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## Do You Have This in Common With Brad Pitt?

### The Scoop on Parental Alienation

Whether you follow celebrity gossip religiously or just like to scan the tabloids when you pass a newsstand, you've probably heard about the latest conflict between famous divorcees Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie. A recent TMZ headline blared, "Brad Pitt Sources Say Angelina Has Poisoned Kids Against Him... She's On a Hate Campaign."

These articles are chock-full of drama, but they also contain some legalese — specifically the phrase "parental alienation," which journalists have applied to celebrities like Brad Pitt and Alec Baldwin and may even apply to you. If you're divorced, have children, and aren't on good terms with your partner, you should be on high alert for signs of parental alienation.

#### What is parental alienation?

According to a resource published by the American Bar Association (ABA), parental alienation is a "mental condition in which a child — usually one whose parents are engaged in a high-conflict separation



or divorce — allies him or herself strongly with an alienating parent and rejects a relationship with the 'target' parent without legitimate justification."

In other words, a child can fall victim to parental alienation if one of their parents constantly paints the other in a bad light through comparisons, exaggeration, lies, and manipulation. This can be emotional, verbal, or even financial.

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## #Unplugged

### Taking a Break From Technology

American novelist Anne Lamott once said, "Almost everything will work again if you unplug it for a few minutes, including you." If you've ever unplugged before, turned off your cellphone, walked away from a laptop, and left the iPad at home, you'll know it can feel a little uneasy at first to be so disconnected when we are so used to having everything at our fingertips. However, it's also liberating, and the best part is that it will be okay — everything will be right there waiting for us when we decide to plug back in.

On March 3, we observe the National Day of Unplugging — a day set aside to honor the beauty of taking a break from technology and screen time. It kicks off an entire 24-hour period, from sunup to sundown, without any phones, computers, tablets, smartwatches, or televisions. This year, March 3 falls on a Friday, so for many of us, unplugging may be difficult when technology is essential in most of our careers.

However, I'm not here asking you to turn off your phone, computer, and television for a full day. Instead, I encourage us all, myself

***"It's not the time spent on social media that matters; instead, what matters most are the adventures we took, the interactions with our loved ones, and the laughs we shared."***



included, to take some time for ourselves and, every now and then, just for a few hours here and there, to simply unplug. One of my favorite memories took place during the pandemic lockdown. Our internet had gone out, and the kids were lost on what to do without their phones and tablets to access social media. As a result, they spent the day outdoors, and in the evening played board games, having quality time with each other.

Today, technology makes our lives easier at work, allows us to catch up with friends and family we haven't seen in years, and connects us with the world. It's amazing to video chat with family around the world, purchase an item online in minutes, and work remotely if we wish and are able to.

As we age and begin looking back on our memories and experiences, it's not the time spent on social media that matters; instead, what matters most are the adventures we took, the interactions with our loved ones, and the laughs we shared. One of the qualities in my clients I admire most is that they are intentional. They know what is important in life and value planning to ensure their loved ones will be well taken care of for many years to come. Unplugging here and there is just one more way to be intentional: Take time to collect those moments and share in those memories that matter most.

*- Angela Klenk*

## The Mac and Cheese Legal Debacle

### Can This Lawsuit Elbow Its Way to a Courtroom Win?

Here's a fun fact for you: In the fall of 2022, a woman in Florida sued food giant Kraft Heinz — all because it took her a few extra minutes to prepare her mac and cheese.

This may sound like a made-up plot straight out of "The Onion," but it's true! The woman's name is Amanda Ramirez, and according to National Public Radio, she's suing Kraft Heinz for \$5 million over its "misleading advertising." What exactly misled her? Well, Kraft's cup of Velveeta Shells & Cheese claims it will be "ready in 3 1/2 minutes" — when in fact, that's just the microwave time.

Apparently, Ramirez felt betrayed when it took her slightly more than 3 1/2 minutes to peel the lid off the container and add water to the noodles. Her outrage only climbed as she waited for her pasta's cheese sauce to thicken after 3 1/2 minutes of staring at the microwave window. Before long, she was steaming over the notion that she'd been ripped off by a greedy manufacturer intent on selling false convenience.



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#### What does parental alienation look like?

Imagine you're running five minutes late to pick up your child, and your ex tells them "Daddy/Mommy is late because they don't love you anymore" — a blatant lie. In this case, you would be the "target" parent and your ex would be the "alienating" parent manipulating your child.

One parent can also alienate the other by spoiling their child with gifts and travel opportunities while maliciously pointing out that the other parent can't or won't do the same. According to TMZ, Jolie has accused Pitt of child abuse and he now has "little to no relationship" with their six kids. If Pitt is not a child abuser — as a judge's award of 50/50 custody seems to indicate — this would be parental alienation. Alec Baldwin details his experience with what he calls parental alienation in his book, "A Promise to Ourselves: A Journey Through Fatherhood and Divorce."

