

In psychology, the systematic disruption or severance of the relationship between a grandparent and grandchild is primarily referred to as grandparent alienation or family estrangement. This dynamic—often utilized by a parent acting as a gatekeeper—is studied across several specific behavioral and emotional frameworks.

Commonly associated psychological concepts include:

1. Alienation and Control Dynamics

- **Grandparent Alienation:** The intentional programming of a grandchild by a parent to denigrate or reject their grandparent. This unjustified rejection severely disrupts intergenerational attachment bonds.
- **Coercive Control:** Tactics in which a parent holds access to grandchildren hostage unless the grandparents provide financial, legal, or caretaking support.
- **Emotional Manipulation / Brainwashing:** Psychological tactics where an adult child uses guilt, false allegations, or secret-keeping to turn the grandchild against the grandparent. [7, 8]

2. The Grieving Process

- **Ambiguous Loss:** A psychological state where a child is physically absent from the grandparent's life, but psychologically and emotionally present. Because the child is still alive, the grandparent is denied closure.
- **Complicated Grief:** A prolonged, intense, and debilitating form of grief that frequently arises when a grandparent is cut off from their family. It is often coupled with trauma symptoms such as nightmares and persistent flashbacks. [10]

3. Family System Patterns

- **Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma/Alienation:** The cycle where a parent who was alienated from their own parents in the past unconsciously, or deliberately, inflicts the same alienation on their own children.
- **Enmeshment:** A family dynamic where a parent blurs boundaries, demanding that their child align solely with them against the grandparent, leaving no room for the child to form an independent relationship with the extended family.
- **Emotional Cutoff:** A process where a middle-generation adult child resolves internal family conflicts by completely severing ties between their nuclear unit (including their children) and the older generation.

Understanding these terms can provide clarity on whether the family is experiencing situational estrangement or active, deliberate alienation.

If you would like to explore this topic further, tell me: Are you looking into this for personal reasons/family dynamics, or for research/academic purposes? Would you like to know more about tactics to recognize alienation, or coping strategies for affected grandparents? Let me know how you'd like to proceed.