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10 Tips for Conducting Beneficial Brief Focused Assessments

Christy Bradshaw Schmidt, MA, LPC
Kenneth Perlmutter, PhD

AFCC established the ***Guidelines for Brief Focused Assessment*** in 2009, and Brief Focused Assessments (BFAs) remain a unique tool available to judges, attorneys, and parties that provides a more timely and cost-effective option to families beyond a comprehensive parenting plan evaluation (PPE). Each jurisdiction likely implements BFAs differently, so practitioners must remain abreast of their jurisdictional legal requirements and know the differences between a BFA and a PPE.

1. **Know When a BFA is Not Appropriate.** Avoid BFA's in cases requiring a parenting time recommendation, an assessment of the parent/child relationship, or cases involving IPV, child abuse/neglect, relocation, Parent Child Contact Problems, or high conflict dynamics. [Continue reading](#).

AFCC 61st Annual Conference

Coping with Transition:

The Fundamentals of Conducting Parenting Plan Evaluations

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

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SOBERLINK

AFCC Conferences



AFCC 61st Annual Conference

Boston, MA
June 5-8, 2024

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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. [Register now!](#)

Pre-Conference Institutes

Interested in a more in-depth seminar? Join AFCC on June 5th, for one of our six pre-conference institutes. [See this year's pre-conference institutes.](#)

Plenary Session

Depolarizing by Example: AFCC Peace Talks on Parent-Child Contact Problems

This plenary focuses on an innovative peace talk strategy to break down polarization of issues related to parent-child contact problems (PCCP) by emphasizing collaborative dialogue. This transformative approach will be showcased among experts across the continuum of perspectives, who will examine the many factors to consider in assessing and intervening in PCCP.

Presenters:

- William Bernet, MD
- April Harris-Britt, PhD
- Peter Jaffe, PhD
- Hon. Denise McColley (Ret.)
- Stacey E. Platt, JD

Opening Keynote

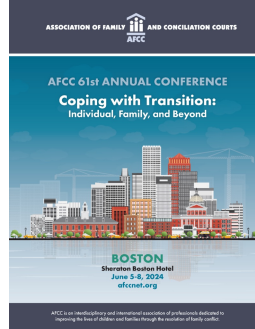
In the spirit of this year's conference theme, Coping with Transitions, attendees will be invited into the personal and profound story of a transgender woman, detailing her journey of transition. Transgender activist, author, and speaker, Tina Madison White will share her inspiring personal and familial evolution and the barriers and successes along the way.

Exhibit at or sponsor the conference!

We are almost out of exhibit space . If you are interested, sign up soon! For additional information, please see the [exhibitor prospectus](#) and contact Abby Rebholz at arebholz@afccnet.org.

For a complete list of conference sponsors and exhibitors, [click here](#).

[Apply for a Conference Scholarship](#)



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Conference Exhibitors

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[Mediate.com](#)
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[PharmChem, Inc.](#)
[Navajo Jewelry & Crafts](#)
[USDTL](#)
[BiasResistantCourts.org](#)
[Pierce's Pledge](#)
[Family Transitions-Programs that Work](#)
[National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse](#)
[Divorced Girl Smiling](#)

16th Symposium on Child Custody

November 14-16, 2024
Columbus, Ohio

AFCC 62nd Annual Conference

May 28-31, 2025
New Orleans, Louisiana

AFCC Chapter Conferences

[AFCC Alberta](#)

Thanks to the generosity of donors to the AFCC Scholarship Fund, AFCC will offer several scholarships for the 61st Annual Conference. Each scholarship includes conference registration, one pre-conference institute, a certificate of attendance, and meal functions, including the Welcome Reception, Luncheon, and Annual Banquet. A limited number of scholarships will include travel stipends. The application deadline is coming up soon on March 11, 2024! [Apply now!](#)

Conference Brochure

For complete conference details, please see the [conference brochure](#).

Continuing Education Credit

This program is eligible for up to 20.5 hours of continuing education for psychologists. AFCC is approved by the American Psychological Association to sponsor continuing education. AFCC is also approved by the State of New York to sponsor CE for psychologists licensed to practice in the state.

This program is pending approval from NASW for 20.5 CE credits.

An application for continuing legal education credit will be submitted to the following states: Minnesota, Vermont, New Hampshire, Ohio, Delaware and North Carolina. Attorneys from other states may use the AFCC certificate of attendance to verify attendance and apply for credit in their state.

