



ASSOCIATION OF
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eNEWS

President's Message

Dick Altman, Napoleon, Ohio

It is hard to believe that I am now writing my fourth and final message. It seems like just yesterday that we were in Toronto for what turned out to be an incredible 51st annual conference. Now we are just weeks away from the annual conference in New Orleans which, based upon the brochure looks like it is going to be absolutely stunning.

[Read more](#)

Register before May 2 to Save—AFCC Annual Conference May 27-30, 2015, New Orleans

May 2 is the last day to register for the conference at a reduced rate. Register now and make sure your payment is received (or postmarked) on or before May 2 to take advantage of the discounted registration rates. AFCC members save even more. Not yet an AFCC member? Join with your registration—save \$10 on your first year's membership AND register at the discounted member rate!

[Register online and more information](#)

Make the Most of Your Trip

Earn up to 6 hours continuing education by attending a full-day pre-conference institute on Wednesday, May 27, with eight to choose from there is certain to be one of interest. There is still time to add an institute to your registration—call the office! See the [program brochure](#) for more information and full session descriptions.

Donate to the Silent Auction

Donate an item and make plans to attend, Friday, May 29, 5:30pm-7:00pm. The AFCC Silent Auction is held each year at the annual conference to raise funds for AFCC's special projects and initiatives, like the Access to Family Court Services Task Force and the Domestic Violence and Child Custody Evaluations Task Force. You can help support these projects by donating an item or attending the auction and bidding on items.

[Online donation form](#)

Thank You to AFCC Conference Sponsors

Thank you to the sponsors of the 52nd Annual Conference! This year's Diamond Sponsor is [OurFamilyWizard.com](#). Please click the

MONTHLY E-NEWSLETTER
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AFCC Conferences



AFCC 52nd Annual Conference

May 27–30, 2015

Children in the Court System: Different Doors, Different Responses, Different Outcomes
Hilton New Orleans Riverside
New Orleans, Louisiana

[Program Brochure, Online Registration](#)

Special Thanks to 52nd Annual Conference Diamond Sponsor

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AFCC-AAML Conference
Advanced Issues in Child Custody Evaluation, Litigation and Settlement
October 1–3, 2015

link below to see a full list of conference sponsors and visit their websites. Stop by the exhibits in New Orleans to learn more about their products and services. AFCC is pleased to have their generous support.

[52nd Annual Conference Sponsors](#)

Exhibit Space and Advertising Opportunities Available

Exhibiting and advertising at the AFCC annual conference are excellent ways to share your products and services with an interdisciplinary community of family law professionals. A very limited number of exhibit spaces remain, rates increase May 1. Registration packet inserts get your marketing piece to each attendee.

[More information](#)

Hotel Update

Check availability at the Hilton [online](#) or call the hotel at 504-584-3959. Some room nights may be sold out. We encourage you to hold a room at an alternate hotel; rooms at the Hilton may become available as cancellations are possible between now and the conference dates. Additional rooms are available at the Loews New Orleans Hotel, 300 Poydras Street. The Loews is offering the same room rate as the AFCC block at the Hilton, \$178/night for single or double occupancy. [Make your reservation at the Loews online](#), or by calling the hotel directly at 866-211-6411 and requesting the AFCC group rate.

Dining Out

Even if you have visited New Orleans before or fashion yourself a foodie, check out this list of new [New Orleans hotspots](#).

Q and A with Julie Kenniston

This year's keynote speaker is Julie Kenniston, MSW, LISW, the executive director of [The Center for Family Solutions](#) (CFS) in Hamilton, Ohio, and co-author of the third edition of the [Handbook on Questioning Children: A Linguistic Perspective](#). Julie's keynote address will focus on understanding the language of children and adolescents by exploring linguistic considerations in child development and what professionals need to know to obtain accurate information and improve communication with children.

[Read more](#)

Share Your Ideas and Interests:

Child Welfare Collaborative Decision Making Network Open Forum

Laura Bassein, JD, Senior Attorney, University of New Mexico School of Law—Institute of Public Law

If you are involved in, or interested in becoming more involved in, mediation and other collaborative processes in child welfare cases, plan to attend the Open Forum, Thursday, May 28, 2015, from 5:15pm to 6:15pm at the AFCC Annual Conference in New Orleans. The Open

Capital Hilton
Washington, DC

AFCC Regional Conference

*Do You Hear What I Hear?
Listening to the Voice of the Child*

November 5–7, 2015
Hyatt Regency Columbus
Columbus, Ohio

[Call for Proposals](#)

AFCC 53rd Annual Conference

June 1–4, 2016
Sheraton Seattle Hotel
Seattle, Washington

AFCC 12th Symposium on Child Custody Evaluations

November 3–5, 2016
Sheraton Atlanta Hotel
Atlanta, Georgia

AFCC 54th Annual Conference

May 31–June 3, 2017
Sheraton Boston Hotel
Boston, Massachusetts

AFCC Chapter Annual Conferences

Minnesota Chapter Annual Conference

July 16, 2015
University of Minnesota
Continuing Education Center
St. Paul, Minnesota

[More information](#)

Australia Chapter Annual Conference

August 14–15, 2015
Sydney Shangri La Hotel
Sydney, Australia

[More information](#)

Colorado Chapter Annual Conference

October 9–11, 2015
Beaver Run Resort
Breckenridge, Colorado

[More information](#)

Ontario Chapter Annual Conference

October 23, 2015
Toronto Reference Library,

Forum provides an opportunity to discuss current work in child protection mediation and other child welfare collaborative processes and to plan for future endeavors.

[Read more](#)

Call for Proposals and Save the Date

AFCC Regional Conference, November 5-7, 2015, Columbus, Ohio

Do You Hear What I Hear? Listening to the Voice of the Child

AFCC is accepting proposals for 90-minute training workshops on the complex issues related to separation, divorce and co-parenting, including: relocation, domestic violence, special needs children, same-sex parenting, abuse allegations, and the child's voice. Workshop proposals should combine a focus on research and theory with skill development to incorporate into practice. The deadline to submit a proposal is May 15, 2015. The program brochure will be available in July. [Proposal submission form and more information](#)

Ask the Experts

Top Ten Tips for Helping Parents Keep Children Out of the Middle

Mindy Mitnick, EdM, MA, Edina, Minnesota, and Zachary A. Kretchmer, JD, Minneapolis, Minnesota

As significant a change as divorce is for children, ongoing conflict between parents can cause problems for children across a number of dimensions, including emotional development, social relationships and academic performance. All too often, even the best-intentioned parents act in ways that exacerbate tension and put the adult-sized weight of the divorce or separation onto the shoulders of children. Parents need to know how they can shield children from conflict while still listening to their concerns.

