

## Coping with Narcissistic Parental Alienation? Consider These Tips

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Little research on [narcissistic](#) parental alienation exists, and many who have experienced this aspect of narcissism are desperate to find help. This article is written to address the issue from a psychological perspective only, in an effort to provide those coping with this situation with tips and strategies. However, it is also possible to seek legal assistance.

### WHAT IS PARENTAL ALIENATION?

Narcissistic parental alienation syndrome refers to the psychological manipulation of a child by an alienating parent (the narcissistic parent). The manipulation typically results in the child's [rejection](#), disdain, and lack of [empathy](#) toward the other, targeted parent.

While parental alienation may occur even when narcissism is not a factor, for the purposes of this article, I will discuss parental alienation that has been instigated by a narcissistic parent.

If you are the “targeted” parent of this syndrome, or if you are trying to help a targeted parent, then the following strategies may be helpful.

You may have to engage, even if you prefer to avoid conflict.

Some of the alienated parents I've worked with have called this a battle, while others found this term too light and preferred “war.” Even when you don't want to fight with your co-parent, their behavior may force you to take action to maintain custody or visitation of your children.

You might have tried to collaborate with your co-parent. You might have suggested [finding a therapist](#) together and even tried bringing them to [relationship](#) or [family counseling](#). But if the person with narcissism doesn't want to participate in therapy, does not believe they have done anything wrong, or has no desire to change, you are unlikely to get very far. It helps to understand you do not have a “typical” situation on your hands. The person with narcissism may have already managed to manipulate or damage your sense of self in many ways. You might feel as if they have dashed your dreams for love and crushed your heart. What do you do now that they also seem bound and determined to take away the children you value more than anything else?

It's not a simple task to co-parent with a hostile adversary, and it can be even more difficult when you want to keep what you're feeling from spilling over to affect your children. You will have to figure out how to parent your children in spite of the feelings you have for the other parent and the feelings and behaviors they are demonstrating toward you.

A good place to begin is to figure out how to make peace with reality. It's generally unhelpful to ruminate over the unfairness of it all, your feelings of hatred and hurt, or the fact things have become so difficult. You will likely have these negative thoughts, emotions, and feelings, but you may be able to better process them by talking them over with friends and family or your counselor and by keeping track of them in a journal.

Create a plan and develop your resources.

Dealing with parental alienation is not easy. It can be exceedingly painful when your children resist your attempts to connect or view you as the "bad" parent, which is often the case. In your hurt, or out of a wish to do what's best for your children, you might wonder if it's better to give up the fight. But this could mean giving up custody, your right to parent your own children or even see them as much as you'd like.

Battles cannot be fought alone. You will need many resources to navigate the difficult terrain that lies ahead. Some potential resources include allies, legal experts, strong [boundaries](#), self-care strategies, a good counselor, [parenting](#) strategies, and personal strength. If a person is manipulating you as well as your children, the manipulation may reach a point where you feel as if you are unable to trust in your own reality. Having a friend or family member present when you need to have discussions with your co-parent may be a helpful way to stay grounded. A good counselor can help you explore the best ways to talk about the situation with your children and may also recommend family counseling.

It can also be helpful to join a support group for parents affected by parental alienation. If you can't find one locally, you may still be able to find helpful resources and web support. If you can find people who've experienced similar situations, their advice may be helpful, at least as a form of support.

Develop a plan, with the help of your counselor and legal aid, to address and face and allegations that may be made against you. Do you have proof to counter claims you know to be lies? Track down proof. Keep a record of any incidents or contradictory statements, without engaging or participating in conflict with your co-parent. Arrange to have a friend or trusted family member when you meet your co-parent to pick up or drop off your children. This can be a good idea for your own well-being and safety, but a witness may also be useful in the event of a legal battle.

The bottom line is, having supportive friends and family can help you get through this challenge. You need these people so you can process your feelings, receive good counsel, and develop a plan to move forward.

Take good care of yourself.

I believe it's especially important to remember to love yourself through this chapter of your life. Practice [forgiveness](#) toward yourself for small mistakes you may have made in the past, as a spouse or as a parent, and offer yourself [compassion](#) and understanding instead. If your relationship was characterized by [abuse](#), remember that you are out of it now. Reminding

yourself of your resolve to live abuse-free can be a good first step, but then remind yourself that this can extend to include any harsh self-criticism that exists within your own mind. Remember: self-compassion is essential for moving forward.

Your physical health is also important. To maintain good physical health, try to eat nutritious foods and get plenty of sleep and exercise. Be mindful of the link between emotional and physical health: having affirming, safe people in your circle of influence can help you stay positive and keep your wits about you. It can be even more difficult to withstand the pressure if you aren't taking good care of your health—emotional and physical—so commit to making self-care a top priority.