For additional continuing education information, please visit the [Continuing Education Credits](#) tab on the conference portal.

Reserve Your Hotel Room Today

The Sheraton Boston Hotel is offering AFCC conference attendees a special group rate of \$245/night for single and double occupancy rooms. Reserve your room early as the AFCC room block frequently sells out prior to the conference. [Book online](#) or by calling 888-627-7054 and mention the AFCC room block.

[Register Now!](#)

AFCC Online Training Programs

The Fundamentals of Conducting Parenting Plan Evaluations

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

An expanded 28-hour online training program for professionals interested in parenting plan evaluations.

This comprehensive parenting plan evaluation (PPE) training program is conducted online by a team of leading practitioners

[Chapter Conference](#)
February 29, 2024-
March 1, 2024
Banff, Alberta

[AFCC Louisiana Annual Conference](#)
March 8, 2024
Baton Rouge, LA

[AFCC Massachusetts Annual Conference](#)
March 15, 2024
Waltham, MA

[AFCC North Carolina Annual Conference](#)
March 22, 2024
Chapel Hill, NC

[AFCC Ohio Annual Conference](#)
April 3, 2024
Westerville, OH

[AFCC Missouri Annual Conference](#)
April 4-5, 2024
Columbia, MO

[AFCC Washington Spring Conference](#)
April 19, 2024
Seattle, WA

[AFCC Colorado Spring Conference](#)
April 26, 2024
Denver, CO

[AFCC Ontario Annual Conference](#)
October 25, 2024
Toronto, ON

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the AFCC
Scholarship
Fund](#)

and trainers. The program will take place in two segments per day, two hours each. Recordings of all sessions will be available for registrants.

This program will incorporate a complete overview of the parenting plan evaluation process, including:

- Definition of the purpose and roles of the parenting plan evaluator
- Specifics of the evaluation process, including interviewing, recordkeeping, and use of technology
- Implications of intimate partner violence and resist-refuse dynamics
- Updates on current research
- Implications of relocations and consideration of special needs children
- Implications of child maltreatment, including sexual, physical, and emotional abuse
- Development of parenting plans
- Review of cultural considerations, biases, and ethical issues
- Utilization of psychological testing
- Best practices for report writing and testifying

Participants will learn the difference between a forensic role and a clinical role, how to review court orders and determine what information should be obtained, strategies for interviewing adults and children, how to assess coparenting issues, how to develop and test multiple hypotheses, and how to craft recommendations.

Training Team:

- Chioma Ajoku, JD, PhD, ABPP
- Robin M. Deutsch, PhD, ABPP
- April Harris-Britt, PhD
- Kathleen McNamara, PhD
- Terry Singh, PhD, ABPP

Read the [program brochure](#) and [register today!](#)

[Register Now!](#)

Webinar Corner

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

Susan E. Guthrie, JD

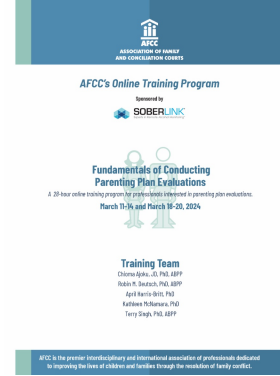
March 5, 2024

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

Registration will close on March 4, 2024, at 9:00am Eastern Time US/Canada.

Join us for an eye-opening webinar that delves into the dynamic intersection of Family Law and Artificial Intelligence! Discover how cutting-edge technology is revolutionizing traditional legal processes, from child custody battles to divorce settlements and the mediation and negotiation processes and learn how to harness AI-powered tools for a smoother, more efficient family law experience for practitioners and clients alike.

Susan Guthrie, JD has been a leading family law attorney and mediator in the country for more than 32 years with a practice focused on high net worth and high conflict complex cases. With Forrest “Woody” Mosten she founded the [Mosten Guthrie Academy](#), in



2021 to provide gold standard family law, collaborative and mediation training for professionals. Her award-winning podcasts, [The Divorce & Beyond® Podcast](#), and [The Make Money Mediating Podcast](#), are two of the top 1.5 % of podcasts



Registration

Members: \$15

Non-Members: \$50

Certificate of Attendance

Members: \$15

Non-members: \$20

[Register Now!](#)

DE&I Series

Disrupting Anti-Black Racism in the Judicial System: A Focus on Child Rearing and African American Parents

Carla Adkison-Johnson, PhD and Trae Bell, MA

Wednesday, April 17, 2024

4:00pm-6:00pm Eastern Time (US & Canada)

Registration closes April 16, 2024, at 9am Eastern Time US

The American Bar Association (ABA), American Psychological Association (APA) and the American Counseling Association (ACA) recommend that court officials and mental health clinicians are educated about anti-Black racism and its impact on the integrity of African American families. It is well documented that the child rearing practices of African American mothers and fathers have been scrutinized and pathologized by helping professionals which has led to the overrepresentation of African Americans in the child welfare system.

