

The Domains of Parent-Child Conflict and the Causal Attributions for “Parental Alienation”

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A Compendium of Parent-Child Conflict List of Domains

PCC-00: Empathic Failures

- 01 Child/Parent – Normal-Range Expressions of Individual Differences Creating Minor Breach-and-Repair Sequences
- 02 Parent – Narcissistic Failure of Parental Empathy
- 03 Child – Child Insensitivity and Empathic Failure

PCC-01: Situational Strains

- 01 Child - Captivated by an Object of Desire
- 02 Child – Resistance to Unpleasant Activity
- 03 Child – Resistance to Stopping Pleasurable Activity
- 04 Child – Resistance to Transition
- 05 Child – Wanting Affection
- 06 Child – Response to Parental Discipline
- 07 Child – Stress-Related Emotionality/Behavioral Dysregulation

PCC-02 Child Vulnerability Strains:

- 01: Child – Autism-Spectrum Vulnerability
- 02: Child – Behavioral Over-Activity
- 03: Child – Motivational-Behavioral Impulsivity
- 04: Child – Anger Regulation Challenges
- 05: Child – Anxiety Regulation Challenges
- 06: Child – Fragile Child Regulation

PCC-03 Child/Parent Vulnerability Strains:

- 01: Child/Parent – Attachment Insecurity
- 02: Child/Parent – Temperament Goodness of Fit
- 03: Child/Parent – Motivational Differences
 - 01: Parent Task-Oriented – Child Bonding-Oriented
 - 02: Parent Authority-Oriented – Child Independence-Oriented

PCC-04 Parent Vulnerability Strains:

- 01: Parent – Withdrawn/Disengaged

01: Emotionally Distant, Disengaged, Neglectful

02: Over-Sad Disengaged Parenting

02: Parent – Inflexible/Rigid Parenting

03: Parent – Intrusive Hyper-Anxious Parenting

04: Parent – Anger Dyscontrol in Parenting

05: Parent – Physically Assaultive Parenting

XX: Parent – Sexually Assaultive Parenting

PCC-05: Family Systems Strains

01 Family – Child Triangulation – Parental Coalition Against Child

02 Family – Child Triangulation – Parent-Child Coalition Against Parent

03 Family – Problematic Family Transition

Modifiers:

AP: Antisocial Pathology

The parent-child conflict evidences antisocial pathology

CG: Chronic Grievance – Absent Forgiveness

One or both parties to the parent-child conflict maintain a chronic grievance toward the other party which is asserted to be “unforgivable”

TC: Terminal Course

The parent-child conflict has mutated into a form that terminates the parent-child relationship

M: Malice

The parent-child conflict evidences a desire to inflict injury

NP: Narcissistic Parenting

Parenting evidences narcissistic or borderline personality organization

R: Revenge

The parent-child conflict reflects a desire to revenge past conflict or perceived injustice

SAC: Substance Abuse - Child

The parent-child conflict emerges from or is exacerbated by child substance abuse factors

SAP: Substance Abuse - Parent

The parent-child conflict emerges from or is exacerbated by parental substance abuse factors

Attributions of Causality for the Cut-Off in the Child's Attachment Bonding Motivations
Toward a Parent Associated with Allegations of "Parental Alienation"

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Parent-child conflict can emerge from individual strains or combinations of strains identified in the Compendium of Parent-Child Conflict. For example, a child's autism-spectrum vulnerability (PCC-02-01) may combine with the child being captivated by an object-of-desire (PCC-01-01) to create parent-child conflict, or a child's anger regulation challenges (PCC-02-04) may combine with rigid and inflexible parenting (PCC-04-02) to create parent-child conflict.

In the family processes traditionally identified as "parental alienation," the causal assertions for the child's rejection of the targeted parent are:

Assertions of Causality by the Allied Parent and Child:

Code	Domain
PCC-04-01-01	Parent – Withdrawn/Disengaged: Emotionally Distant, Disengaged, Neglectful
Description: The targeted parent is too emotionally withdrawn, distant, and disengaged with the child. The attribution may contain allegations that the targeted parent spends too much time with his or her new romantic partner or new spouse and does not spend enough one-on-one special time with the child.	

Code	Domain
PCC-04-02	Parent – Inflexible/Rigid Parenting
Description: The targeted parent is too rigid and inflexible in his or her parenting of the child and is not sufficiently sensitive to what the child feels, wants, or needs.	

Code	Domain
PCC-04-04	Parent – Anger Dyscontrol in Parenting
Description: The targeted parent is unable to regulate his or her anger and so becomes overly angry and too punitive with the child.	

