



November 2023
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AFCC Welcomes British Columbia as Newest Chapter

AFCC is excited to welcome British Columbia as our newest provincial chapter. The BC Provisional chapter is AFCC's third Canadian chapter, joining the ranks of the well-established Ontario and Alberta chapters, and AFCC's twenty-third chapter. Thank you, Marianne Cottingham and the Chapter Coordinating Committee, for spearheading this initiative and making this possible.

Are you a part of your local chapter? See all of the [AFCC chapters](#) and join your local chapter today!

Online Training Programs

AFCC online training programs will be returning this winter with three excellent courses.

The Fundamentals of Parenting Coordination

December 4-7, 2023

This comprehensive parenting coordination (PC) training is based on the AFCC Guidelines for Parenting Coordination and

AFCC Online Training Programs

The Fundamentals of Parenting Coordination

December 4-7, 2023

Advanced Issues for Family Law and Dispute Resolution Professionals

January 16-18, 2024

The Fundamentals of Conducting Parenting Plan Evaluations

March 11-14, 2024 and
March 18-20, 2024

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AFCC Conferences

AFCC 61st Annual Conference

Boston, MA
June 5-8, 2023

16th Symposium on Child Custody

November 14-16, 2024
Columbus, Ohio

AFCC 62nd Annual

the Recommendations for Comprehensive Training of Parenting Coordinators. This program will include a comprehensive overview of the parenting coordination process, including definition of the role, responsibilities, and function of the parenting coordinator; an overview of family dynamics; specific PC strategies, techniques, and interventions; implications of intimate partner violence; cultural considerations; ethical issues; and use of technology.

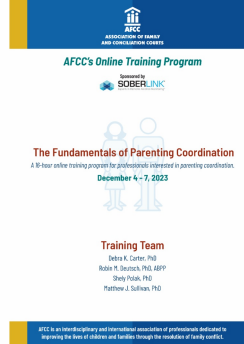
Participants will learn about the parenting coordinator's scope of authority, strategies to help parents improve cooperation and communication, how to help clients utilize the process, and how to effectively write recommendations or decisions.

Presenters:

- Debra K. Carter, PhD
- Robin M. Deutsch, PhD, ABPP
- Shely Polak, PhD, AccFM
- Matthew J. Sullivan, PhD

For more information, please see the [program brochure](#) or check out the [training portal](#).

[Register Now!](#)



Conference
May 28-31, 2025
New Orleans, Louisiana

AFCC Chapter Conferences

**AFCC Arizona
41st Annual Conference**
January 19 - 21, 2024
Sedona, AZ

**AFCC California
Annual Conference**
February 2-4, 2024
San Francisco, CA

**AFCC Washington
Spring Conference**
April 19, 2024
Seattle, WA

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the AFCC
Scholarship](#)

Advanced Issues for Family Law and Dispute Resolution Professionals

January 16-18, 2024

A 12-hour online training program for family law, mental health, and dispute resolution professionals.

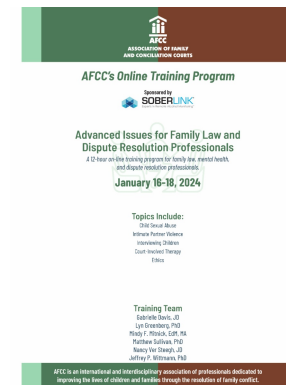
This program addresses the challenges often associated with the most intractable family disputes, including intimate partner violence, interviewing children, child abuse/neglect, - and new this year, court-involved therapy, and ethical considerations. Presenters will share the latest and most relevant research, while examining the many controversies related to these issues from multiple perspectives.

The program takes place in two segments per day, two hours each. Registration includes access to recordings of all training program sessions.

Presenters:

- Gabrielle Davis, JD
- Lyn R. Greenberg, PhD, ABPP
- Mindy F. Mitnick, EdM, MA
- Matthew J. Sullivan, PhD
- Nancy Ver Steegh, JD
- Jeffrey P. Wittmann, PhD

The [program brochure](#) is available along with the [registration](#).



Save the Date!

The Fundamentals of Conducting Parenting Plan Evaluations

March 11-14, 2024 and March 18-20, 2024

More information is coming soon!

Perspective

Parental Alienation Theory Is Frequently Misunderstood

William Bernet, MD, and Alan D. Blotcky, PhD

The concept and the name of “parental alienation” (PA) was introduced by Richard A. Gardner in a newsletter article in 1985. Since then, there has been a remarkable proliferation of qualitative research (e.g., descriptions of PA from about 50 countries) and quantitative research (e.g., prevalence of PA in U.S. and Canada; psychological tests to distinguish alienated from non-alienated children; frequency of acceptance of the PA concept in trial and appellate courts). The basic premise of PA theory has been widely accepted for many years. At the AFCC conference in Denver in 2010, nearly 98% of survey respondents (who attended a plenary session) endorsed the question, “Do you think that some children are manipulated by one parent to irrationally and unjustifiably reject the other parent?” [Continue Reading](#).

