshole to my father, I was in a hassle for my mother, or I disowned one or the other. And now I'm thinking, I probably shouldn't have done that, because I was manipulated into doing that. Have you either had experience with that, that somebody had that? I don't know, maybe it's an epiphany, whatever you want to call it. And he's able to resolve that issue with some help, and actually been able to go back to that parent that either they were alienated from and make peace with them, or,

**Dr. Dana** 46:07

you know, most of my practice has to do with people that have grown up or have somebody in their life that has a personality disorder. So it's really common for me to help people deal with their trauma based on whatever the association is with. Either its parents or grandparents or a child or who knows what. So I see people all the time coming to terms with the damage that's been done by somebody with a personality disorder in their life once they become an adult.

**Kim Fauskee** 46:33

And I'm guessing they're probably here, maybe for another reason, whether it's anxiety or, or some level of PTSD or depression. And that kind of comes out from that.

**Dr. Dana** 46:43

Well, I do a ton of educating with people who don't really understand narcissism. I mean, the term is very common because of, you know, the political situation that everybody knows a narcissist, right. But I don't think that most people really understand the depth of the damage that is done. And the wealthier the community, the more narcissism and personality disorders that exist, because not having that disorder does not preclude enormous success, and creativity and, and power. And so if you're in a wealthy community, a lot of the people that are self made, have really, really, really troublesome personalities. But that doesn't mean that you're not capable of an enormous amount of success and I guess, from a statistical standpoint, having a personality disorder affects about 20% of the population. But in my experience, in a welfare community, it's more than 50%. Because that's what it takes to be at the very, very top of the pyramid, in terms of success and fame, and, and fortune, and unfortunately, you know, that success breeds a lot of family problems, really significant family problems.

**Kim Fauskee** 47:56

So I'm gonna go back to Christie and ask her again, a question I ask earlier of the families of the families that you deal with where some level of this is happening. How much success Do you have, in terms of either getting the parents to recognize and then either stopping what they're doing, changing their behavior, and or the victim, getting them to understand what was happening to them and then putting up the stop sign if it continued to happen? I know that's probably a hypothetical question, because maybe people leave your office and you don't really know because you see them for a few times, and they don't come back for for whatever reason, like Dana said, like, you put a narcissist in a therapists couch, and you know, unless you tell them what they want to hear, they're not gonna come back.

**Kristi Miller** 48:45

Right? Well, that's a good point. Because I would, I would need to think about what success would look like, in each one of those cases. Yeah.

**Kim Fauskee** 48:55

And I guess success to me, not being the therapist in the room here. Success to me is stopping the behavior. Number one is understanding as a victim , understanding what's happened to you, what's happening to you, and being able to have the courage to put the stop sign up and say, I'm not gonna let

this happen to me anymore. And or a parent, like you said, either directly doing it or indirectly, and I still can't fathom how somebody wouldn't understand what they were doing to their kid. But again, I don't understand a lot of things. So. Yeah, so that would be success to the parent, either stopping the behavior, the child understanding and having the courage to say, no more.

**Kristi Miller 49:36**

I really feel like my work has to do with the targeted parent and the child. If nothing else, the targeted parent, and they are the ones who usually come in asking for the help, because they've tried everything they know up to that point, and they've convinced themselves they're crazy and You know, so really being able to work with them in terms of grief loss regulation, if they still have younger children in the house, how do you ensure and maintain contact? How do you teach and model compassion? How do you teach them critical thinking skills, so they can start to deeply question the world around them based on how they feel inside their bodies. And, you know, there's always more than just two choices, really being able to help them come up with a parenting script. So that one of the trickiest parts of this system is that the children are watching the targeted parent so closely, as are the alienating parents, if they do if they make just any regular kind of human error, that's magnified, it's exponentially magnified. And then they're further in the doghouse and all of that. So really helping the targeted parent, not doing the stuff that's going to, you know, confirm the lies coming, which is really difficult. But it's a form of parenting that is very specific to targeted parents that help create a safe, consistent, loving space around them as parents. So that's what their children experience every single time they're around them. And even if just one person does the work consistently, my belief is, that's enough to shift some of the system. And I'm not talking about miracle work with people with personality disorders, I think that's a completely separate podcast and experience. I put my energy into the places where I believe, can shift.

**Dr. Dana 52:01**

Gotcha. Awesome, Kim, I just want to mention something again, that we haven't talked about yet in that set. A lot of times, one child can be recruited to be a soldier for the general. And, that kid ends up being as harmful to their siblings as the mother or father is to the children themselves in terms of alienating the other parent. And it's important to understand that it's not just the parent that is responsible, sometimes, one or more children are indoctrinated so deeply, that they end up becoming as destructive, and sometimes even worse than the parent themselves.

**Kim Fauskee 52:41**

So that prompted a question in my head. So if you have multiple children, does it tend to all get manipulated? does one get manipulated? does one get manipulated more than the other?

