

The Re-Enactment Narrative

of the Parental Alienation Dynamic

C.A. Childress, Psy.D. (2010)

The Origin in the Alpha Level

The Abusive Parent – Victim child: The central narrative feature of the Re-Enactment Narrative is the theme of the abusive parent and the victimized child. In the original Alpha Event, this abuse-victim event was the hostile rejection of the Alpha parent toward the Beta child (within the relationship context of variable parental nurturance). In the Re-Enactment Narrative, it is the “abusive” Delta parent and victimized Delta child (which “requires” the protection of the child by the Beta parent).

Fusion is Safety – Separation is Danger: One of the key features of the initial Alpha parent/Beta child relationship abuse is that the Beta child begins to monitor closely the inner psychological state of the Alpha parent to assess whether the child is to obtain the nurturing parent, in which case the child can relax and open into accepting the nurturing care of the Alpha parent, or the hostile-rejecting parent, in which case the child has to adopt defenses of psychological closure toward the Alpha parent.

This relationship dynamic requires the child to become sensitive to the inner state of the Alpha parent. For the Beta child, a fused psychological state with the Alpha parent represents a state of safety since a state of psychological fusion allows the Beta child to predict the Alpha parent’s state, either the nurturing parent or the hostile-rejecting parent. On the other hand, if the child is in a state of psychological separateness from the Alpha parent, then this represents danger since the child will be unable to predict whether the Alpha parent is the nurturing parent (in which case the child can open psychologically to receive the nurturance) or the hostile-rejecting parent (in which case the child needs to defend with psychological closure to the parent). **Psychological fusion is a signal of safety – psychological separateness is a signal of danger.** This is the primal relationship pattern embedded into the neurological networks of the Beta child, and so into the Beta adult/parent.

Furthermore, since a state of psychological fusion represents the primal parent-child nurturing relationship, the Beta child (and later the Beta adult/parent) comes to view this state of psychological fusion as representing “love,” whereas most people emerging from healthier parent-child relationships refer to a successfully negotiated relationship of separate and different self-experiences as “love.”

The continued replication of the relationship pattern of psychological fusion with the intimate other prevents the child’s relationship patterns/expectations from ever being influenced by subsequent relationships. In intimate relationships, the Beta child (and later, the Beta adult/parent) fuses with the psychological state of the other person in order to meet the emotional/psychological needs of the other person and by doing so avoid the other’s hostile-rejection. The absence of expressed authenticity of the Beta child in relationship and the continuing compliance in meeting the needs of the other person in the relationship means that the Beta child/Beta adult can never experience acceptance of his or her authenticity with an intimate relationship.

Splitting: The nurturing/hostile-rejecting unpredictability of the Alpha parent/Beta child relationship produces a high degree of anxiety in the Beta child. This excessive anxiety interferes with the Beta child’s capacity to relax and psychologically open into the nurturing-parent experience when it is available. In order to relax and open into the nurturing-parent experience, the Beta child must psychologically **split off** the two representational networks for the parent. The Alpha parent is **either** the all-good **or** the all-bad parent. When the all-good parent is present, the child is able to relax into the experience of nurturance without interference from the anxiety associated with the hostile-rejecting parental representational networks.

The Re-Enactment in the Delta Level

The Trigger: The entry of the Beta adult into an intimate family relationship as a spouse and parent re-triggers the core relationship patterns/expectations of intimacy and parenting. As a spouse, the Beta adult attempts to form a psychological fusion with the Delta spouse, and as a parent, the Beta parent seeks and succeeds in forming a fused psychological relationship with the Delta child.

The Beta Spouse –Delta Spouse Relationship: Initially, the psychological fusion process of the Beta spouse presents as sensitive and nurturing of the other person’s needs. But this presentation lasts only so long as psychological fusion is sustained. When the psychological separateness associated with two distinct people emerges within the relationship, as it inevitably must, the Beta spouse experiences this psychological difference and separateness as danger (**fusion is safety – separateness is danger**).

However, the Beta spouse is unable to accurately interpret the meaning of this sense of danger as related to an activation of neurologically embedded early childhood relationship patterns/expectations, and instead the Beta spouse interprets the feelings of danger as related somehow to the Delta spouse’s actual actions or way of being. The Beta spouse attributes “abusive” qualities to the Delta parent in order to explain the Beta spouse’s sense of danger emanating from the relationship with the Delta parent.

As psychological separateness and interpersonal differences increase within the spousal relationship, the Beta adult’s early childhood relationship patterns of the abusive-parent/victimized-child reactivate. The Delta spouse represents the abusive parent to the Beta spouse’s victimized child. However, since the Beta spouse is now an adult, the child representational networks are transferred to the Delta child. The full representational pattern becomes the Delta parent as the abusive parent to the Delta child. This is the Re-Enactment Narrative.