This webinar is free to attend, but you must register to receive the link to join.

Carla Adkison-Johnson, PhD, has been a licensed professional clinical counselor for over 25 years and is committed to meeting the counseling needs of adults, families, and children. She is currently a professor (tenured), Department of Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology, at Western Michigan University. She received her doctorate in counseling and human development from Kent State University and is nationally known for her research on culturally competent counseling and African American child rearing practices. She has served as a child discipline expert witness in civil and criminal courts. In 2017, she received the WMU College of Education and Human Development Distinguished Scholar Award. Dr.

Adkison-Johnson is also the recipient of the Kent State University Outstanding Alumnus Award. She is a past member of the Board of Directors for the Council for Counseling and Educational Related Programs (CACREP), the national and international accrediting body for the counseling profession. In this capacity, she served as Chair of CACREP's Training Committee.



Trae Bell, MA is a third-year doctoral student in the Counseling Psychology program at Western Michigan University. He works on various research teams assisting Dr. Carla Adkison-Johnson and her work in child rearing in African-American families. He was born and raised in Teague, TX, and is proud to be a Black man. He graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and a Masters of Arts from an CACREP accredited Clinical Mental Health Counseling program from the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor in Belton, TX. His dissertation research focuses on somebodiness and how the concept is intertwined in the lives of African-American children. His master's internship experience involved counseling children ages three to eighteen.



Trae Bell has presented at the 2023 American Psychological Association (APA) Annual Convention, 2023 Association of Family and Conciliation Courts (AFFC) Conference, and the 2022 Great Lakes Regional Counseling Psychology Conference.

[Register Now!](#)

More Upcoming Webinars!

The "Good Enough" Parenting Plan Evaluation

Leslie M. Drozd, PhD

April 9, 2024

Disrupting Anti-Black Racism in the Judicial System: A Focus on Child Rearing and African American Parents (DE&I Series)

Carla Adkison-Johnson, PhD & Trae Bell

April 17, 2024

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

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

May 8, 2024

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

Jeffrey P. Wittmann, PhD

June 18, 2024

Call for Proposals

AFCC is accepting proposals for 90-minute workshops for our 16th Symposium on Child Custody. The deadline to submit a proposal is **May 3, 2024**.

Layers of complicated issues often confound the transitions experienced by families navigating separation and divorce. Some issues are relatively straightforward. Others are truly perplexing, as family court professionals endeavor to consider allegations, review supporting evidence, and untangle the "he said, she said." Polarizing concerns have given rise to heated debate over presenting risks, and the potential for interventions that integrate safety and the preservation of parent-child relationships whenever possible.

AFCC's 16th Symposium on Child Custody

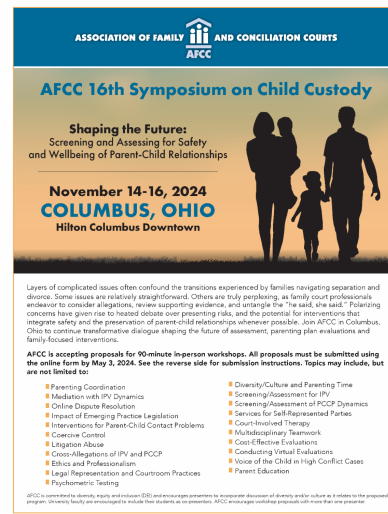
Shaping the Future: Screening and Assessing for Safety and Wellbeing of Parent-Child Relationships

November 14-16, 2024

Columbus, Ohio

Proposals can draw on a topic related to the conference theme or from a topic below:

- Parenting Coordination
- Mediation with IPV Dynamics
- Online Dispute Resolution
- Impact of Emerging Practice Legislation
- Interventions for Parent-Child Contact Problem
- Coercive Control
- Litigation Abuse
- Cross-Allegations of IPV and PCCP
- Ethics and Professionalism
- Legal Representation and Courtroom Practices
- Psychometric Testing
- Diversity/Culture and Parenting Time
- Screening/Assessment for IPV
- Screening/Assessment of PCCP Dynamics.
- Services for Self-Represented Parties
- Court-Involved Therapy
- Multidisciplinary Teamwork
- Cost-Effective Evaluations
- Conducting Virtual Evaluations
- Voice of the Child in High Conflict Cases
- Parent Education



