

**Assessing whether alienating behaviour is causing or contributing to child resistance or refusal**

**Please note that this tool should only be used in conjunction with the** [**‘Children’s resistance and refusal to spending time with a parent’ guide.**](https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/grown-ups/professionals/ciaf/resources-for-assessing-child-refusal-resistance/) **The guide details that there are numerous reasons a child might refuse contact, and this tool should only be used within this context:**



* *Alienated – experiencing or inducing feelings of isolation or estrangement.*

# Please note this tool has been developed following review of relevant literature, experiences of Cafcass practitioners and feedback from parents

# How to use the tool

This is an analytical or ‘thinking’ tool to be used by Family Court Advisers (FCAs) after they have completed interviews with parents and children, observed or facilitated child/parent contact, and gathered relevant information from other professionals. The purpose of the tool is not to apply a label to the adult behaviour, but to support the analysis of the child’s experience. It is broken down into three sections:

1. *Behaviours by a child where they have experienced alienating behaviours*
2. *Alienating behaviours by a parent who is intermittently or persistently impacting on the child’s relationship with the other parent*
3. *Behaviours often exhibited by a parent from whom the child has been alienated.*

FCAs can click on ‘choose an item’ to indicate the frequency of the behaviours.

While these behaviours can be seen in families where resistance requires assessment, not all of them will be present in every case involving alienation, and any of the factors taken alone will not be an indicator of alienation. A cluster of **frequently** occurring child and adult behaviours will help to inform the analysis of child impact.

This is not a scored tool i.e. there is no numerical value to attach to the indicators or examples.

Please note: **this tool should not be used in cases where the child is resisting or refusing time with a parent as a justifiable rejection e.g. when there has been domestic abuse or other forms of harmful parenting**.  **It is also not a relevant tool when any of the other reasons for the child’s resistance or refusal e.g. affinity, attachment or the child’s own independent preference are the primary factors.**

**Practitioners need to be aware of the pattern over which these factors may develop within a family and over time as that will inform the assessment and provide a greater understanding of what is happening for the child. Often the behaviours of the parent that the child lives with are observable prior to the child’s resistance strengthening or becoming refusal, and prior to the other parent displaying response behaviours such as those noted below. The Practitioner needs to be alive to early signs of alienating behaviour to reduce the risk of emotional harm to the child and to enable the court to be able to make informed decisions about the most appropriate person to care for the child at the earliest possible stage in the child’s life.**

**Practitioners will need to conscious of the behaviours of the rejected parent and at what stage these became evident. If they were present before the child started to resist or refuse time with them, then there may be justifiable reasons for the child to be uncomfortable spending time with them and hence reduce the likelihood that alienation is the significant factor.**

**This should be used as a working tool during the life of the case. A critical factor for practitioners to consider when using this tool is the inverse relationship between the gathering or exhibiting of evidence and the opportunity for the court to intervene over time, should a change of where the child lives be the only way to preserve relationships with both parents (see below).**

# Behaviours exhibited by a child where they have experienced alienation or implacable hostility

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| The child’s opinion of a parent is **unjustifiably** one sided, all good or all bad; idealises one parent and devalues the other.  | Choose an item.  |
| Trivial, false, weak and/or irrational reasons to justify dislike or hatred.  | Choose an item.  |
| Allegations of harm are made against the rejected parent which, following investigation are either unsubstantiated or found not to have occurred. | Choose an item. |
| Reactions and perceptions are unjustified or disproportionate to parent’s behaviours. This is often based around a single incident or alleged incident. | Choose an item.  |
| Talks openly and without prompting about the rejected parent’s perceived shortcomings  | Choose an item.  |
| Revises history to eliminate or diminish the positive memories of the previously beneficial experiences with the rejected parent. May report events that they could not possibly remember.  | Choose an item.  |
| Extends dislike / hatred to extended family of rejected parent (rejection by association)  | Choose an item.  |
| Where otherwise compliant children appear to defy the resident parent’s verbal and observed attempts to encourage contact | Choose an item. |
|  No guilt, or ambivalence regarding their attitudes towards the rejected parent | Choose an item.  |
| Speech about rejected parent appears scripted, it has an artificial quality; no conviction; uses adult language; has a rehearsed quality | Choose an item.  |
|  Claims to be fearful but is aggressive, confrontational, even belligerent.  | Choose an item.  |
| Otherwise compliant children who do not recognise the authority of professionals or the court. | Choose an item. |
| Other: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | Choose an item.  |