**Dr. Dana 52:54**

Well, I mean, I can give you probably one of the worst experiences I've ever encountered. And that's that both parents had personality disorders added, as did three of the four children. There was one child who didn't have a personality disorder, the father recruited the twin brothers, to teach the sister how to be a sexual person in the world. And that's how far the influence went. So when older brothers became 14, or 15, and their younger sister was 13, or so they really believed that it was their job to teach her how to be a sexual person. And everybody else in the family went along with it. Because, you know, basically, they were all insane, except for her. And she didn't really understand how badly this

affected her until, you know, she started doing therapy and realized that, you know, that's just one of the many insane things that you had to encounter. In the hands of a parent with a personality disorder. I know this is not exactly on the topic. But I just want to make sure that it's really clear that other family members can join into the alienation in a really powerful way.

**Kim Fauskee** 54:08

So I just watched, Kristi's jaw dropped to the floor, so I'm gonna let her pick her job for a second after that story. And ask her the same question in her experience. If there are multiple kids in the family, does it generally happen to all of them either at the same level or different levels or as one picked on the other left alone? Or does it or is that just a complete generalization?

**Kristi Miller** 54:32

No, I think in my experience, what I've seen there are certain personality types that are more targeted by an alienating parent than others. They're the ones who may not, you know, have as much confidence there. They may be a little more shy, they may not be as concrete a thinker, so deaf. Honestly, there are personality types that I believe are more prone. I don't think it's systematic, but I do think it's transgenerational meaning I do believe that, that this it, every child is affected by it. They may not be moderately or severely trained to alienate, but certainly you could look, and there would be mild collateral damage. Yes, absolutely. And they've been abused just like their other siblings. It may look different, but it's still there. So can I

**Dr. Dana** 55:35

say one thing? Do you mind if I'm a little bit personal with you with you and your history and that you've talked about on the podcast before?

**Kim Fauskee** 55:42

I think I've pretty much done all my dirty laundry so far out here. So

**Dr. Dana** 55:46

I think that part of the answer to the question that you're asking is that if you think about your own family, your sister is almost as though she grew up in a different family than you did.

**Kim Fauskee** 55:55

That's that's grimy, not only the age difference between being her 10 years older, but she was also a female. And the abuse was perpetuated by my father, right, that was going to pick on me being probably the same sex person. And I don't want to say weaker, but much younger

**Dr. Dana** 56:14

will. But I think that part of the reason that your dad victimizes you as profoundly as he did is because you're an incredibly sensitive person by nature, and no offense to your sister, but Jesus of normal sensitivity, so not nearly as much of a threat to your father as you would be. Absolutely. And so I think that that's part of it is that the more sensitive you are, the more of a threat you are to somebody with a personality disorder period. Because they can instinctually tell that you know what they are. And so they're going to do everything they can to make you feel like you're crazy. And there's something wrong



with you for perceiving the reality of who they are as a person. So the more sensitive the kid is, the more they get victimized in my experience.

**Kim Fauskee 56:57**

So you offered a very good segue of what I was going to ask you both as the psychological experts in the room, Dana, you and I have done a podcast on personality disorders. And we went over the top eight of them, obviously, narcissism and borderline personality disorders were the two that we spent a lot of time on. But again, it comes up in this conversation. And it's fairly predominant, obviously, in the subject matter we're talking about today. So I think it's important again and I'm going to ask you both to talk about this. It's for people that are listening, that deal with somebody that has let's hopefully they don't have sociopathic or psychopathic tendencies, but they are dealing with a narcissist. So again, I think giving some helpful tips on how to deal with that narcissistic person that's in your life.

**Dr. Dana 58:00**

It will, it depends on the nature of I mean, like, like we talked about with somebody who's a narcissist, there are multiple varieties,

**Kim Fauskee 58:08**

well, we can talk about it in a parental relationship, a parenting relationship or at this point.

**Dr. Dana 58:15**

But I think that educating yourself about what it is you're dealing with is of primary importance, because most people don't want to believe that the person is as damaged. And as dangerous as they are, even though they've experienced the damage and the danger. None of us want to believe that somebody could be capable of that kind of unconscionable behavior. And so the more you come to understand what makes a person tick that has a personality disorder, the easier it is to try to figure out how you're going to orient yourself around that dynamic. And to make sure that if it's a legal situation, that your attorney without any question knows about personality disorders, because you'd be amazed at how many people I've known that have, you know, had attorneys that rationalize the narcissist behavior? Oh, he doesn't really mean it, or she's not that bad. Or, you know, they can't possibly have said those things. And I think you're making a big deal about nothing, because we don't want to believe just like, we don't want to believe that as sexual abuses is rampant. It is it's

**Kim Fauskee 59:18**

minimizing the victimization. Right. Right. Right.

**Dr. Dana 59:21**

And that happens a lot. So so if you're, if you're going to fight the battle, to try to redeem yourself and have a relationship with your kids, and there's a legal situation, I mean, you would know this better than I because I don't work in the court system, but you better make sure that the person that's helping you understands what you're up against big time. Is that true for you from your experience?