ASSOCIATION OF FAMILY AND CONCILIATION COURTS
AFCC

AFCC 16th Symposium on Child Custody

Shaping the Future:
Screening and Assessing for Safety
and Wellbeing of Parent-Child Relationships

November 14-16, 2024
COLUMBUS, OHIO
Hilton Columbus Downtown

Layers of complicated issues often confound the transitions experienced by families navigating separation and divorce. Some issues are relatively straightforward. Others are truly perplexing, as family court professionals endeavor to consider allegations, review supporting evidence, and untangle the "he said, she said." Policing concerns have given rise to heated debate over presenting risks, and the potential for interventions that integrate safety and the preservation of parent-child relationships wherever possible. Join AFCC in Columbus, Ohio to continue transformative dialogue shaping the future of assessment, parenting plan evaluations and family-focused interventions.

AFCC is accepting proposals for 90-minute in-person workshops. All proposals must be submitted using the online form by May 3, 2024. See the reverse side for submission instructions. Topics may include, but are not limited to:

• Parenting Coordination	• Diversity/Culture and Parenting Time
• Mediation with IPV Dynamics	• Screening/Assessment for IPV
• Online Dispute Resolution	• Screening/Assessment of PCCP Dynamics
• Impact of Emerging Practice Legislation	• Services for Self-Represented Parties
• Interventions for Parent-Child Contact Problems	• Court-Involved Therapy
• Coercive Control	• Multidisciplinary Teamwork
• Litigation Abuse	• Cost-Effective Evaluations
• Cross-Allegations of IPV and PCCP	• Conducting Virtual Evaluations
• Ethics and Professionalism	• Voice of the Child in High Conflict Cases
• Legal Representation and Courtroom Practices	• Parent Education
• Psychometric Testing	

AFCC is committed to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) and encourages members to incorporate discussion of diversity and culture as it relates to the proposed program. Diversity topics are encouraged to include the inclusion of underserved populations. AFCC reserves the right to edit proposals with the new program.

For more information, please see the [Call for Proposals](#). All proposals must be submitted using the [online form](#).

AFCC Member News



Lyn Greenberg, AFCC member from California was recently awarded the Joseph Drown Award for Outstanding Services to Children from the California Chapter of AFCC. This award is presented to those who have made significant contributions to the betterment of children's welfare. Congratulations, Lyn!



Benjamin Garber, AFCC member from New Hampshire has recently published a new book entitled *Twisted Allies*. This gripping murder mystery touches on the extreme consequences of parental alienation. AFCC members can use [this link](#) to purchase *Twisted Allies* at a discount! Congratulations, Ben!

Award Nominations

AFCC will be acknowledging the accomplishments of leaders in family law by presenting awards at the AFCC 61st Annual Conference. We encourage you to recognize your colleagues by submitting a nomination. Nominations for the awards listed below will be accepted online through **March 22, 2024**.

John E. VanDuzer Distinguished Service Award recognizes outstanding contributions and/or achievements by AFCC members. [Nominate a colleague!](#)

Stanley Cohen Distinguished Research Award recognizes outstanding research and/or research achievements in the field of family and divorce. [Submit your nomination now!](#)

Irwin Cantor Innovative Program Award recognizes innovation in court-connected or court-related programs created by AFCC members. [Nominate a program!](#)

AFCC Technical Difficulties

If you are having trouble accessing your account, please note that AFCC's password reset function is currently having some technical difficulties. Members have reported that the password reset will go to their spam folder or not come at all. If you are having trouble accessing your account, please email afcc@afccnet.org and we can assist you.

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.