# Behaviours demonstrated by a parent who is intermittently or persistently alienating

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| Actively denigrates and exaggerates flaws of other parent to the child, directly and indirectly e.g. may ask others to do this also.  | Choose an item.  |
| A resident parent with authority over all aspects of a child’s life but abdicates parental responsibility regarding the relationship with the other parent (e.g. “I won’t make them do something they don’t want to do”). | Choose an item |
| A resident parent who will not ‘force’ or ‘drag’ a child to contact and uses those or other negatively loaded terms  | Choose and item |
| Coaches or instructs the child in what to say to professionals and others about negative experiences of the rejected parent.  | Choose an item.  |
| Where a resident parent applies to the court to reduce the amount of time the child spends with the other parent, particularly where there have been previous proceedings, and there appear to be no safety or welfare issues. | Choose an item. |
| Where a resident parent moves locality without agreement and a shared care arrangement or significant contact arrangement becomes unworkable | Choose an item. |
| Refusal to hear positive comments about other parent; quick to discount child’s good times as trivial and unimportant.  | Choose an item.  |
| Overt and covert threats to withdraw love and affection from child unless other parent, and/or siblings that live with the other parent, are rejected.  | Choose an item.  |
| Expresses no concern or empathy that the child is missing out on a previously positive relationship with the other parent. Is disinterested in the impact this may have on their development and identity.  | Choose an item.  |
| Portrays the other parent as dangerous (**and this is not justified**). False or fabricated allegations of physical abuse, sexual, and/or emotional abuse or a single incident has disproportionate levels of fear or risk associated.  | Choose an item.  |
| Telephone messages, gifts, and communications from the other parent to child are persistently destroyed, ignored, or passed on to the child with disdain.  | Choose an item.  |
| False information repeated to child; distorts history and may make false allegations to professionals and in court proceedings  | Choose an item.  |
| Does not correct child’s rude, defiant behaviour directed toward the other parent but would not permit child to do this with others.  | Choose an item.  |
| Is reluctant to allow professionals to make arrangements to see the child privately or tries to exert control over the enquiries the professional makes  | Choose an Item |
| Makes the child aware of their own distress and emotional fragility.  | Choose an item.  |
| Where a resident parent insists on being present (in person or on media) during contact time that has been assessed as safe or where it has been previously agreed was safe, without significant event to alter this view | Choose an item. |
| Makes complaints against professionals for harming the children by promoting time with the other parent | Choose an item |
| Other: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | Choose an item.  |

These typical behaviours have been derived and adapted from an overview of the literature by Fidler, Bala, and Saini (2013) and Judge and Deutsch (2017).

# Behaviours that may be exhibited by a rejected parent, which may contribute to the dynamic

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| Lacks empathetic connection to the child.  | Choose an item.  |
| Ineffective pursuit of the child. Pushes calls and communications, unannounced appearances at school or activities that the child perceives as embarrassing. | Choose an item.  |
| Harsh, rigid, and punitive parenting style (uses authoritarian parenting style as the dominant strategy). This is particularly damaging when relating to older children who are striving for independence. | Choose an item.  |
| Treats the child as much younger than their age, possibly due to not having spent time with the child for a significant period of time. | Choose an item |
| Loses temper, angry, demanding, intimidating character traits, but not to level of abuse.  | Choose an item.  |
| Outrage at challenge to his/her authority.  | Choose an item.  |
| Apportions blame to widespread sources including other parent, child, extended family, professionals and the court. | Choose an item.  |
| Counter-rejecting behaviour. Passivity or withdrawal in the face of the child’s resistance or rejection of them.  | Choose an item.  |
| Attempts to induce guilt.  | Choose an item.  |
| Other: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  |  |

Derived from Whitcombe (2017).

**References:**

*If you would like to see any of the items listed, send the 5 or 6-digit item numbers (in* ***bold****) to library@cafcass.gov.uk (for internal use only)*

***181311.*** *Fidler, B., Bala, N. & Saini, M. (2013). Children who resist post-separation parental contact: a differential approach for legal and mental health professionals. Oxford: Oxford University Press.*

***203850.*** *Judge, A. & Deutsch, R. (2017). Overcoming parent-child contact problems: family-based interventions for resistance, rejection and alienation. New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press.*

***204101.*** *Whitcombe, S. (2017). Parental alienation or justifiable estrangement? Assessing a child's resistance to a parent in the UK. Seen and Heard, 27(3), pp.31-47*

**IMPORTANT**: *This tool has been developed from the existing evidence base, however, is not a validated tool. The tool should be used to inform the assessment and analysis and is not a replacement for the professional judgement of the practitioner.*