[Read more](#)

AFCC-AAML 2015 Conference

Advanced Issues in Child Custody Evaluation, Litigation and Settlement

October 1-3, 2015, Capital Hilton, Washington, DC

Mark your calendars! The complete program will be available in May 2015, along with online registration open to AFCC members and AAML Fellows. For now, here is a peek at the session topics and presenters.

[Read more](#)

Member News

John Moran, PhD, Phoenix, Arizona, **Matthew Sullivan, PhD**, Palo Alto, California, and Tyler Sullivan have written a new book, [Overcoming the Co-Parenting Trap: Essential Parenting Skills When a Child Resists a Parent](#). The book helps parents understand the reasons why some children resist a parent during divorce.

Yonge Street
Toronto, Ontario
[More information](#)

Join AFCC

Are you a member?

[Join](#) or [Renew](#)

AFCC offers member benefits that promote excellence in the field of family law and in your practice. [Read more about member benefits.](#)

Ask the Experts

Is there a topic you would like to see covered by an AFCC Ask the Experts piece?

[Suggest a topic](#)

AFCC Chapters

Network and share your interdisciplinary view of family court matters on the local level. There are currently chapters in the following states, provinces, and country:

Australia
Alberta
Arizona
California
Colorado
Connecticut
Florida
Illinois
Indiana
Louisiana
Maryland
Massachusetts
Minnesota
Missouri
New Jersey
New York
Ohio
Ontario
Oregon
Texas
Washington
Wisconsin

[Add an AFCC Chapter to your membership](#)

AFCC Networks

New Zealand

The opinions expressed in articles published or linked to in the *AFCC eNEWS* are those of the authors and do not

D. Gordon F. Morton, QC, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, was awarded the [2015 Patricia Wallace Award](#) for his outstanding contributions to the Hamilton Bar in the practice area of family law. The Patricia Wallace Award is presented by the Hamilton Law Association to a lawyer who practices primarily family law in the Hamilton area whose community service and professional conduct best exemplifies the qualities of Justice Patricia Wallace.

Larry Sarezky, JD, Fairfield, Connecticut, wrote and directed a film, [Talk to Strangers](#). The film and accompanying guide provide tools for child advocates and parents trying to spare children the trauma of high conflict divorce. He will hold two screenings at the AFCC 52nd Annual Conference in New Orleans.

The [Resource Center for Separating and Divorcing Families](#) (RCSDF) was awarded the John W. Cooley Lawyer as Problem Solver Award (Institution). This award is presented to individuals and organizations that employ their problem-solving skills to forge creative solutions. Institutional recipients “exhibited extraordinary skill in promoting the concept of the lawyer as problem-solver or resolving individual, institutional, community, state, national, or international problems.” **Melinda Taylor**, Denver, Colorado, is executive director of RCSDF.

Chapter News

The Missouri Chapter presented its 2014 Ellen Cowell Leadership Award to **Andrea Clark, MSW**, St. Louis, Missouri, at its annual conference. The award recognizes leadership, initiative, creativity and dedication to improving the lives of families involved in the Missouri Family Court System.

Congratulations to the following new chapter presidents!

Missouri—Richard Scott, PhD
Texas—Mary Fogel, MEd
Washington—David Hodges, MA

Publication of the Month

Essays from the Family Court Review: Social Science Research

This collection of *Essays from the Family Court Review* focuses on social science as a bridge to practice and policy. Articles showcased follow an introduction exploring how social science research can contribute to family law practice and policy. Editor: Marsha Kline Pruett, PhD, ABPP. AFCC members save 15% on AFCC publications. [Order today and see other AFCC titles](#)

AFCC Scholarship Fund

A heartfelt thank you to the members who have already donated this appeal cycle. Your generosity will provide access to new research, interdisciplinary networking and the countless benefits of AFCC conference attendance for colleagues who would otherwise not be

necessarily reflect the positions of the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts.

Readers are welcomed and encouraged to forward this e-newsletter to interested colleagues.

[About the AFCC eNEWS](#)

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able to attend. Special thanks to those who donated in honor of Doneldon Dennis, over \$5,000 was contributed.

[Give a gift today to help more professionals attend AFCC conferences!](#)
[2014-2015 contributors](#)

Co-Parenting in a Highly Conflicted Separation/Divorce: Learning about Parents and Their Experiences of Parenting Coordination, Legal, and Mental Health Interventions

Kelly Mandarin, PhD, MSW, RSW, Smith College School for Social Work, Northampton, Massachusetts

Sixty separated/divorced conflicted co-parents completed surveys to investigate parent characteristics and dynamics (narcissism, empathy, conflict) associated with co-parenting style and parents' experiences of parenting coordination and other legal and mental health interventions. Study findings did not support common notions found in parenting coordination and high conflict literatures that suggest these parents are narcissistic or low in empathy. Findings pertaining to all high conflict participant experiences revealed the presence of common elements deemed useful across interventions. Parenting coordination appeared satisfactory for half of the respondents making it imperative to determine who benefits from this intervention and the specific ways in which this intervention may be changed.

[Read more](#)

Membership Notice of AFCC Board Nominations

At the AFCC membership meeting on May 30, 2015, the following individuals will be nominated to serve on the Board of Directors for a three-year term beginning July 1, 2015 and concluding June 30, 2018: Dolores A. Bomrad, JD, Kelly Browe Olson, JD, LL.M., and Michael Saini, PhD. The AFCC Executive Committee is elected by the Board of Directors. For informational purposes, the following individuals have been nominated for positions on the Executive Committee: President: Hon. Peter Boshier; President Elect: Marsha Kline Pruett, PhD, ABPP, Vice President: Annette Burns, JD; Secretary: Hon. Dianna J. Gould-Saltman; and Treasurer: Matthew J. Sullivan, PhD.

Family Law in the News

Ohio Supreme Court Task Force on Access to Justice Delivers Report

Stephanie Beougher, courtesy of Court News Ohio

A group tasked with identifying barriers to Ohio's civil justice system has finalized its report to the Ohio Supreme Court. The Task Force on Access to Justice has worked since August 1, 2014, after it was established by Chief Justice Maureen O'Connor. As stated in the executive summary, the task force, chaired by former Justice Yvette McGee Brown, found that "gaps in and obstacles to accessing the civil justice system can be classified as funding, structural, and cultural."

Specifically, the decrease in legal-aid funding at a time of increased demand; a need for standardized forms; and a lack of understanding among Ohioans about the role of attorneys, the judiciary, and organizations that may be available to provide assistance.

