

Legal



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Choosing a professional

by Joan T. Kloth-Zanard

Picture this scenario that you may have experienced: you have just walked out of your child's therapist's office; the therapist has just informed you that your child does not want a relationship with you, and added that your child is ready, they are not going to make the child visit with you.

Linda Gottlieb, one of the leading authorities on parental alienation, would say, "Children should not be allowed to drive the visitation bus!" But how do you go about getting a therapist who understands what you and your child(ren) are going through? How do you ensure that the chosen therapist gets it?

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There are all sorts of professionals out there, and it can be challenging to quickly assess their fit for your purposes. However, what you can do is ask them the right questions to ascertain whether they can handle high conflict divorce with parental alienation in the mix.

If you do not ask the hard questions, you may end up with a professional who does not know what to do when it hits. So do not be afraid. If you have the question, it is probably a valid one.

Questions you may want to ask when interviewing a professional:

1. Have you ever handled a high-conflict divorce and custody case?

2. If so, did it involve a case where children were being alienated from one of the parents, their relationship with that parent actively compromised or destroyed?
3. How did you handle that case, and what was the outcome?
4. Did any badmouthing, slander, false allegations, visitation issues or the like occur? If so, how did you handle them?
5. In your own words, how would you define "parental alienation"? "Custodial interference"? Hostile or aggressive parenting?
6. Have you read anything by Amy Baker, Linda Kase Gottlieb, Joan Kloth-Zanard, Douglas Darnell, Dr. Craig Childress, Dr. Jennifer Harman, or Dr. Richard Warshak, just to name a few?
7. Have you been to any trainings, conferences or symposiums on parental alienation?


"But I don't have final decision-making!" You might think. This is a huge problem, and lack of such decision-making is constantly used against the targeted/alienated parent.

If you cannot vet the therapists/professionals, still ask those tough questions to assess who you will be dealing with. However, your main job in this case will be to learn how to endear these individuals to you. You have to learn how to show them that what they have been told is false without actually badmouthing the other parent. In effect, you will be helping to educate those professionals using critical thinking skills. And this is where many parents have difficulty.

Many parents make the grave mistake of being combative with the professionals. Not only does it make the parent look like they are the problem, but it often becomes the defining evidence in that causes them to lose their case. Remember that you are dealing with professionals who may be arrogant and feel like they know everything. So ask them questions as if you needed their advice. Make them feel like you respect them, and they will then respect you.

I am not saying to stay silent on the issues, but rather to indicate them in a way that makes it look like you are asking for their help. For example, if the other side is not providing the afterschool schedule, you could say, "Recently, I requested a copy of our child's after school schedule, but I am not getting an answer. What do you recommend I do to get this schedule?" Or "My child has been coming to me lately very angry and saying that I am a mean monster who hit them. I have never hit my child, and I feel like I should be correcting this misrepresentation so that they do not continue to feel this way. How do you recommend I do this?"

Also, try to keep the topics in the present because that is easier for the therapist to deal with than rehashing the past that cannot be changed. In other words, while the child might be bringing up the past, you can keep it in the present by focusing on ways to address it now.

Most importantly, do your homework about custodial interference and parental alienation so that you can determine if the professionals really know what they are talking about. And don't shy away from doing some extra research on the professionals themselves by checking Rip-off Reports, Health Grades, USComplaints.com and other websites where previous clients can report on them. Just keep in mind that you may have to use several versions of the name to get the information: Sam and Samuel, Elizabeth or Beth, and so on. 

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