#### What can you do about it?

The ABA reports that parental alienation has been recognized by lawyers, courts, and psychologists to varying degrees for at least 200 years. In many states, parental alienation is legally recognized, which means that proving it could impact your custody agreement. Other states don't take parental alienation as seriously, so we recommend asking your family law attorney about your specific state and situation.

NPR reports that Ramirez's lawsuit reaches beyond her kitchen and even beyond the state of Florida. It "looks to cover consumers in Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Utah, New Mexico, Alaska, Iowa, Tennessee, and Virginia who purchased the mac and cheese cups during the applicable statute of limitations period." Over 100 people fall into that category, maybe including you!

Does Ramirez stand a chance? It's hard to say. NPR reports that her legal team expects Kraft to try to get the case dismissed, but the U.S. does have a history of successful lawsuits against misleading advertising by food companies. According to NBC News, a class-action lawsuit filed over a non-GMO advertising campaign cost Chipotle \$6.5 million in 2020. And just last spring, a Florida attorney went to bat against Burger King, claiming its Whoppers were smaller than advertised.

As we write this, the mac and cheese fiasco is still unresolved — but you can bet we'll be watching the news. We may even chow down on a bowl of Velveeta Shells while we do it!

In the meantime, family lawyer Patricia Fersch offers this advice in Forbes: "Document everything in a diary — missed visits, alienating behavior in the presence of the child. Be consistent with your child no matter how they respond to you. Don't abandon them."



## TAKE A BREAK



#### Ingredients

- 1 medium head cabbage
- 1 1/2 cups chopped onion, divided
- 1 tbsp butter
- 2 14.5-oz cans Italian stewed tomatoes
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 tbsp brown sugar
- 1 1/2 tsp salt, divided
- 1 cup cooked rice
- 1/4 cup ketchup
- 2 tbsp Worcestershire sauce
- 1/4 tsp pepper
- 1 lb lean (90%) ground beef
- 1/4 lb Italian sausage

#### Directions

1. In a Dutch oven, cook cabbage in boiling water for 10 minutes; drain. Rinse in cold water; drain. Remove 8 large outer leaves; set aside.
2. In a large saucepan, sauté 1 cup onion in butter. Add tomatoes, garlic, brown sugar, and 1/2 tsp salt. Simmer sauce for 15 minutes, stirring occasionally.
3. In a large bowl, combine rice, ketchup, Worcestershire sauce, pepper, and remaining onion and salt. Crumble beef and sausage over mixture and mix.
4. Remove thick vein from cabbage leaves for easier rolling. Place 1/2 cup meat mixture on each leaf; fold in sides. Starting at an unfolded edge, roll leaf to completely enclose filling. Place rolls seam side down in a skillet. Top with sauce.
5. Cover and cook over medium-low heat for 1 hour. Reduce heat to low; cook 20 minutes longer or until a thermometer inserted reads 160 F.

## VAN GOGH REINCARNATED?

### One-Eared Rescue Dog Becomes Master Painter

When a one-eared shelter dog in Connecticut struggled to find a new family last year, one of his caretakers had a wild idea: Why not teach him to paint? With help from TikTok and peanut butter, the aptly named Van Gogh became a social media star.

"I'd seen TikTok videos of other dogs creating paintings, so why not Van Gogh?" Jaclyn Gartner, the founder of Happily Furever After Rescue, told The Washington Post. "He certainly had the name and the ear for it."

To leverage what she calls Van Gogh's "fast and creative tongue," Gartner covered small canvases in dollops of paint, wrapped them in plastic wrap, and slathered them in peanut butter. Then, she presented the treats to the boxer-pit bull mix. He quickly licked the canvases clean, creating his "art" along the way.

According to the Post, Van Gogh's first few paintings flopped — just like the work of the human artist Vincent Van Gogh, who didn't become famous until after he died in 1890. This star rose thanks to Jo Van Gogh, the wife of his brother Theo, who advocated for his work after both Theo and Vincent passed away.

You could say that Gartner was dog Van Gogh's Jo because, like the original painter's, the pup's art staged a comeback! After his first "art show" drew just two guests, Gartner started auctioning off his paintings online. His abstract work like "Peacock Swirl" and a rendition of human Van Gogh's "Starry Night" quickly raised more than \$3,000 for Happily Furever After Rescue.

As his reputation soared on social media, Van Gogh also found his forever home with shelter volunteer Jessica Starowitz. He now spends his days painting and lounging on the couch. You can follow his exploits on Instagram under the handle @officialvgdog.

