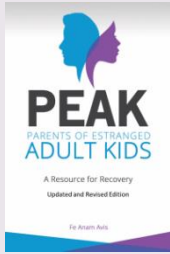


If you are a reader,
and would prefer to
work on recovery on
your own...



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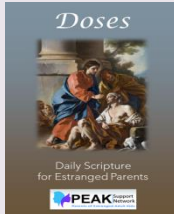


If you would prefer
to work on your
recovery with other
estranged parents...



Contact:
Rocky Mountain Region
Coordinators
(bottom of this page)

If you prefer a faith-
based approach...



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If you prefer to learn
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videos...



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If you prefer one-on-
one support...



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Dealing with Parental Estrangement



Millions of people today are experiencing parental estrangement from their adult children. Parental estrangement occurs when the communication between a parent and their adult child is severed or severely curtailed. What have we learned?

- **Parental estrangement is not rare.** Research suggests that 12 percent of parent-child relationships in the United States are estranged. That's one out of every 8.
- **Only 5% of those estranged from a son or daughter say that they made the move.** It is usually the case that the estranged parent is left longing for a relationship that they have no power to reinstate.
- **While parental estrangement tends to begin for parents as early as age 50, it tends to occur most frequently among older parents** with over a third falling in the 70 to 80 age range when they are most likely to be experiencing other losses: spouses, friends, siblings, health, vocation, and financial security.
- **In spite of the prevalence of parental estrangement, most people are surprised by how common it is.** This is largely due to the shame that parents feel in admitting that their adult children have broken contact with them, and the silence of their friends and faith communities.



Rocky Mountain Region Coordinators

Janet Mortinsen - janet@bethany-denver.org

Sue Ann Glusenkamp - glusenkamp@augustanadenver.org

Is this happening to you or someone you love?

What is causing parental estrangement?

There is no single “cause.” It is often the case that only one child in a family will become estranged, while their siblings maintain a close relationship with parents. Yet they were all raised by the same parents.

Nonetheless, there are certain risk factors that make estrangement more likely.

The most common is a **third party** who consciously or unconsciously encourages the estrangement. Examples of third parties include an adult child’s spouse or romantic partner, friends, or the spouse in a parent’s second marriage. Many voices on the internet today act as a third party



as they encourage adult children to “ghost” their parents. Divorce can often create a situation where one parent demonizes the other resulting in something called “parental alienation.”

Another risk factor is a **difficult to change issue** in the relationship or in the personality of the parent or the adult child. These can include serious mental illnesses like schizophrenia, bi-polar disorder, or a personality disorder. Sometimes temperament differences between the parent and their adult child can be difficult to overcome.

Other risk factors include **addictions and mood disorders** like depression or anxiety in either the parent or the adult child. With proper treatment, their impacts can be alleviated, but both must be willing to work on rebuilding the relationship.

Finally, **situational factors** can be a risk for estrangement. These include geographic relocations due to school, job assignments, or military service. The pandemic also became a risk factor for parental estrangement.

What are the impacts of parental estrangement?

The experience of parental estrangement is always stressful. Some parents are able to find their way through that experience and emerge on the other side with positive self-regard and purpose on their own.

Most are not so fortunate. The experience of this parental trauma leaves them with a variety of symptoms similar to PTSD observed in persons returning from combat zones. These include:

- Mental impacts, particularly ruminations about past conversations or imagined future ones, but also thinking errors about their situation and what might remedy it.
- Emotional impacts, mood disorders, depression, anxiety, grief, but particularly guilt and shame. Use of poor coping mechanisms.
- Behavioral impacts, acting out, irritability, short temper, impulsivity, insomnia, avoiding or resenting those who speak positively about relationships with their adult children and grandchildren.
- Physical impacts, GI issues like functional dyspepsia, cardiac arrhythmias, skin rashes i.e. atopic dermatitis, headaches, skeletal-muscular issues.
- Relational issues, tension with a spouse, other children, faith community members, friends, work associates.

The good news is that estranged parents can recover from the impacts of parental trauma. However, most will need resources to support their healing process.

My recent research—and my clinical work over the past four decades—has shown me that you can be a conscientious parent and your kid may still want nothing to do with you when they’re older.

Joshua Coleman, PhD, Rules of Engagement