Webinar Corner

Affirmative Practice with LGBTQ+ Clients and Family Members

Allan E. Barsky, MSW, JD, PhD

Monday, December 11th, 2023

1:00pm – 2:00pm Eastern Time (US/Canada)

Registration will close on December 10th, 2023, at 9:00am Eastern Time US/Canada .

This webinar provides family dispute resolution professionals with information about how to take gender and sexuality into account when engaging, assessing, and helping individual clients and families experiencing conflict related to separation and divorce. Participants will learn how to engage in LGBTQ+-affirmative practice, including the use of inclusive language and cultural humility, respecting clients, and family members as experts in their own lives.



Allan Barsky received his PhD from the University of Toronto Faculty of Social Work, his MSW from the Wurzweiler School of Social Work at Yeshiva University, and his Juris Doctor from the University of Toronto Faculty of Law. His teaching and research interests include social work practice theory and skill development, pedagogy, conflict resolution, professional ethics, and substance abuse. His book credits include *Ethics and Values in Social Work* (Oxford University Press), *Clinicians in Court* (Guilford Press), *Conflict Resolution for the Helping Professions* (Oxford University Press), *Interprofessional*



Practice with Diverse Populations (Greenwood), *Successful Social Work Education: A Student's Guide* (Cengage), and *Alcohol, Other Drugs and Addictions* (Cengage). Dr. Barsky was awarded the "Distinguished Teacher of the Year" by CDSI students in 2005 and 2020, the "Researcher of the Year – Scholarly and Creative Works" by FAU in 2007, and FAU Scholar of the Year in 2020. Dr. Barsky chaired the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics Review Committee (2016-2017) and was awarded NASW's "Excellence in Ethics Award" (2015).

Registration

Members: \$15

Non-Members: \$50

Certificate of Attendance

Members: \$15

Non-members: \$20

[Register Now!](#)

More Upcoming Webinars!

Confirmation Bias: Getting it Backwards in High Conflict Cases (and How to Correct It)

Bill Eddy, LCSW, Esq.

January 11, 2024

Military Families: Untangling Biases and Balancing Cultural Considerations (DE&I Series)

Hon. Kevin M. Duffan, Richard Garriott, JD, & Sarah Buitrago, JD

January 24, 2024

Equal Parenting Time in Practice and Policy: A Friendly Debate and Discussion

William V. Fabricius, PhD & Michael A. Saini, PhD

February 13, 2024

Family Matters 2.0: Navigating Family Law in the Age of AI

Susan E. Guthrie, JD

March 5, 2024

The "Good Enough" Parenting Plan Evaluation

Leslie M. Drozd, PhD

April 9, 2024

Grappling with No: Children Declining Treatment in the Age of Consent

Barbara Jo Fidler, PhD, CPsych & Stacey E. Platt, JD

May 8, 2024

The Hats We Wear as Court Experts: Roles, Conflicts, and Helpfulness

Jeffrey Wittmann, PhD

June 18, 2024

AFCC 61st Annual Conference

Coping with Transition: Individual, Family and Beyond

Sheraton Boston Hotel, Boston, Massachusetts

June 5-8, 2024

The work of family law, mental health, and dispute resolution professionals is endlessly impacted by

transition on an individual, family, and community level. These include the transition from an intact family to one that lives in two homes; children's transition between developmental stages; transitioning gender; transitioning to new statutes, processes, and professional roles; transitioning in or out of a career; moving, which requires a transition between communities and parenting time plans; and transitioning to new relationships, marriages, and new family forms. Save the date and join AFCC to explore the role of transition in and out of our work.

Exhibit at or sponsor the conference!

With an expected attendance of over 900 family law professionals including judges, lawyers, psychologists, and mediators this conference is the perfect opportunity to showcase your brand or product to those who could benefit most from your services. Secure your spot at the conference by reserving an exhibit table or sign up as a sponsor to have your logo in our conference brochure and on our conference portal page.

We encourage you to sign up early since there is a finite space in our exhibit hall. For additional information or to sign up, please see the [exhibitor prospectus](#) and contact Abby Rebholz at arebholz@afccnet.org.



AFCC ASSOCIATION OF FAMILY AND CONCILIATION COURTS

AFCC 61st Annual Conference
Coping with Transition: Individual, Family, and Beyond
Sheraton Boston Hotel | 39 Dalton St, Boston, MA 02119
June 5-8, 2024

Sponsorship, Advertising, and Exhibiting Opportunities

What is AFCC?
AFCC is the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts, an interdisciplinary, international association of professionals dedicated to improving the lives of children and families through the resolution of family conflict. Founded in 1963, AFCC has about 5,800 members in over 30 countries.