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If you are a religious or [spiritual](#) person, turning to spiritual or religious leaders in your community and the higher power you believe in can help you feel both stronger and not alone. Whether you [meditate](#), pray, or connect in some other way, many find it beneficial to “fill” empty psychological reserves in this spiritual way.

Use wisdom.

Think back to strategies your co-parent may have used to manipulate you in the past and remember not to allow these same tactics to work on you now. It may be difficult to realize you are being manipulated as it's happening, especially when you are primarily concerned for your children. Try to use your own feelings as a guide. Do you feel angry, confused, [guilty](#), or ashamed? Take a moment to consider why you feel that way.

If you believe you are being manipulated, don't allow yourself to react heatedly, but plan ahead for when the same strategies might be used with your children. Talk over your options with your counselor. Developing firm boundaries and sticking to them can help you avoid “traps.”

If, over the course of the relationship you had with your co-parent, you gained knowledge of the particular tactics they used—lying, [gaslighting](#), boundary violation, anger, or playing the victim, to name a few—you may be able to use this knowledge, even if only to prepare and forewarn yourself.

You may feel [anger](#) and other similar emotions toward the other parent. You may have chosen to practice forgiveness. You may understand their actions stem from a mental health concern, such as narcissism. Regardless of how you think of the situation, it can be helpful to remain calm when dealing with the co-parent in person. Try to contain your emotions and feelings instead of giving them the reaction they may be seeking.

Know your weaknesses.

The other parent likely already knows your weaknesses, and they may attempt to use these against you.

I believe that the best way to counteract exploitation of your weaknesses is to know these weaknesses yourself. Be honest and open with yourself. If this is something you struggle with, it can help to explore this with your counselor. Developing your personal strength can help you learn to accept your weaknesses as part of you and embrace them. If there are aspects of these you can and would like to change, you can work on a plan to do so.

But even simply acknowledging your areas of weakness is a great exercise in self-acceptance. Once you can embrace your own fears and perceived faults, these things are likely to lose any hold they have on you. If you are okay with yourself, with all of who you are, it will be much more difficult for someone to use any aspect of your [self](#) against you.

Don't lose focus on your strengths, either, as you consider your weaknesses.

Don't compete.

Sometimes parents attempt to buy the loyalty of their child(ren) by pulling out all the bells and whistles when it comes to promises, gifts, and privileges. The parent may not explicitly state these things are exchanged for the children's loyalty, but this is generally implied or clearly communicated non-verbally.

It can be difficult to resist the urge to compete, but instead, try to focus on yourself and your own parenting values. It is still important for you to understand the dilemma your children are facing. Without a full understanding of the situation, these bells and whistles are attractive to them. Understand this, and also the manipulative tactics at play.

What may bring you greater peace of mind than an attempt to compete with your co-parent is consideration of what you have to offer your children. What are your personal strengths and values? While they may not be tangible or have monetary value, "gifts" of intrinsic value will sustain your children throughout their lives:

No matter what is going on in your personal life, particularly with regards to the challenges you are facing with your co-parent and children, it can help to avoid expending all of your energy focusing on what doesn't work. Maintaining a positive attitude can be difficult, but try to practice gratitude by waking up each morning and welcoming the day.

1. Empathy
2. Validation
3. [Love](#)
4. Security
5. Stability
6. [Kindness](#)
7. Strength
8. Good role-modeling
9. [Truth](#)
10. Presence
11. Attunement

12. [Healthy attachment](#)

13. Abuse-free environment

Your children may not immediately recognize the worth of these [values](#), but be constant in your demonstration of love and affection for them, and commit to practicing these values, even when it is difficult.

Enjoy your life.

No matter what is going on in your personal life, particularly with regards to the challenges you are facing with your co-parent and children, it can help to avoid expending all of your energy focusing on what doesn't work. Maintaining a positive attitude can be difficult, but try to practice [gratitude](#) by waking up each morning and welcoming the day. Notice the good things you do have and keep in mind the things in life you are thankful for, instead of focusing on the negative.

Another helpful practice is demonstrating [resilience](#) and [confidence](#) each day to your children. You do this by living these values, by genuinely showing your children your strength and love for them. Children may naturally gravitate toward strength. If you can show yourself and your children unwavering and positive strength through the process of living well, you may be able to minimize any damage caused by the other parent. This may, in fact, be one of the most important things you do for your children in the long run.

I hope some of these strategies are helpful as you attempt to manage the challenges that may come your way when co-parenting while experiencing parental alienation. Narcissistic abuse is often so personalized and insidious that it can be difficult for people who have not experienced it to fully understand how daunting and far-reaching it can be. Regardless of how much support you have, you may feel alone, as if other people in your life have no clue what you are up against.

But remember that you are not alone. Developing trust and faith in yourself, and prioritizing your well-being, can help you remain strong. If you aren't already working with a compassionate therapist or counselor, finding one who has training or experience appropriate for your situation can also be of great benefit.

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