[Read more](#)

Making Time for Kids? Study Says Quality Trumps Quantity

Brigid Schulte, courtesy of The Washington Post

Do parents, especially mothers, spend enough time with their children? Though American parents are with their children more than any parents in the world, many feel guilty because they don't believe it's enough. That's because there's a widespread cultural assumption that the time parents, particularly mothers, spend with children is key to ensuring a bright future. Now groundbreaking new research upends that conventional wisdom and finds that that isn't the case. At all.

[Read more](#)

One-Parent Students Leave School Earlier

Kathleen M. Ziol-Guest, Greg J. Duncan and Ariel Kalil, courtesy of Education Next

In the analysis presented, we examine the relationships between children's completed schooling and a number of factors, including single-parent family structure. We find that, while statistically significant, the strength of the relationship between living with a single-parent family and educational attainment is comparable to the relationships for family size and the age of the mother at the time of the child's birth and weaker than the relationship for maternal schooling. Troublingly, however, the negative relationship between living with a single parent and educational attainment has increased markedly since the time the Moynihan Report was published. In other words, American children raised in single-parent homes appear to be at a greater disadvantage educationally than ever before.

[Read more](#)



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Over this past year numerous great things have happened for AFCC:

1. In furtherance of the charge directed by Past President Hon. Emile Kruzick, we reached the 5,000 number mark! Truly an outstanding accomplishment when you consider that just ten years ago there were under 2,500 members.
2. The 11th Symposium on Child custody Evaluations was a huge success in San Antonio Texas, not only in terms of the number of attendees, but also from the perspective of the information delivered through the numerous programs presented.
3. Our collaboration with other organizations continues to grow as we will hold our third biennial conference with the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers (AAML) in Washington, DC, October 1-3, 2015. Thanks to the extraordinary leadership of past President Linda Fieldstone the [Guidelines for Eldercaring Coordination](#), a project conducted with Association for Conflict Resolution (ACR), are completed and posted on the website. That project is now moving towards implementation through the efforts of additional ACR and AFCC members. The [Intimate Partner Violence and Child Custody Evaluation Task Force](#) in collaboration with the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) and in consultation with the Battered Women's Justice Project (BWJP) have completed draft guidelines. We continue to work with the Institute for the Advancement of the American Legal System (IAALS) on several projects including unbundling legal services.
4. The Access to Family Court Services Task Force continues to move forward and an access to justice survey for Family Court professionals will be sent to AFCC members in the near future. This Task Force is chaired by Hon. Dianna Gould-Saltman and Jacqueline Hagerott with Michael Saini, Linda Fieldstone, Stacy Platt, and Andrea Clark

playing leadership roles. I wish to thank all of them for their very hard work and dedication to this project.

5. As a result of strong leadership from Leslye Hunter, and from our Chapter Committee Co-chairs Patti Cross and Lesley Goldsmith, chapters continue to grow and thrive. When I first joined the AFCC board, more than a decade ago, there were only a handful of chapters. We now have 22 chapters and that number continues to grow. If you consider the growth of our organization and the growth of the chapters, it becomes rather obvious that a large part of AFCC's total growth has been chapter driven. Our chapters are not only an important element in the growth of the parent organization, but they are also a key location for the dissemination of knowledge and education of professionals who are working in the trenches on a day-to-day basis.

While I did not have an opportunity to personally attend all of the chapter conferences held this past year, I did have the opportunity to attend a few and from what I observed (and from what I have heard from other chapters), the educational opportunities they provide are extremely beneficial. Chapter events provide an opportunity for professionals who cannot travel to the AFCC parent organization conferences, to receive high-level professional training and knowledge, essentially in their backyards. Additionally, chapter events have also had a great impact on changes in local judicial processes and legal/mental health practices. Special thanks go out to all of those who work at the chapter level and provide so much for membership.

6. Our AFCC staff continues to perform in an exemplary fashion, not only in the heavy tasks of handling conferences, but also in growing our membership and handling day-to-day issues that arise for members. I especially wish to point out that Nicole Ellickson, who received her Certified Meeting Professional credential through the Convention Industry Council. This credential is recognized globally as the badge of excellence in the meeting, convention, exhibition and event industry. Qualifications for the certification are based upon professional experience, education and a rigorous examination. Nicole came on board with AFCC to replace Candi Walker upon her retirement. She has done an incredible job. Please take the time to thank not only Nicole but the entire staff when you see them in New Orleans.

None of the above could be accomplished if it was not for the dedication of our members. I cannot think of any other professional organization that I belong to where you get the feel of excitement and desire to learn and grow as you do when you attend an AFCC conference. As I have stated before, while attending numerous other conferences on behalf of AFCC this year, I cannot begin to count the many people who came up to me just to tell me how much they appreciate our conferences and that they are without question the best conferences they attend each and every year. We have to thank our members for these conferences—it is you who put together the proposals for

the presentations, plan and work hard to make the presentations top notch, and provide an incredible work product while at the same time sharing with your professional colleagues ideas and knowledge that you have developed, without expectation of financial reward. For all of this, you have my eternal gratitude.

I would also like to thank the Board of Directors for all the hard work that each and every one of them puts in throughout the year. It is unusual day in my life if I do not receive an email from at least one member of the board, relating to either an activity that they are participating in for AFCC or an idea that they have that would benefit AFCC. Your board members, like the membership itself, are a dedicated group, who spend countless hours on behalf of our organization, without any financial reward. They dedicate themselves to their profession and the families that we ultimately hope are benefiting from the hard work that we do. They participate in extensive email conversations and endure evening conference calls, they are completely tireless and for that they too will have my continued thanks.

As for the AFCC staff, it goes without saying that they are the heart and soul of this organization. Words cannot begin to express the level of heart felt gratitude that I have for each and every AFCC staff member. Over the past year, I am certain that there has not been a week gone by that I have not had the pleasure of being able to either communicate with staff members by phone or email and each time I have felt uplifted. The staff has made my tasks as president simple, rewarding, and most certainly enjoyable. I wish there was time and space available for me to outline what each of staff member means to this organization, but there is not. Let me just say that this organization and I will be forever in their debt for all that they have done for us.

Finally, I want to ensure everyone that the upcoming year looks even more exciting than past years. With the Hon. Peter Boshier (former Principal Family Court Judge of New Zealand and current Law Commissioner with the New Zealand Law Commission) there will be an added focus on expanding international reach of AFCC. For those of you who have not yet met Peter, he is just incredible. He has a talent for handling difficult issues with absolute ease, constantly works for the benefit of our organization and will go out of his way to assist in accomplishing any task. It will be a truly great year for AFCC.