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[Ann Ordway, JD, PhD](#)

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10 Tips for Conducting Beneficial Brief Focused Assessments

Christy Bradshaw Schmidt, MA, LPC
Kenneth Perlmutter, PhD

February 2024
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AFCC established the [Guidelines for Brief Focused Assessment](#) in 2009, and Brief Focused Assessments (BFAs) remain a unique tool available to judges, attorneys, and parties that provides a more timely and cost-effective option to families beyond a comprehensive parenting plan evaluation (PPE). Each jurisdiction likely implements BFAs differently, so practitioners must remain abreast of their jurisdictional legal requirements and know the differences between a BFA and a PPE. Below is a Top 10 List for practitioners conducting BFAs to ensure that their final work product is beneficial to the trier of fact, as well as the family:

1. **Know When a BFA is Not Appropriate.** Avoid BFA's in cases requiring a parenting time recommendation, an assessment of the parent/child relationship, or cases involving IPV, child abuse/neglect, relocation, Parent Child Contact Problems, or high conflict dynamics.
2. **Establish Reasonable Expectations.** Work with the attorneys before initiating the BFA to ensure that the goals are clear and that everyone agrees on the limited issues to be addressed and the specific questions to be answered. It is also vital that the parties and the attorneys maintain realistic expectations as to the limited nature of the evaluation, how to effectively use a BFA within the custodial disagreement, and the importance of attorneys ensuring that their clients are prepared.
3. **Obtain a Focused Court Order.** Require a detailed court order on every case and ensure that court order contains no more than 1-3 specific questions to be answered that are narrowly focused and discrete.
4. **Develop a Streamlined Process.** Develop a process to conduct a BFA from start to finish that includes a clear Statement of Understanding and a detailed checklist; while ensuring flexibility to pivot within the process with new data. Once a signed court order and the initial retainer are received for a BFA, initiate the

process immediately to ensure efficiency and cost-effectiveness. The goal is to complete a BFA in 60 to 90 days with no more than 10 to 30 hours' work.

5. **Request Necessary Documents.** Determine the scope of documents to request and review because data gathering must be limited to what is needed to answer the court's questions.
6. **Keep the Process on Track.** Take responsibility for keeping the BFA on track and not allowing the parties or the attorneys to shift their focus onto other issues outside the scope of the court order. Should the process go awry, consult with the attorneys or request a case management conference with the court to clarify the focus.
7. **Stay Within the Scope.** Ensure the report is descriptive rather than analytic or interpretive. It is vital to be aware of the limitations of one's role within a BFA to not step out of the scope of one's role or the questions posed by the court.
8. **Create a Template for a Clear, Concise Report.** Develop a report style that is clear, concise, and answers the questions posed by the court, while identifying the limitations of the BFA and any assessments or conclusions reached. A BFA report should be substantially shorter and less expansive than a PPE.
9. **Don't Change Lanes.** Fully understand what is and what is not a BFA so that you avoid opining on the ultimate issue or allowing a BFA to become a comprehensive PPE. BFAs entail a circumscribed focus on such issues as school selection, potential decision-making authority, the voice of the child, coparenting versus parallel parenting, or an update to a completed PPE.
10. **Consider Skills and Competencies.** Remain aware of the skills necessary for PPEs that are relevant to BFAs. (See the AFCC *Guidelines for Parenting Plan Evaluations in Family Law Cases* [2022 Guidelines for Parenting Plan Evaluations in Family Law Cases](#)). Always work to mitigate bias, seek peer consultation, understand the complexities of working in the legal system, avoid clinically intervening during an evaluation, explain the process clearly to the parties, refrain from making interim recommendations, and utilize multiple, diverse, reliable, and valid methodologies.

While there are a number of additional processes for evaluators to consider in conducting BFAs, this list provides a starting point for those interested in adding this unique service to an existing practice or introducing it as a new approach for jurisdictions where it is not already utilized. BFAs allow for access to justice and self-represented litigants to underserved communities while saving the Courts, the attorneys, and the parties precious time and costs.



Christy Bradshaw Schmidt, MA, LPC is a Licensed Professional Counselor from Texas who works as a child custody evaluator. She also serves as an expert witness, and she conducts work product reviews related to the work of other child custody evaluators and mental health professionals. Ms Bradshaw Schmidt is also available to provide strategic legal support to attorneys and their clients in a consulting role.



Ken Perlmutter, PhD is a licensed psychologist in private practice in Palo Alto, CA for over 40 years. His work focuses on various aspects of forensic child custody matters and specializes in working with families in unique, complex, high conflicts cases. His primary work involves Parenting Plan Evaluations and Brief Focused Assessments. He has been a long-term proponent of BFAs and recently presented at AFCC Los Angeles on their current use. He has extensive experiencing serving in the roles of custody mediator, parenting coordinator and co-parent counselor. He enjoys consulting with attorneys as a reviewing expert, both disclosed and non-disclosed, and as a confidential consultant to attorneys and their clients. Recently he has written several articles on the use of Remote Methods in Parenting Plan Evaluations. He has been a member of AFCC for over 30 years. He is a Board Member of AFCC-CA.