AFCC 61st Annual Conference - Boston, MA
The annual conference is our hallmark event, offering participants unique access to an incredible interdisciplinary network of professionals. The AFCC 61st Annual Conference will bring together 900-1,000 family law professionals. The best of our global partners will gather to share pioneering efforts taking place worldwide and we want you to be a part of it.

Four Great Reasons to Sponsor, Exhibit, or Advertise with AFCC

1. A variety of outreach opportunities, including sponsorship levels to suit your goals and budget, a vibrant exhibit forum, and online listings.
2. Conference faculty includes authors and researchers who conduct landmark studies, leading practitioners, policy makers, judges, and program directors.
3. Conference attendees include the decision-makers who are responsible for selecting programs and products for agencies, firms, and courts.
4. Between 900-1,000 participants are expected to attend, including judges, lawyers, psychologists, mediators, academics, custody evaluators, parenting coordinators, dispute resolution professionals, court service personnel, and others working in the family justice system.

In other words, your potential customers will be there!



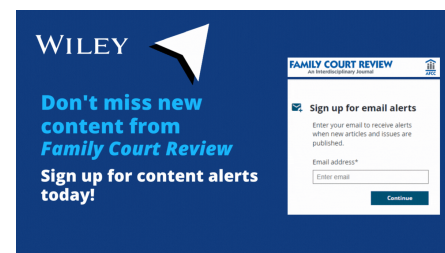
Coming Soon from *Family Court Review*

Beginning in January 2024, *Family Court Review* (FCR) will be disseminated in digital format only, so the *AFCC eNEWS* will be highlighting future issues, and when each issue is fully published online, AFCC will send an email notification along with the table of contents and a link to the issue through the AFCC website. January's issue of *FCR* is a special issue on intimate partner violence, edited by Robin Deutsch, Leslie Drozd, and Michael Saini and [include the following articles](#).

Access the FCR Online!

All *FCR* articles will be posted to the *FCR* archives which can be accessed via the member center on the AFCC [website](#). There you can read any new articles or previous articles you may have missed.

Make sure to [sign up for alerts](#) for when a new article is published in *FCR* which will allow you to stay up to date on the latest research.



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AFCC Seeks Next Executive Director

The AFCC seeks as its next Executive Director, a respected, knowledgeable leader in the family law and dispute resolution field who additionally brings skills or acumen in strategy, partnerships development, and fiscal and team management. The incoming ED will have the opportunity to: build on a talented team's outstanding work; step into an organization in a strong financial position; and drive programmatic impact and growth for the AFCC of the future. [Read the job description to learn more about the position.](#)

Kansas State University Teaching Opportunity

The Department of Applied Human Sciences at Kansas State University is currently seeking a 9-month Assistant/Associate Professor (tenure track) or Teaching

Assistant/Associate Professor (non-tenure track) in the area of peace and conflict studies to join the Conflict Resolution Program. Candidates with expertise and experience across areas of peace, conflict, and trauma studies with a specific focus in one or more of the following areas are preferred: conflict management, mediation, alternative dispute resolution, and/or interpersonal conflict resolution. Please click the following link to learn more: <https://careers.k-state.edu/en-us/job/516276/associate-professor>.

AFCC eNEWS

The *AFCC eNEWS* is the monthly e-newsletter of the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts. The *eNEWS* provides up-to-date information for professionals including practice tips, international news, and the latest initiatives in family law and conflict resolution. The *AFCC eNEWS* is provided at no charge to you; anyone can subscribe. [Subscribe here](#).

AFCC members are free to share eNEWS content.

EDITOR:

[Ann Ordway, JD, PhD](#)

ASSOCIATE EDITOR:

[Patrick Sommer](#)

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Association of Family and Conciliation Courts (AFCC) | 6525 Grand Teton Plaza, Madison, WI 53719

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Perspective

Parental Alienation Theory Is Frequently Misunderstood

William Bernet, MD, and Alan D. Blotcky, PhD

The concept and the name of “parental alienation” (PA) was introduced by Richard A. Gardner in a newsletter article in 1985. Since then, there has been a remarkable proliferation of qualitative research (e.g., descriptions of PA from about 50 countries) and quantitative research (e.g., prevalence of PA in U.S. and Canada; psychological tests to distinguish alienated from non-alienated children; frequency of acceptance of the PA concept in trial and appellate courts). The basic premise of PA theory has been widely accepted for many years. At the AFCC conference in Denver in 2010, nearly 98% of survey respondents (who attended a plenary session) endorsed the question, “Do you think that some children are manipulated by one parent to irrationally and unjustifiably reject the other parent?” (Baker, Jaffee, Bernet, & Johnston, Brief report on parental alienation survey, *AFCC eNews*, 2011).