In closing, I again wish to thank all of you for the effort that you put forward for this organization. AFCC has truly become an international leader in this field and you should all take pride in that. I look forward to seeing all of you in New Orleans for what is shaping up to be an outstanding annual conference.

Dick



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[American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers](http://AmericanAcademyofMatrimonialLawyers.org)

[American Bar Association Section of Dispute Resolution](http://AmericanBarAssociation.org)

[American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children](http://AmericanProfessionalSociety.org)

[Association for Conflict Resolution](http://AssociationforConflictResolution.org)

[International Academy of Collaborative Professionals](http://InternationalAcademyofCollaborativeProfessionals.org)

[National Association of Counsel for Children](http://NationalAssociationofCounselforChildren.org)



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Q and A with Julie Kenniston

The Keynote Speaker at the AFCC 52nd Annual Conference in New Orleans is Julie Kenniston, MSW, LISW. Julie is the executive director of The Center for Family Solutions (CFS) in Hamilton, Ohio, and co-author of the third edition of the *Handbook on Questioning Children: A Linguistic Perspective*. Her keynote address will focus on understanding the language of children and adolescents by exploring linguistic considerations in child development and what professionals need to know to obtain accurate information and improve communication with children.

What does your current work as executive director of The Center for Family Solutions entail?

CFS is a nonprofit that works with families dealing with sexual abuse and domestic violence, offering intervention, prevention and wellness programs. In addition to the administrative duties necessary as the Executive Director, I provide clinical supervision to our social work interns. I also conduct forensic interviews for the local FBI office, the Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force in Southwest Ohio, and our local task force working with human trafficking victims. I work with a very talented Program and Operations Manager who makes our program a success. My current role at CFS is volunteer, so in addition, I am also an independent contractor and trainer.

How did you become interested in your work?

My career in forensic interviewing began as a child protection worker in a specialized sex abuse unit in Cincinnati/Hamilton County, Ohio. While working in that unit, I interviewed over 3,000 children and their caregivers.

I saw Anne Graffam Walker present on the topic of linguistics many years ago (maybe in 1995 or so) and immediately incorporated her concepts into my interviews. Over the years, Anne and I became colleagues and friends. When she began working on the third edition of her book, she asked me to co-author. Working with her just supported how important these concepts are for practitioners. I have been very fortunate to carry on her work while she enjoys retirement.

What advice would you give to someone new to the field?

There are many resources out there and the body of research has grown immensely. The most important resource that positively impacted my career is the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (APSAC). This multidisciplinary professional association allowed me to connect with experts in the field and stay up on

current trends and research. The work we do can feel like we are in silos. APSAC seeks to open those lines of communication by offering opportunities for different professionals working in child abuse to meet and share. I find that I grow as a professional when I have the opportunity to learn from others, both in my profession and outside my profession.

What are the greatest challenges you see in the field now?

Technology has greatly impacted perpetrator access to children because even very young children are able to connect to the internet with the devices they use. Perpetrators build relationships with children by using technology to facilitate communication. A child of any age might be asked to take pictures or videos and send them to the perpetrator. These pictures/videos are then used illicitly by the perpetrator and the child does not have control. Pictures/videos are sometimes used as a threat to the child to get the child to engage in additional behaviors. In addition, these images are used as extortion which, in turn, keeps the child from telling a trusted adult. Forensic interviewers are more aware of how to inquire about the use of technology and we continue to work with specially-trained law enforcement to keep up with what is happening in the world of technology. Professionals working with children should feel comfortable engaging children in discussions about who they communicate with online so that concerning behaviors can be identified and assessed.

What would you like to see happen in the field in the next ten years?

We are moving toward better communication between researchers and practitioners. Researchers and practitioners are meeting at national conferences, taking advantage of learning opportunities in sessions. The hope would be that we have research-informed practice and practice-informed research.

What aspect of your work do you enjoy the most?

The children and families I work with are incredibly resilient. I am amazed at the power of hope. I have interviewed children who have experienced the unimaginable. While interviewing them I am always impressed with the way they take back control of their lives in the mere process of disclosing. I am also very aware that some children do not disclose because the dynamics are such that in their cost/benefit analysis they feel that disclosing does not help. Regardless, the smiles and the hope that these children embody can only be celebrated. We do our best to help maltreated children, but sometimes they do more to help us than we realize.

What is your proudest personal achievement?

Other than my work with children and families, my proudest professional achievement is working with Anne Graffam Walker on the third edition of *Handbook on Questioning Children*. Anne reached out many years ago to share with me that she would be retiring and wished to complete the third edition. At dinner one evening she asked me to be her legacy. There are no words to explain the moment other than saying it was a gift of gigantic proportions from a woman I admire. I hope to carry on what she started. She is the pioneer who got interviewers of all sorts to identify where we were failing. She gave us concrete answers to fix our communication. Because of Anne, children are safer. My

proudest personal achievement is seeing my children grow into compassionate, kind, thinking individuals.

What do you enjoy doing in your free time?

I enjoy spending time with my family, reading, and traveling. When I read, the characters become a part of my life and I find that I am somewhat saddened when a book ends. I thoroughly appreciate a writer who takes me somewhere new and who teaches me something that helps me grow as a person. I read both fiction and nonfiction, although I tend to gravitate to fiction more. When traveling, I enjoy seeing a place through the eyes of the locals. The best travels include the times that I spend with someone from the location who is willing to share favorite spots or interesting anecdotes.

Tell us something about yourself that your colleagues don't know or answer a question that you wish we had asked.

This year, I began teaching in the MSW program at the University of Cincinnati. We took a class to Nicaragua over spring break. Bachelor's and master's level social work students implemented programs they created for teen groups, domestic violence groups for women, clinics and nursing home work. Our whole group felt that spending time with the people of Nicaragua was a learning experience that changed our lives.



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Share Your Ideas and Interests: Child Welfare Collaborative Decision Making Network Open Forum

Laura Bassein, JD, Senior Attorney, University of New Mexico School of Law—Institute of Public Law

If you are involved in, or interested in becoming more involved in, mediation and other collaborative processes in child welfare cases, plan to attend the *Open Forum*, Thursday, May 28, 2015, from 5:15pm to 6:15pm at the AFCC Annual Conference in New Orleans. The *Open Forum* provides an opportunity to discuss current work in child protection mediation and other child welfare collaborative processes, and to plan for future endeavors. AFCC has long provided a home for the Child Welfare Collaborative Decision Making Network (CWCDMN) and its think tank meetings, and this year's annual conference includes even more sessions than usual of interest to child welfare professionals.