However, since the Re-Enactment Narrative is not related to actual relationship events, beyond merely a psychological separateness of two people (the Beta spouse and the Delta spouse), the justification for the “abuse” is, of necessity, vague and non-descript. Typically, the description of the “abuse” concerns the Delta spouse’s attitude or tone-of-voice; it is about who the Delta spouse is “as a person” rather than about what the Delta spouse actually does.

The vagueness of the “abuse” is then transferred to the Delta child’s own psychological organization of the Delta child/Delta parent relationship. The Delta child describes the “abuse” of the Delta parent in vague terms and appears to sit in judgment of the Delta parent **as a person**.

The Beta Parent – Delta Child Relationship: For the Beta parent, the state of psychological fusion represents “love.” Through subtle replications of the Alpha parent/Beta child relationship pattern of variable nurturing and rejection, the Beta parent is able to obliterate expressions of authentic experience from the Delta child, and instead seduces/coerces the Delta child into a narcissistically organized fusion between the Beta parent and Delta child. To all external appearances, this relationship looks nurturing and loving, except that, psychologically, the Delta child is in a narcissistically fused psychological state with the Beta parent. The Delta child’s experience and expressions-of-being are a reflection of the Beta parent’s psychological organization, just as the Beta child’s experience and expressions-of-being were a reflection of the Alpha parent’s psychological organization.

When the Beta parent organizes the Re-Enactment Narrative as the abusive Delta spouse – victimized Beta spouse, this psychological organization is transferred through the psychological fusion to the Delta child, who organizes the complementary relationship pattern of Abusive Delta parent – victimized Delta child, which represents the expression of the re-activated representational networks of the Beta adult’s Re-Enactment Narrative; abusive-parent/victimized-child.

The Enactment: All that is left is to re-enact the Alpha level relationship patterns using the actors of the Delta level. This is accomplished by the Delta child's active rejection of the Delta parent, which serves to **define the relationship** with the Delta parent as one of abuse (i.e., because why else would the Delta child so actively reject a relationship with the Delta parent?). To achieve this definition, however, requires that the child appear to be acting from his or her own volition. The Beta parent must appear to remain non-engaged with this definition process, otherwise the alienation process becomes overt and evident, thereby de-activating the Re-Enactment Narrative.

The child's "**independent**" rejection of the Delta parent serves as the relationship indicator that **defines** the Delta parent as abusive and the Delta child as victimized.

Splitting in the Delta Level: The splitting process in the Delta level emerges in several ways.

1. The Delta parent as all-bad

The Delta child expresses a complete rejection of the Delta parent. The Delta child evidences no normal relationship ambivalence or empathy toward the Delta parent. The Delta child overtly judges the value of the Delta parent and finds the Delta parent as entirely inadequate as a person. The Delta child views the Delta parent as beneath contempt, and as not even meriting normal human respect and empathy that the Delta child gives to other persons and strangers.

2. The Beta parent as all-good

The Delta child's relationship with the Beta parent reflects an over-idealized relationship in which the child is extremely cooperative and well-behaved, thereby **defining** the Beta parent as the ideal parent (reflecting a narcissistically organized process with the Beta parent). The Beta parent also presents as wonderfully caring and concerned, particularly around the "abusive" parenting of the Delta parent and the "emotional/psychological injury" to the Delta child. This wonderfully caring parent presentation is incorporated into the "rescuing parent" narrative.

3. The Delta child as all-good

The splitting process with the Delta child representation is momentarily fluid. While initially, the Delta child must initiate the Re-Enactment Narrative by rejecting the Delta parent through active non-compliance and rude/rejecting behavior (i.e., the child as perpetrator of "abuse" toward the Delta parent as victim), the representational outcome within the Re-Enactment Narrative must have the Delta child as the victim in order to **define** the Delta parent as abusive. This requires that the Delta child, but primarily that the Beta parent, quickly excuse the child's acts of non-compliant, rude, and rejecting behavior as justified by the "attitude" or parenting of the Delta parent. The Delta child is then highly cooperative and well-behaved in every other setting (i.e., with the Beta parent, at school, with therapists) in order to **define** the Delta child as a wonderful, all-good child who is merely responding to the "abusive" attitude or parenting of the Delta parent.

The Healing Representations: The Re-Enactment Narrative contains several variations on the original Alpha relationship trauma event that serve a psychological healing function for the Beta parent.

1. Child agency: While the Beta child was a helpless victim of the Alpha parent's psychological abuse, the Delta child actively rejects the "abusive" Delta parent.
2. A protective parent: While the Beta child was a helpless victim of the Alpha parent's psychological abuse, the Delta child has the protection of the Beta parent (i.e., the split off all-good nurturing parent). The protection of the Delta child by the Beta parent therefore becomes an important feature of the motivational press of the Beta parent within the Re-Enactment Narrative. The Beta parent needs the abuse narrative in order to be the protective parent.