Code	Domain
PCC-00-02	Parent – Narcissistic Failure of Parental Empathy
Description: The targeted parent is too self-absorbed and fails to empathize with the child's wants, needs, and experience.	
Modifier TC-NP: Terminal Course from the addition of Narcissistic Parenting	
The chronic narcissistic failure of parental empathy for the child's experiences exhibited by the narcissistically self-absorbed targeted parent produces child discouragement regarding the possibility of establishing an affectional and empathically attuned relationship with the targeted parent, resulting in the child's emotional and psychological detachment from the parent-child relationship	

Code	Domain
Modifier - CG	Chronic Grievance – Absent Forgiveness
Description: The child maintains a chronic grievance toward the targeted parent for past parental failures that the child asserts are “unforgivable”	

In some cases:

Code	Domain
PCC-04-05	Parent – Physically Assaultive Parenting
Description: The targeted parent was physically assaultive toward the child (i.e., physical child abuse) or toward the allied parent (i.e., domestic violence)	

Code	Domain
PCC-04-XX	Parent – Sexually Assaultive Parenting
Description: The targeted parent was sexually assaultive toward the child (i.e., incest)	

Assertions of Causality by the Targeted Parent:

Code	Domain
PCC-05-02	Family – Child Triangulation – Parent-Child Coalition Against Parent
Description: There is a cross-generational parent-child coalition of the child with a narcissistic/(borderline) allied and apparently “favored” parent against the targeted parent.	
Modifier TC-NP: Terminal Course from the addition of Narcissistic Parenting	
The addition of narcissistically distorted parenting practices by the allied and “favored” parent transforms the child’s conflict with the targeted parent into a terminal course of parent-child conflict that terminates the parent-child relationship.	

Code	Domain
PCC-05-03	Family – Problematic Family Transition
Description: Problematic transition of the family from an intact family structure to a separated family structure following divorce.	
Non-cooperation of allied and “favored” parent in supporting a separated family structure; tacit or active support provided by the allied and “favored” parent for a cut-off in the child’s relationship with the targeted parent.	
Modifier TC-NP: Terminal Course from the addition of Narcissistic Parenting	
The addition of narcissistic parenting from the allied and “favored” parent transforms the family’s problematic transition to a separated family structure into a terminal course of	

parent-child conflict that terminates the child’s relationship with the targeted parent. Causal Process: The “splitting”¹ dynamic of the allied and “favored” parent’s narcissistic/(borderline)² personality organization prevents the allied and “favored” parent from accommodating to the new complexity in role-relationships inherent to separated family structure, in which the spousal relationship with the other person has ended, but the parental relationship of the other person continues. Within the black-and-white polarized structure of the “splitting” dynamic, the termination of the spousal relationship requires the termination of the parental relationship as well. The polarized structure of the “splitting” dynamic requires that the dissolution of the marital relationship with the other spouse also means the dissolution of the parental relationship of the other spouse. The polarized thinking of the “splitting” dynamic requires that the ex-spouse also becomes an ex-parent.

Code	Domain
PCC-01	Situational strains
Description: Situational parent-child conflict serve as justifying events related to more complex causative strains of parent-child conflict (PCC-05-02: Cross-Generational Coalition; and PCC-05-03: Problematic Family Transition).	
Modifier TC-NP: Terminal Course from the addition of Narcissistic Parenting Situational strains of parent-child conflict are transformed into a terminal course of parent-child conflict (i.e., are used as child justifications to terminate the parent-child relationship) by the addition of narcissistic parenting emanating from the allied and “favored” parent through the parent-child coalition of the child with the narcissistic/(borderline) allied and “favored” parent (PCC-05-02-LM-NP). Situational parent-child conflicts are distorted and exaggerated into justifications for the cut-off of the child’s attachment bonding motivations toward the targeted parent. The allied and “favored” parent provides tacit or active support for the child’s provocations of situational parent-child conflicts.	

¹ Splitting: “The individual deals with emotional conflict or internal or external stressors by compartmentalizing opposite affect states and failing to integrate the positive and negative qualities of self or others into cohesive images. Because **ambivalent affects cannot be experienced simultaneously**, more balanced views and expectations of self or others are excluded from emotional awareness. Self and object images tend to alternate between polar opposites; exclusively loving, powerful, worthy, nurturant, and kind – or exclusively bad, hateful, angry, destructive, rejecting, or worthless.” (American Psychiatric Association, 2000, p. 813; emphasis added)

American Psychiatric Association. (2000). Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (Revised 4th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.

² Theorists consider the narcissistic personality as possibly representing a variant of borderline personality organization,

“One subgroup of borderline patients, namely, the narcissistic personalities... seem to have a defensive organization similar to borderline conditions, and yet many of them function on a much better psychosocial level” (Kernberg, 1975, p. xiii);

“The defensive organization of these patients [narcissists] is quite similar to that of the borderline personality organization in general...” (Kernberg, 1975, p. 229).

Kernberg, O.F. (1975). Borderline conditions and pathological narcissism. New York: Aronson.

Code	Domain
PCC-00-03	Child – Child Insensitivity and Empathic Failure
Description: The child provokes parent-child conflict from an insensitivity to and lack of empathy for the parent's feelings and desires; secondary to more complex causative strains of parent-child conflict (PCC-05-02: Cross-Generational Coalition; and PCC-05-03: Problematic Family Transition).	

Code	Domain
PCC-00-04	Child – Anger Regulation Challenges
Description: The child displays overly hostile and angry behavior toward the targeted parent; secondary to more complex causative strains of parent-child conflict (PCC-05-02: Cross-Generational Coalition; and PCC-05-03: Problematic Family Transition).	

In some cases:

Code	Domain
PCC-02-05	Child – Anxiety Regulation Challenges
Description: The child displays overly anxious and fearful behavior toward the targeted parent; secondary to more complex causative strains of parent-child conflict (PCC-05-02: Cross-Generational Coalition; and PCC-05-03: Problematic Family Transition).	