Since 2007, AFCC has hosted the think tank meetings¹ of the CWCDMN at its annual or regional conferences. These meetings range from half-day to day-long meetings chock full of child protection mediation, family group conferencing, and other related presentations and discussions. Additionally, think tank meetings provide a unique opportunity for significant networking among child welfare professionals involved in mediation and other collaborative processes.

Through the CWCDMN, the *Guidelines for Child Protection Mediation*² were born. The *Guidelines* were developed by a diverse group of experts in the field of child protection mediation who are members of the CWCDMN. The *Guidelines* have been adopted by AFCC and endorsed by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) and the Association for Conflict Resolution (ACR).

¹ Information about the "Think Tank" meetings and the Child Welfare Collaborative Decision Making Network are found at: <http://www.afccnet.org/Resource-Center/Center-for-Excellence-in-Family-Court-Practice/ctl/ViewCommittee/CommitteeID/13/mid/495>

² The *Guidelines for Child Protection Mediation* are found at: <http://www.afccnet.org/Portals/0/Guidelines%20for%20Child%20Protection%20Mediation.pdf>

Subsequently, an inspiration to develop “Child Protection Mediation Mediator Model Competencies” arose from the work completed on the *Guidelines*. A workgroup of the CWCDMN examined the portion of the *Guidelines* that addresses “Mediator Recruitment and Training” and that examination led to the idea of mediator competencies. The workgroup concluded that an understanding of the skills and proficiencies that an effective mediator must possess should come before development of training for child protection mediators. Development of this mediator competency document continues.

Many child protection mediation programs throughout the United States, Canada and other parts of the world continue to provide important services on an ongoing basis. Still, much work remains to sustain, strengthen, and strategically develop additional child protection mediation efforts.

At last year’s annual conference in Toronto for the first time in many years, the think tank meeting did not occur. What happened? Throughout the past couple of years, the CWCDMN Steering Committee discussed and considered the necessity for some strategic conversations to assess the needs, interests, and future of the CWCDMN. Thus, this year’s *Open Forum* will provide an opportunity for all interested conference attendees to participate in a facilitated discussion about child protection mediation, family group conferencing, and other child welfare collaborative decision-making processes. The discussion will focus on how CWCDNM can enhance and support work already being done in this field around the world.

Before the *Open Forum*, Thursday, May 28, a workshop will take place from 3:30pm to 5:00pm titled *Collaborative Decision-Making in Child Welfare: Where Do We Go from Here?* Following the *Open Forum*, an optional Dine-Around will take place for all those interested in extending the conversation. Join your colleagues and take a full afternoon to focus on child protection mediation and related collaborative processes.

Child welfare professionals participating in the AFCC Annual Conference will find many sessions of interest including:

- Pre-Conference Institutes:
 - *Critical Issues in Child Development for Family and Juvenile Judges*
 - *Child Protection Mediation: Confronting the Challenges, Getting it Right*
- Keynote Address and Plenary Session:
 - *Rediscovering the Language of Youth*
 - *Children in the Court System: Different Doors, Different Responses, Different Outcomes*
- Workshops:

- *One Family, One Judge, Three Courts: Unifying an Un-Unified System*
- *Supervised Visitation: A Therapeutic Bridge for Relationship Building*
- *One Family, One (Specialist) Judge*
- *Court Ordered Child Protection Psychological Evaluations: The Connecticut Model*
- *Courthouse Dogs Provide Emotional Support for Children in the Court System*
- *Giving Voice to the Adolescent Community through Youth Court Models*
- *Opening the Door to Resolution by Listening to the Child's Voice*
- *Collaborative Decision-Making in Child Welfare: Where Do We Go from Here?*
- *Referral Pathways for Vulnerable Families: Court-Based Models in Australia*
- *Judicial Officers Forum—Balancing a Life on the Scales of Justice: Judicial Wellness*
- *Parent-Child Reunification: How the Family and Court Influence Clinical Process*
- *Toward a Uniform Model of Screening and Safety Planning in Mediation*

- *Unified Family Courts: The Door to One-Stop Shopping for Children and Families*
- *An Improved Multi-Systems Approach for Children Involved in Court Proceedings*
- *Parenting Capacity Assessment in CPS Cases: Evaluating the “Good Enough” Parent*
- *Substance Abuse and Parenting: When Enough is Enough*
- *Advocacy in Child Protection Mediation: Training Toward Attorney/GAL Competencies*
- *Beyond Apples and Oranges: When Domestic Relations and Child Protection Mediators Come Together*



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eNEWS

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Top Ten Tips for Helping Parents Keep Children Out of the Middle

Mindy Mitnick, EdM, MA, Edina, Minnesota and Zachary A. Kretchmer, JD, Minneapolis, Minnesota

As significant a change as divorce is for children, ongoing conflict between parents can cause problems for children across a number of dimensions, including emotional development, social relationships and academic performance. All too often, even the best-intentioned parents act in ways that exacerbate tension and put the adult-sized weight of the divorce or separation onto the shoulders of children. Parents need to know how they can shield children from conflict while still listening to their concerns.

These practical tips are intended for family law professionals to provide to clients they represent as attorneys, see in mediation, help resolve disputes through parenting coordination and in mental health settings, both for parents and children.

1. Parents should model appropriate behavior for the child

Children constantly observe parental behavior. If a parent is terse, rude, will not make eye contact, or is otherwise disrespectful to the other parent, children notice and think that such behavior is normal or okay. Further, children identify with their parents. When it becomes obvious that Dad doesn't like Mom, a child is very likely to question if Dad likes them because the child likes Mom.

Even if it feels fake, making the effort to greet the other parent in a positive way, using good manners with them and avoiding a hostile or sarcastic tone, makes it comfortable for children to be in situations with both parents, such as at a school event or athletic activity.

Further, co-parenting does not end when the child turns 18. Graduations, weddings, grandchildren and other important events will likely involve both parents. Continuing conflict lessens the likelihood that both parents or either parent will be included in these important gatherings.

2. Parents should answer questions posed by the child in an engaged and empathetic way

Children need to be heard rather than interrogated about what they say. For example, when a child says, "I'm really tired," merely asking what time they went to bed may miss their need for comfort entirely. If a child states that he or she is

unhappy with a decision, such as why they cannot spend the night with a relative of the other parent, reflective or active listening helps the child feel heard and doesn't blame anyone. Examples include:

"Wow! That must be confusing. Let's talk about this."

"Why, what do you think?"

"I understand what you're saying, and your mother/father and I will talk about it and get back to you by ___."