PA theory is generally understood and accepted by mental health professionals and legal practitioners, i.e., that alienating behaviors by a favored parent can influence a child to avoid and reject a relationship with the other parent. However, there has been an unusual level of misinformation and misunderstanding regarding this topic. These misunderstandings—like memes and wozzles—have taken on a life of their own. Misinformation makes it hard for children and parents who are embroiled in a PA situation to get the help they need, since practitioners may have difficulty in accurately identifying and treating this toxic condition. Here are some examples of recurrent misunderstandings regarding PA theory.

Blatant Ad Hominem Attacks

Since the 1980’s, critics of PA theory have made unprofessional and extremely inappropriate statements regarding Richard Gardner, e.g., that he was “a proponent of pedophilia” and that he “invented” PA simply as a legal device to protect fathers who

sexually abused their children. As time progressed, critics made false statements about the next generation of PA scholars: that we have created a “cottage industry” and are motivated to increase our income by providing expert testimony regarding PA. Also, that we engage in censorship and book-burning when we try to correct misinformation that has been published regarding PA. These false claims are not supported by scholarly investigation but are angry outbursts by writers who tend to speak up without considering the consequences.

Recurrent Misstatements of PA Theory

Recurrent repetition of the *same misinformation* can be studied systematically by citation analysis, which is a type of bibliometric research. For example, Bernet and Xu studied the repetition of the following statement in mental health and legal literature: “PA theory assumes that the favored parent has caused PA in the child simply because the child refuses to have a relationship with the rejected parent.” That is a seriously false representation of PA theory for two reasons: (1) All PA scholars agree that there are several possible causes for a child’s contact refusal or parent–child contact problem; (2) No serious PA scholar “assumes” that all children who manifest contact refusal were indoctrinated by the favored parent to reject the other parent. Bernet and Xu located 94 examples of that *same misinformation* in the writings and presentations of PA critics between 1994 and 2022. They used citation analysis software to illustrate the flow of misinformation over 29 years (Scholarly Rumors, *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*, 2023). The underlying causes of that unbroken trail of misunderstanding appear to be the psychological mindset of the writer (e.g., confirmation bias) and sloppy research practices (such as persistent use of secondary and tertiary sources of information).

Straw Person Arguments Regarding the Diagnosis of PA

A straw person argument occurs in the following way: Author A publishes an article regarding some aspect of PA theory; then Author B misinterprets the statement of PA theory and criticizes their own flawed version of the theory. In that way, Author B makes a big deal out of finding fault with their own interpretation of PA theory, which differs significantly from what Author A wrote in the first place.

For example, Bernet and Greenhill (Five-Factor Model, *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 2022) published criteria for the diagnosis of PA, which is called the Five-Factor Model (FFM) or sometimes the Baker Model. The five criteria are: the child manifests contact resistance or refusal; a prior positive relationship between the child and the rejected parent; absence of abuse, neglect, or seriously deficient parenting on the part of the rejected parent; multiple alienating behaviors on the part of the favored parent; and the child exhibits many of the eight behavioral manifestations of PA. Some critics compare the FFM with the “Ecological Model” or the “Multi-Factor Model” and disparage the FFM as being less useful or less comprehensive. The problem is that the FFM and the Ecological Model have different scopes of interest. The Ecological Model is a broad concept that pertains to all the different reasons why a child might manifest contact refusal, including a parent who is

abusive, a parent with an alcohol problem, separation anxiety, a new stepparent, PA, etc. In contrast, the FFM is a narrow concept that pertains to only one of those various scenarios, i.e., PA. It is illogical to compare the Ecological Model with the FFM and say that one of them is superior. These two models are completely compatible if they are correctly defined and understood.

Hopeful Road Ahead

As a maladaptive family dynamic, PA is an intense, painful phenomenon that causes hard feelings among family members without a good reason. Sadly, PA also contributes to painful misunderstandings among mental health and legal practitioners and researchers. It has been suggested that misunderstandings among professionals are an echo of the feelings among family members. It is a fractal in human psychology, perhaps, not just in mathematical shapes.

Mental health and legal professionals should try to identify and undo misunderstandings and misinformation that they encounter in scholarly literature as well as in their day-to-day professional activities. In the example of the straw person argument, Author A and Author B should communicate with each other, listen to each other, and try to understand each person's perspective. This advice pertains to PA theory and other aspects of family law, in which potential misunderstandings may cloud our understanding and resolution of critical situations. We strive for the day when proponents of PA and critics of PA can engage in meaningful dialogue so that progress can be made for millions of children and parents who are hurting.

For questions, comments, or dialogue, please contact william.bernet@vumc.org.



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