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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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## Here's the Thing About Luck: You Must Seek it Out!

As the Irish blessing goes, "May you have all the happiness and luck that life can hold — and at the end of your rainbows, may you find a pot of gold." On St. Patrick's Day, more than any other day, I flaunt my wee bit of Irish heritage. While it's said that everyone is Irish on St. Patrick's Day, I actually am — at least a little bit.

I've always believed that luck exists, so I'll buy into the luck of the Irish. However, I also believe everyone has opportunities to create circumstances where they can come out on top. In other words, we make our own luck. Some people seize the opportunities that 'luck' grants them wholeheartedly, while others throw those opportunities to the wayside. It all comes down to perspective.

A few years back, I had the opportunity to represent a client who had been severely injured in an automobile accident and received a quadriplegic diagnosis. I was humbled by his positivity and optimism. He spoke of how fortunate he was that he hadn't lost his life, that he had a great support system of friends and family, that modern technology and medicine gave him a chance at continuing to live, and that he lived in a wheelchair-accessible area.

He was an incredibly happy man and a joy to be around. He genuinely saw good wherever he was and made the best of any situation. This man knew how to capitalize on his luck. I was proud to consider myself part of his support system, and I understand why others wanted to help him, too. It's often said that whatever you focus on becomes larger. Because this client focused on good fortune and support from God and loved ones, he found them everywhere.

Often, if you aren't looking for luck and opportunities, you'll pass them by. This is something that, during my husband's illness and death, I thought about a great deal. I focused on what I was grateful for. I was glad we had time together and a wonderful marriage and relationship. I was fortunate to have many others in my life who could lend a helping hand and a listening ear. We were



grateful to have had the ability to obtain the medical help that he needed. And, when he passed away, I was happy to have great relationships with his family members and that I was surrounded by so much love.

Some events cannot be turned into happy events, but we can focus on what is lucky about them. If you are focused on maximizing the opportunities available, luck finds a way to step in and help. I have five children in incredible health — that's good luck! If you actively look for the good in everything and practice gratitude, good fortune will find you, and you will likely find opportunities to capitalize on. And when you do, you'll look back and say you were lucky to have stumbled upon it!

Happy St. Patrick's Day! May the Luck of the Irish always be on your side!

*-Ruby Bolton*

# 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.



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!

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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.

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



## CLASSIC CABBAGE ROLLS

Inspired by TasteOfHome.com



### 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 Forever 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 Forever 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.