"You sound really upset about this. Let's sit down and talk about it."

Parents should demonstrate that they are listening to their children and are willing to help them with their confusion, fear, sadness and/or anger. It's always okay for the parent to ask the child whether there is anything they can do to help.

3. To question or not to question children

When parents don't get along well, they may think, "What goes on in my home stays in my home," and ask, directly or indirectly, that the children not talk about their time together. This teaches children to keep secrets, which may actually prevent them from telling parents about unsafe or frightening situations, such as something that occurs at a friend's home. A parent who asks questions such as, "What did you guys do over the weekend?" or "Where did you go to eat?" should not be seen as intrusive, but rather as encouraging the child to feel free to talk about every part of their life. When a child comes home from school, parents would never say, "What happens at school stays at school."

4. Parents must respond to the child's needs now, and their own needs later

Sometimes the child will ask a question or make a statement that pushes a button. The words "Mom/Dad said" are often triggers that remind a parent of the difficulties they experienced with the other parent. Your client may hear, "Dad says that you left us for another man" or "Mom told us you are behind in child support and that's why we can't go on vacation this year." It's important for parents to wear their "parent" hat at the time they are talking with the child, and appropriately respond to the child's question/statement (See Number 2, above). It may seem helpful to agree with the child, "I know what you mean. S/he used to do the same thing to me," but this would be putting the parent's needs before the child's. Instead, parents should react by using one of the examples in Number 2, above, and take care of their own needs later on, outside the presence of the child.

5. Using "we" messages implies cooperative co-parents

"We" messages show that the parents, although separated, are still a unified team. Parents can use these messages even when they think the co-parent isn't trying to protect the child from the adult disagreements. A statement such as, "I know you want to go on Spring Break with your friends, but I need to talk to your Mom/Dad about whether we think this is a good idea," models respectful and

appropriate decision-making. Parents should make sure children don't think they have to choose between the parents: "We're both going to be at your awards ceremony and you can sit with anyone you want. If you don't sit with me, I'll see you afterwards before I go home."

6. Parents should keep the children informed (schedule, activities, big decisions), but not too informed (financial circumstances, reasons behind the divorce, other adult issues)

When parents say, "I'm going to be honest with the children," this often forecasts sharing too much or inappropriate information with the children. There is a great deal of information parents don't share with children while they're married or living together. Keeping those same topics between the adults prevents unnecessarily burdening children and prevents them trying to figure out who is "right." Few parents share financial details with their children, such as whether they're worried about getting laid off. Telling children about financial matters worries them and typically results in them asking the other parent if the information is "true." Parents regularly promote positive myths like Santa Claus and the Tooth Fairy and don't worry about "being honest" in that context. Parents should ask themselves why they are thinking about sharing information now that they wouldn't have shared if the parents were still together.

7. Keep the responsibility for constructive communication with the parents

When children realize that there is no communication between parents they typically feel a need to fill the void. Similarly, children may begin to protect parents from hostile communication by taking on that role. There are numerous simple guides to constructive communication available to parents, such as "Biff"—Be Brief, Informative, Friendly and Firm.¹ Parents should consider themselves co-workers at Raising Our Children, Inc., and consider how they would react if they saw a colleague in the store, or at the child's ballgame. They would not be rude, dismissive, condescending, or otherwise belligerent, but rather would model good social behavior to the child. Telling clients to react as they would to anyone else rather than make a negative exception for the other parent can make a dramatic difference. Parents should remember that children are always watching, listening and remembering how their parents interact.

8. Pretend that any communications will be viewed/heard by the judge (or the children) someday

Communicated enmity between parents can cause emotional problems for children, and lead to legal ramifications if the parties' judicial officer becomes privy to disrespectful and uncooperative communications. A good rule of thumb is to assume *all* communications (in-person, over the phone, or text/email) can be viewed by people other than the other parent. There are very few circumstances that demand an immediate response, and many parents have lashed out at the other parent without stopping to consider the possible ramifications of their communication. Drafting an email or text and letting it sit for an hour or more will allow the sending parent to fully consider potential consequences of rude or

¹ www.billeddy.com.

disrespectful communications. Pretending that the child or the judicial officer is copied on any written communication reminds parents to be brief and respectful. Further, given that many parents allow children to use their smartphone or computer, the possibility that a child will actually view hostile or degrading communication between the parents can be very real.

9. Pay attention to who owns the problem

Parents sometimes react too quickly in telling a child the issue is “grown-up” business. When a child says, “Mom told me I have to ask you if I can go to Ryan’s birthday party,” telling the child, “Your mom should have talked to me about this,” may leave the child feeling helpless in solving a simple problem. On the other hand, when a child says, “Dad says you’re supposed to buy me new shoes,” this appears to be a grown-up issue. Responding with reassurance that the parents will work this out helps kids get out from between the grown-ups. Sorting out whose problem it is can be tricky: Is this request one that the child would have made to either parent or does this sound like the child is reporting something the other parent wants? Will telling the child you will talk to the other parent leave them feeling stuck and as though there will never be a decision? Sometimes the best course is to answer the child’s question or respond to the request even though the other parent should have spoken to you first. Parents sometimes say, “When I get paid next, we’ll get a pair of shoes” to avoid the child waiting while the grown-ups discuss the issue.

10. Be careful about taking children’s reports literally

There are a variety of reasons why children’s statements and questions to their parents may be unreliable. Sometimes they do report exactly what they heard, but not everything the other parent said. Young children aren’t good reporters of the context of events or statements. They may be accurately reporting the effect but not the cause: “Mommy pulled my arm and hurt me” may be true, but the child doesn’t report that he was stuck in the grocery cart and Mommy was trying to help him get out. Older children often report the part of the conversation that fits with what they want: “Dad said I can go to the carnival with him” does not include the full statement, “You can go the carnival with me if that’s our night together.” Although it’s hard to admit, sometimes children are manipulative to get what they want and purposely don’t provide all of the information when they know a parent is likely to believe the worst of the other parent, such as, “Mom said you’re paying for my class trip.” A good response to such a statement is, “I understand; Mom and I will talk about it and you and I can discuss it afterwards.”

Resources:

Eddy, B. (2005) *High Conflict People in Legal Disputes*. HCI Press.

Garber, B. (2008) *Keeping Kids Out Of The Middle*. Health Communications.

