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Not all abuse can be seen

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Child abuse.

The phrase usually brings to mind bloodied and bruised youngsters, waifs who bear clear evidence of neglect comes in the form of a clenched fist, screaming parent or empty refrigerator.

Many children suffer a much more insidious method of abuse, one that can scar them for life and forever and loving parents.

Parental alienation is a growing phenomenon in North America, an ailment that's escalating among children. The Parental Alienation Awareness Organization defines it as, "the mental manipulation and/or bullying of a loving and warm relationship they once shared with a parent."

Sadly, parental alienation is most often the result of two supposedly mature adults who resort to using a game of post-marital revenge.

The practice has become so prevalent in this age of temporary marriages (and other similar alliances) that a foundation has been established to raise awareness of the issue.

In Mississauga, one teen's fight to see, and possibly raise, his two younger brothers — separated from their parents — has become an issue for the courts.

While the eldest brother, who has petitioned the court for standing in his parents' ongoing divorce and custody proceedings, the parents continue to sling muck, accusing each other of nefarious attempts to win their children. In the interim, the younger pair have been institutionalized in a psychiatric ward for five months, placed in a controversial American psychological boot camp to undergo treatment for parental alienation, then placed in residential care. While these and other parents will eventually form new relationships and carry on with their lives, they are impairing their ability to lead full lives or participate in meaningful relationships.

It's time the judicial system acknowledged parental alienation for what it really is — a crime — and established laws to protect those who refuse to heed the law.