

Book Reviews

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Warshak, Richard A., and Otis, Mark R. (WBP Media 2010). *Welcome Back, Pluto: Understanding, Preventing and Overcoming Parental Alienation (DVD)*. 83 minutes, \$24.99, \$19.99 per DVD for 2 or more. Available at plutodvd.com.

Dr. Richard Warshak has done it again. Author of the ground-breaking book *Divorce Poison: How to Protect Your Family from Bad-Mouthing and Brainwashing*, now in its 22nd printing, Warshak has co-authored a professionally produced a DVD for children and parents “Welcome Back, Pluto: Understanding, Preventing and Overcoming Parental Alienation.”

Warshak and Brandi Andrade are the co-narrators of this informative, but easily digestible DVD that talks common sense in everyday words. Even the title is modern and catchy, referring to the fact that in 2006, scientists declared that Pluto was no longer a planet, meaning: What if one day you were part of your family and the next day you weren't, because you had been demoted and wiped out from the lives of your children who had become alienated?

Alienation most often strikes parents who are separated, divorced, or never married. Although the video acknowledges that a child can feel rightly alienated from a parent because of abuse or poor parenting skills, alienation is usually the result of a favored parent who is needy, seeks total control over the child, or fails to recognize the importance of the other parent in the child's life. This favored parent will then do everything in his or her power (the video is gender neutral) to punish the other parent, and cause the child to reject the other parent.

The video describes three components of a very complex psychological situation, which are: 1) defining the problem, 2) explaining how it is manifested, and 3) providing intervention techniques for its control and abatement.

Dr. Warshak, a clinical professor at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, prepared this video in partnership with Dr. Mark Otis, a clinical and family psychologist. In presenting a comprehensive understanding of the modifications, behaviors, and reactions of all the parties concerned, especially the children, Warshak and Otis have performed a marvelous

service for practitioners as well as family members in better adapting to the fallout from divorce.

This video, if used appropriately by court family service departments, judges and judicial training conferences, *mental health professionals*, and parents, could go a long way to lessening a form of child abuse: alienation of a child from a loving, warm family. Children of different ages, including adolescents, have had a positive, healing, and dramatic change of attitudes after viewing the DVD. Specific instances have been reported of “spontaneous recovery” from alienation the child has suffered at the loss of the formerly loved parent. One 17-year-old boy remarked, “If I had seen this a year ago, I would have realized immediately what was going on and stopped it.” An alienated mother, about to give in to her 10-year-old daughter’s demands to cut off contact, decided as a last resort, to watch the DVD with her child. The mother reported, “My daughter pretended to be bored with the narration format (which was her only criticism) but was drawn in anyway. I watched her change to a mesmerized child waiting at the edge of her seat for the next nugget of information to be spoken. When we had completed all the chapters, she told me she thought Dr. Warshak must have been watching her family—because her father’s family did ‘everything’ the narrator discussed of the favored parents. I could see her make connections, realizations, and discoveries. She always wanted to go back to it, never gave me a hard time about watching more, as if she knew despite the hard emotions she felt watching it she needed to see more. It was a platform to open much needed conversation.” As a result, this formerly alienated child asked to move in with the mother for whom she previously expressed only contempt and tried to avoid.

Time and events missed over the years can not be made up. The video points out that when children grow up and realize that they have been the subject of alienation, the adult children of divorce may turn on the controlling parent—much to the surprise of that parent.

The simplest idea is to realize that in any relationship breakup, the parties are angry and disappointed, and may harbor ill feelings. When children are involved, it sometimes becomes attractive to identify, vilify, and punish the other parent. Parents need to develop a thick skin to handle this rejection, the video points out, and courts need to understand that parents are reacting in a natural way and therefore they should help, not punish parents.

The video urges parents to follow court-ordered visitation. The video can also help courts better understand how a vulnerable child might just be parroting what the favored parent wants the child to say against the targeted parent.

This moving and trail-blazing DVD—the first program designed for parents and children to watch together—is an indispensable and welcome addition to the growing field of information about parental alienation of children. “Pluto” should be a standard part of the curriculum of co-parenting classes,

parent education workshops, and anger management groups. Lawyers and therapists will want to hand out copies to clients to prevent children from becoming casualties of divorce and to help those at various stages of alienation to restore positive relationships with their parents.

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