Ricci, I. (2006) *Mom’s House/Dad’s House*. Simon & Schuster

Ross, J. (1996) *Joint Custody with a Jerk*. St. Simon’s Press



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Marsha Kline Pruett, PhD, ABPP
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Co-Parenting in a Highly Conflicted Separation/Divorce: Learning about Parents and Their Experiences of Parenting Coordination, Legal, and Mental Health Interventions

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This dissertation research surveyed 60 separated/divorced conflicted co-parents to investigate parent characteristics and dynamics associated with co-parenting style and parents' experiences of parenting coordination and other legal and mental health interventions. Narcissism, empathy, and conflict were explored in relation to co-parenting style.

The first objective of this study was to learn more about a group of separated/divorced conflicted co-parents, some of whom were involved in parenting coordination, with respect to these personality characteristics and conflict, and how these characteristics and dynamics relate to one another. The second objective was to explore the relationships between narcissism, empathy, conflict, and co-parenting styles. The third objective was to hear parent perspectives about what they believe was most helpful about parenting coordination and other ADR and therapeutic interventions with which they had been involved in order to discover if common elements occur consistently across interventions. The inclusion of parents' perspectives was a much needed addition to enrich the current literature and provide further direction as to what might be needed to improve successful outcomes.

Participants were recruited through a variety of avenues. Those with parenting coordination involvement were recruited through their parenting coordinators (PCs) along with parenting coordination related websites. Other recruitment strategies included study information being disseminated to parents by legal and mental health organizations throughout Canada and the United States. Finally, parents were recruited directly through social media and my research websites. This quantitative study used an anonymous, online survey to collect data from parents, some of whom had parenting coordination involvement (along with other legal and mental health interventions). Through a series of closed and open-ended questions, parents were asked about their

experiences with the above interventions and those with parenting coordination involvement were asked more specifically to comment on this intervention. The survey also included measures of narcissism (Narcissistic Personality Inventory-16), empathy (Toronto Empathy Questionnaire), conflict (Acrimony Scale), and a self-developed co-parenting style scale. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze these measures to look for correlations and associations between these phenomena and a thematic analysis was conducted on the responses to the open ended survey questions in order to establish a framework of thematic ideas.

This study population was predominantly white women in the 35-44 age range, who were highly educated and employed with above average income. Participants were representative of 24 states and two Canadian provinces. The majority of participants (45%) had two children together, with the length of the relationship prior to separation ranging from one to 23.83 years, and an average of 9.5 years. Data from the measures included in the survey revealed a sample low in narcissism, relatively high in empathy and in conflict with their child's other parent. The majority of parents were also equally divided between the two co-parenting categories, parallel and conflicted. Further analyses revealed no relationships between any of the parent characteristics or dynamics (narcissism, empathy and conflict) and none of the characteristics or dynamics predicted co-parenting style. A significant and noteworthy finding occurred within the sub-group of participants with parenting coordination involvement. Those with two years or less involvement in parenting coordination were more likely to be conflicted in their parenting style, while those with more than two years involvement in parenting coordination were more likely to be parallel parenting.

Thematic analysis was used to code the written data from the open-ended questions into six categories: Satisfaction with Mental Health Services, Satisfaction with Legal Services, and Satisfaction with Parenting Coordination, along with dissatisfaction for each of these three categories. Within each category, two sub-categories were created to include specifics about the program or service and specifics about the practitioner. With respect to the category *Satisfaction with Aspects of the Interventions*, three main themes emerged from the data, with two of them occurring across both legal and mental health interventions: *focused on the child's best interests* and *learned useful skills*. The third theme, *gained insight*, was specific to mental health interventions. Emerging themes within the category *Satisfaction with Aspects of the Practitioner*, for both mental health and legal interventions were having a *knowledgeable/experienced practitioner*, followed by the utility of having a *neutral practitioner*. Two main themes that emerged across both mental health and legal interventions for the category *Dissatisfaction with Aspects of the Interventions* were *inefficiency of the intervention* and *lack of therapeutic/working alliance*. One theme emerged across mental health and legal categories within *Dissatisfaction with Aspects of the Practitioner*:

unprofessional/unqualified practitioners. A second theme emerged that was specific to mental health practitioners, bias towards the other parent.

Prior to the open-ended questions, the 37 participants with parenting coordination involvement were asked additional questions specific to their involvement with parenting coordination. They were asked to rate their satisfaction with parenting coordination and with their PC along with how likely it would be for them to recommend parenting coordination to others. Participants were almost equally split between feeling *very dissatisfied*, *neutral*, or *very satisfied* with their experience of parenting coordination. Although responses to the question about satisfaction with the PC covered the entire range of possible scores, the majority of responses were either *very dissatisfied* or *very satisfied* with their PC. Similar to the responses about satisfaction with the PC, participants were equally split between being *very unlikely* or *very likely* to recommend parenting coordination to others.

Thematic analysis specific to the open ended questions pertaining to parenting coordination revealed themes specific to satisfaction and dissatisfaction with parenting coordination and the PC. Four main themes arose from the data for those satisfied with parenting coordination: *logistical issues, interpersonal skills, case management, and authority*. With respect to participants' satisfaction with their PC, two main themes emerged: *changed parent's thinking to recognize the best interest of the child and equity/fairness*. For those dissatisfied with aspects of the parenting coordination program, participants reported information that fit into four main categories: *lack of authority, cost, lack of therapeutic/working alliance, and timing*. The vast majority of participants reported statements that fell into all three of the main themes of dissatisfaction with the PC: *unqualified, bias towards the other parent, and unprofessional*.

Two additional analytic themes emerged from the data that were not directly asked about in the survey questions. The themes were found throughout data from both groups of participants and were not specific to the group with parenting coordination or the group without. The two themes were *lack of success attributed to the other parent*, and *feeling unheard/not validated*. Three sub-categories within the *lack of success attributed to the other parent* theme emerged: *mental health/personality disorders, uncooperative, and alienating behaviours*.

Based on the literature, the findings were unexpected in that scores on the narcissism measure were low and scores on the empathy measure were high, despite half of the sample scoring in the conflicted range of the acrimony scale. Potential reasons for this lack of findings could stem from the self-selected nature of the participants in that those with lower narcissistic features and higher empathic features chose to participate in the research. As the current sample did not have both co-parents fill out the survey, it is

unknown whether the other parent may have scored higher in narcissism or lower in empathy, as some of the participants themselves reported the other parent to be “narcissistic” in their open ended survey responses. Alternatively, some participants may portray themselves in a more favourable light than an independent observer would on behaviours indicative of narcissism or empathy, leading to more positive self-ratings. This has been described in the research as a bias in self-perception or self-enhancement.