**Kristi Miller 59:43**

That's true as specifically with parental alienation. I truly believe if someone is going to be working with this, they need to be specially trained. It's so easy to miss. And it's so easy to put into different frameworks enough, but it's also one of those things where you're sitting in the room with it. And it kind of fits into this category kind of fits into this category. Well, we'll see, you know, and we, as therapists will just kind of let the family go for a while without doing the necessary steps to treat it immediately. And again, I don't believe all narcissists are bad. You know, I don't think people with personality disorders are bad. I think they're, they're unique and interesting and challenging to work with, because of the nature of the pathology. I do believe that treatment is possible. I'm not sure if treatment is possible within this family structure we're talking about and that's the tricky piece. But I do believe it's possible for most.

**Kim Fauskee** 1:00:53

So you know,

**Dr. Dana** 1:00:55

that Christian, I vehemently disagree on this subject. And that's okay. That's okay. I just want to say that my experience is xe, there's no hope.

**Kim Fauskee** 1:01:06

Kristi has a benevolent heart. Well, she's much kinder than what I'm saying. And

**Kristi Miller** 1:01:09

I also believe in spectrums. I really love that word. And I really think it applies.

**Kim Fauskee** 1:01:15

I mean, that's the beauty of having both of you in this world. And doing what you're doing, because Dana, I mean, there are people that are gonna gravitate to her, and those people are gonna gravitate to you, you know, so it all works. And if somebody's seeking help, that's all you know, it makes it worthwhile. So Kristi's recommendation would be if somebody's listening here, clues into this, and that's possibly happening at some level in their life, that they probably seek out a therapist that has a specialty in this subject matter. Yes, absolutely. I'm doing that. And so before we end, this conversation, which I think has been extremely helpful and extremely informative. You just authored a book that I mentioned early on, called establishing boundaries with kids, I have given an out probably now to a half a dozen times, especially to younger parents. The three of us in here have, well, you have Dana, you have older kids, but Kristi and I still have some teenagers at home. But I think it was especially helpful for those that haven't had the parenting experience before, or have kids that are in that kind of adolescent stage. And they're, you know, going through these things, and I don't know how to deal with them. So I think your book is very helpful for that, I want you to talk a little bit about it, because I think there again, people are listening here that could be helped by purchasing that book.

**Kristi Miller** 1:02:49

Thank you for that. And that's really wonderful feedback. So establishing boundaries with kids is, you know, it's in the form of a guide, because I pictured it being

**Kim Fauskee** 1:03:02

you know, it's like an owner's manual is what I was saying, a little bit

**Kristi Miller** 1:03:05

is geared toward, for the sake of publishing, I think ages two through 10. We had to wrangle it somehow. And I think, in my opinion, what's most helpful about that book is it's a foundational approach to positive parenting that emphasizes really healthy, loving relationships. And it's valuing the relationship over punishment. So it's very much about setting boundaries for discipline for the teaching piece of it, so that you can take the hardcore punishment out, because that's where almost exclusively conflict comes into families in parenting. So I hope it's useful. We talk a lot about the different kinds of boundaries, how to set good boundaries, how to reinforce boundaries, consequences, the kind that work the kind that don't. And I give little examples, real life examples. From the years I've been doing this, so it's, it was fun to write, I have to say,

**Kim Fauskee** 1:04:13

so is there gonna be another book after this owner's manual number two for the adolescents and teenagers,

**Kristi Miller** 1:04:19

that one will probably be a lot thicker.

**Kim Fauskee** 1:04:23

Certainly will be I hope to

**Kristi Miller** 1:04:25

write another one. If I don't, I think this one applies. You just grow it up a little bit, and still use the same techniques really

**Kim Fauskee** 1:04:34

perfect. Well, we appreciate you being here and being an expert in this conversation. And certainly people that want to get a hold of you. We'll put your website, your Instagram, and contact information in the show notes. So if they have questions for you or want to seek your professional counsel, I don't know how to do that. And hopefully this has been pleasant enough for you that We ask for your expertise again, you'd be willing to come back.

**Kristi Miller** 1:05:03

I love what you guys are doing. Thank you so much. Great fun. We're in such a good vibe. I would love to come back. And thanks for having me. All right. Thanks, Kristi. Thanks, Dana.

**Dr. Dana** 1:05:11

The whole Thank you very much. And I just want to say to you that the information that you presented was very educational for me. I didn't know some of the stuff that you're talking about. So thank you so much. Good that it's really helpful. Yeah, thank

**Kristi Miller** 1:05:22

you. You're welcome.

**Kim Fauskee** 1:05:23

I was gonna say you're not the parental alienation expert that we should seek out

**Dr. Dana** 1:05:28

that. The only thing I can say is when my kids were adolescent. I had a full head of hair. Yeah, perfect. Not so much anymore.

**Kim Fauskee** 1:05:33

All right, well, I'm gonna hit the off button now. Thanks, everybody, for listening.

**Fear Me Out** 1:05:41

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