

THE EMOTIONAL LIFE OF THE TARGETED PARENT

Most of the targeted parent's emotions were negative, with alienation described by the parents as "my biggest nightmare," the "worst experience of my life," and "a harrowing ordeal that never really ends."

- 1. Sadness**
- 2. Loss**
- 3. Yearning**
- 4. Unending suffering**
- 5. Concern for their child**
- 6. Shock and awe**
- 7. Desperate**
- 8. Weary**
- 9. Worried and afraid**
- 10. Confused, without a plan of action**
- 11. Victimized by the system**
- 12. Alone**
- 13. Anger and frustration**

Common characteristics of parents that were able to reunite with their children:

Negative emotions flooded targeted parents on a daily basis, enlisting them in a war they did not want and were not prepared to fight. Nonetheless, they managed to cope and draw on an unwavering commitment to their children during the long and arduous journey. They experienced themselves as being on a mission to rescue their children and this mission infused their lives with purpose and meaning. They developed identities as targeted parents fighting for their children. Some common thoughts among targeted parents were "What helped me is that I am a very persistent person with a lot of fight in me". I spent nearly every waking minute thinking about how to

rescue my daughter,” while another said he “launched into the fight of his life.”

Parents understood they were in a war and realized they needed to marshal their resources and develop a plan of engagement.

1. Energized
2. Committed
3. Focused
4. Courageous
5. Patient
6. Careful
7. Grateful
8. Appreciate the good

Conceptualize Alienation as a Battle

Alienation is a battle for the heart and mind of your child. As a targeted parent, you need to steel yourself for the prospect of a prolonged and protracted battle. Inner and external resources need to be reserved and allocated as necessary. You also need to expect the unexpected and not waste any time or energy being surprised or outraged at the behaviors of your ex. Accept that the life of a targeted parent will be filled with gross injustices, rude awakenings, and an enormous waste of time and money.

Because it is a battle, it is essential that you have a battle plan, a vision of what success would mean for you and your child, whether it is to hold on to the relationship before your child becomes more severely alienated or to reconcile with a currently alienated child. Once the goal is conceptualized you can develop an action plan. The plan will help you stay focused and committed during times when you might despair and feel like giving up. The plan will help you see that each small step you take (each phone call, each letter, each option considered) is part of an overall strategy to one day get your child back. Part of the plan must involve taking the long view, understanding that the plan is long-term and not likely to result in immediate reconciliation or improvement or judicial action. Keeping expectations appropriately low and long-term can help buffer you

from the crushing disappointment of failed efforts or lack of immediate results or timely action.

Actions to Take:

- 1. Appreciate the good**
- 2. Take care of yourself**
- 3. Get social support**
- 4. Work with a mental health provider who understands**
- 5. Find serenity**
- 6. Develop a mantra**
- 7. Call on a helpful image (the child is a puppet being controlled or a prisoner)**
- 8. Validate your identity as a parent**

Living with parental alienation is excruciating and heartbreaking. Targeted parents experience a range of negative emotions over an extended period of time. The process of being alienated and the efforts to reconnect with the lost child can be all-consuming. It is important for targeted parents to periodically take a step back to experience themselves as more than just a targeted parent and, thereby, to not let the alienation define them. They need to take care of themselves in order to forge ahead in their alienation journey.

Amy J. L. Baker and Paul R. Fine, editors, Surviving Parental Alienation, a journey of hope and healing (Lanham, Maryland: Rowan & Littlefield, 2014) pgs. 131 to 153