Adding further speculation to the meaning of the results could be practitioners viewing subclinical behaviours as indicative of a personality disorder. The reported angry and difficult nature of conflicted co-parents, may lead practitioners to view and categorize their clients as narcissistic, when they may be as likely to be suffering from resurfacing trauma or family of origin issues. These individuals may appear narcissistic in the context of the intervention and work with the practitioner, yet may present quite differently in other areas of daily life, not necessarily meeting diagnostic criteria for narcissism. As my research does not have a matched practitioner and other parent sample with which to triangulate the data, it is difficult to know if the ratings would be similar across both parents and practitioner. The narcissism and empathy measures do not specifically assess these variables with respect to parents in a conflicted separation/divorce. That is, these measures may not be valid for this population or use in this way.

The current study sample found that 14% were co-parenting collaboratively, 44% parallel, and 42% conflicted. Length of time since separation was correlated with co-parenting style. Those who were separated longer were significantly more likely to fall into the parallel parenting category, while those who were separated for a shorter period of time were co-parenting in a conflicted manner. This may suggest that when practitioners work with parents who have been separated for a long period of time and continue to have intense conflict, that a parallel parenting approach may be the direction of the intervention. Given the majority of participants are parallel parenting, it suggests that despite continued conflicted feelings, at least half of the co-parents have been able to disengage and agree to follow similar parenting practices.

The majority of sub-themes emerging within the satisfaction and dissatisfaction categories were found across the type of intervention (i.e. legal, mental health, parenting coordination) and practitioner, indicating many similarities in perception despite specific type of intervention or practitioner. This also aligns with the emerging research on common factors in therapeutic change. Common factors can be described as a common core of elements which explain successful therapeutic outcomes across various modalities and models of treatment. Although there is diversity and complexity within clients, practitioners, presenting issues, and specific goals, determining common

elements that are effective across multiple ADR interventions will contribute to increased efficacy and successful outcomes.

Future research should include a matched sample of co-parents, along with their practitioner, to triangulate data with respect to ratings of narcissistic features, empathy, conflict, and co-parenting style. Also triangulating the data about what led to successful and unsuccessful outcomes of the intervention would be extremely beneficial to get a well-rounded and complete picture of both skills and techniques of the intervention along with specific aspects of the practitioner and parents that played into the process. Perhaps accessing a sample from a court program would also address the dilemma of self-selection and recruitment in that all parents going through the intervention would be asked to participate, potentially leading to a more diverse range of experiences that span the continuum of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the intervention. Similarly, researching programs that are geared toward lower income families and those with more culturally and racially diverse families would expand the research for these populations providing further recommendations for how to increase accessibility to these interventions.

Narcissism and empathy continue to be some of the main personality characteristics discussed in the high conflict literature from clinical perspectives, yet it is unclear whether there is an actual link between these personality characteristics and those engaged in high conflict separation/divorce. The current measures used to assess narcissism and empathy in this study did not find any relationships, but they may not have accurately assessed these characteristics in this particular sample. As a result, narcissism and empathy, along with other personality disorders (i.e. borderline personality disorder) should be further researched to determine if links between these variables and co-parenting style exist and/or manifest in highly conflicted populations. In order to further explore narcissism and empathy as potential personality characteristics evident in a highly conflicted sample, future research could include parents with prior diagnoses of narcissistic vulnerabilities or narcissistic personality disorder to reduce potential self-report bias. Also using other methods of assessment besides self-report measures may provide a more complete or accurate picture of highly conflicted parents' narcissistic and empathic features.

Some of the main takeaways and implications for further research are as follows:

Further education and training about law, courts, and the legal system pertaining to highly conflicted families may help clinicians have a better understanding of the legal system. Similarly, further education and training about mental health and therapeutic skills, techniques, and theoretical frameworks pertaining to highly conflicted families may help legal professionals better understand parents' behaviors within their ecological

context. Specific to parenting coordination, consider joint PC teams consisting of one mental health PC and one legal PC.

Similarly, having PC teams use a group supervision type model would allow for multidisciplinary case consultation and collaboration with other PCs from mental health and legal backgrounds.

Parents appreciate practical, skill based education to effectively manage parenting schedules and recognize unhealthy interpersonal patterns with the other parent.

Increase knowledge about, and research on, parallel parenting and its effectiveness for individual (i.e. parent), child, and family outcomes via longitudinal studies.

Since the parents in this sample are still locked in combat more than two years after separation and are expressing deep concerns about the mental health of the other parent, earlier referrals of parents and families with acute or more persistent mental health concerns to additional mental health services (i.e. individual and/or family therapy) may prove beneficial.

Given participants' perceptions of feeling unheard/not validated and the lack of a therapeutic/working alliance, utilizing a therapeutic approach within the PC role and in other high conflict interventions, in terms of generic clinical skills found to increase success within interventions (i.e. reflective listening, reframing, empathy, engagement, working alliance) could help parents feel their concerns are being heard and their perspectives understood.

Further research is needed to study personality disorders and their frequency in parenting coordination cases to determine if there are higher incidents of personality disorders in parenting coordination participants.

Continue to recognize and include parent perspectives of their involvement with courts and other court-based services into service evaluations and research. In addition, incorporate information from PCs and courts to triangulate data from various viewpoints in order to better understand factors leading to and impeding successful outcomes among high conflict families.

Given the cost to highly conflicted parents, and the legal system by highly conflicted families, increasing access to and providing more affordable services (i.e. sliding scale, pro bono, non-profit community-based agencies) is needed to increase service availability and families' willingness to use the service, along with reducing clogged court dockets. More specific to parenting coordination, provide more pro bono and court funded parenting coordination services to lower income and racially diverse families for increased access to this intervention.

Develop uniformity of the PC role with respect to the level of authority PCs have to make and enforce decisions and a formal process for parents to voice their concerns about parenting coordination and/or the PC, while being mindful of the potential for false accusations (i.e. quasi-judicial immunity for the PC should not be removed).

Regulate parenting coordination through a governing body to manage training/education requirements, continuing education, and uniformity of how the role is practiced across geographic locations and jurisdictions.

In conclusion, participants reported many similarities across mental health, legal, and parenting coordination interventions indicating that there are common elements with which participants were both satisfied and dissatisfied. This speaks to the overlap in mental health and legal services provided to a highly conflicted population. With respect to parenting coordination specifically, participants seemed to be divided in terms of their satisfaction with the intervention and the PC. Nevertheless, the majority of factors with which parents were dissatisfied had to do with the intervention as opposed to the PC, which further highlights the importance of the therapeutic relationship between the family and practitioner. Given the number of parents who were extremely satisfied with the PC and very likely to recommend the intervention to other parents, parenting coordination is a useful intervention with unique qualities.

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