

Letter to Minor's Counsel

I am Dr. Craig Childress and my area of professional experience is parent-child conflict, the attachment system, and family therapy. I am providing this letter to parents who suspect that their family situation may involve a particular type of highly distorted family interaction pattern involving major disruptions to the child's attachment system.

The pathology reflected in this family may involve what's called a "role-reversal" relationship in which the child is being used by the parent to meet the emotional and psychological needs of the parent.

- In normal-range and healthy parent-child relationships, the child uses the parent as a "regulatory other" to regulate the child's emotional and psychological state.
- In a role-reversal relationship, these parent-child roles are reversed, so that it is the parent who is using the child as a "regulatory other" to regulate the parent's emotional and psychological state.

A role-reversal relationship is extremely pathological and destructive to the child's healthy development. However, superficially the parent-child relationship will appear to be a closely bonded one. But the hyper-bonding in a role-reversal relationship is actually a symptom of an extremely pathological and destructive relationship in which the parent is "psychologically feeding" off of the child's healthy development in order to support the parent's own inadequate "self-structure" formation that occurred during the childhood of this parent.

The signs of a role-reversal relationship can be subtle and may easily be missed, even by mental health professionals. As an attorney, you might experience an uncomfortable feeling that something isn't right, and a general perception that things don't make sense; the child's feelings are way too extreme and outside of what's normal for children. The child will be rigid and inflexible regarding relationship perceptions, and family relationships will be highly polarized. The parent in the role-reversal relationship may present either as charming, self-assured, and confident, or as emotionally seductive with a prominent display of the "victim" role. The parent will also display a hyper-fixation on the alleged need to "protect the child" that is not actually warranted by the facts surrounding the family situation

The parent who is providing you with this letter simply wants to alert you to this possibility. All that glitters is not necessarily gold. Role-reversal parent-child relationships appear as hyper-bonded parent-child relationships and are extremely pathological. Role-reversal parent-child relationships are established in the scientific literature and are associated with parents who have a disorganized attachment pattern, typically as a result of unresolved relationship trauma from the childhood of the parent.



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