



ASSOCIATION OF  
FAMILY AND  
CONCILIATION COURTS



eNEWS

## President's Message

**Dick Altman, Napoleon, Ohio**

As I write this message it is seven degrees outside with about three inches of snow on the ground; not bad since last year at this time it was -10 degrees with 24 inches of snow. But as my wife often reminds me, I love living in Northwest Ohio. On the other hand, it also makes me smile to think that in just a few short months we will all be in New Orleans at the 52nd AFCC Annual Conference, *Children in the Court System: Different Doors, Different Responses, Different Outcomes*.

[Read more](#)

## AFCC 52nd Annual Conference

***Children in the Court System:  
Different Doors, Different Responses, Different Outcomes***  
May 27-30, 2015, Hilton New Orleans Riverside

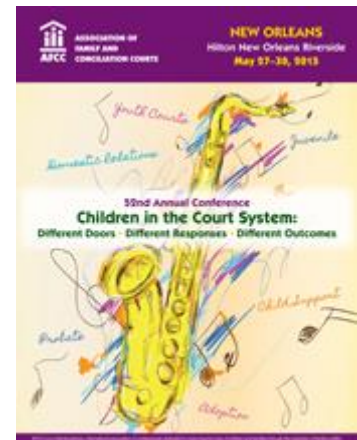
**Special thanks to 52nd Annual Conference Sponsors!** This year's Diamond Sponsor: [OurFamilyWizard.com](#); Gold Sponsors: [OnlineParentingPrograms.com](#) and [Complete Equity Markets, Inc.](#); Silver Sponsor: [Creighton University—The Werner Institute](#); and Bronze Sponsors: [Kolodny Law Group](#) and [Adelphoi](#). Please visit their websites and learn more about them. AFCC is grateful for their generous support.

**Thank you as well to the Conference Program Committee:** Hon. Denise McColley and Matthew Sullivan, co-chairs; and committee members: Terri Campesta, Milfred Dale, Mindy Mitnick, Daniel Pickar, Aaron Robb, Michael Saini, Leslie Todd, and Marilou Giovannucci—all of whom spent many hours poring over proposals and preparing for what promises to be an excellent conference program.

**Exhibit space is filling up fast.** If you would like to introduce your

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## AFCC Conferences



## AFCC 52nd Annual Conference

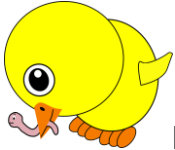
May 27–30, 2015  
*Children in the Court System:  
Different Doors, Different  
Responses, Different Outcomes*  
Hilton New Orleans Riverside  
New Orleans, Louisiana  
[Program Brochure, Online  
Registration](#)

**Special Thanks to 52nd  
Annual Conference Diamond  
Sponsor**  
[OurFamilyWizard.com](#)

products and services to the interdisciplinary community of family professionals who attend AFCC conferences, [read more about the opportunities](#) and contact Erin Sommerfeld, [esommerfeld@afccnet.org](mailto:esommerfeld@afccnet.org) or 608-664-3750.

**AFCC is accepting proposals for posters to be exhibited during the annual conference.** Students, lawyers, mental health professionals, and academics are invited to propose posters concerning innovative interventions, initiatives, new programs, legal or policy changes, and/or research. The deadline to submit a proposal for a poster is February 7, 2015. [See submission instructions, topic suggestions](#) and [submit a proposal using the online form](#).

**Thanks to generous member donors, conference scholarships are available to assist recipients with the cost of conference attendance.** Scholarships include registration for a pre-conference institute, the conference, attendee meals, networking functions, and a certificate of attendance. A limited number of stipends to help recipients offset the cost of travel and lodging will be awarded. The deadline to apply is March 1, 2015. [Scholarship application, guidelines and criteria](#)



**Register now—early bird registration discounts end March 7.** AFCC members who register and pay by March 7, 2015, will receive the best rates for conference registration. Not yet a member of AFCC? You can join with your conference registration, register at the member rate and save \$10 on your first year of membership. It is strongly encouraged that you register for the conference and book your accommodations early; previous annual conferences have sold out in March.

[Register online](#)  
[More information](#)

**Make your hotel reservations at the Hilton New Orleans Riverside.** Enjoy a prime downtown location near [Harrah's Casino](#), on the famous [street car lines](#), a quick three blocks from the [French Quarter](#), and on the banks of the Mississippi River. [The Shops at Canal Place](#) are nearby and the [Outlet Collection at the Riverwalk](#) is connected to the hotel. Family friendly attractions like the [Audubon Nature Institute](#) are conveniently located. The AFCC participant room rate is \$178 per night, single or double occupancy. All rooms are



**AFCC-AAML Conference**  
October 1–3, 2015  
Capital Hilton  
Washington, DC

**AFCC Regional Training Conference**  
November 5–7, 2015  
Hyatt Regency Columbus  
Columbus, Ohio

**AFCC 53rd Annual Conference**  
June 1–4, 2016  
Sheraton Seattle Hotel  
Seattle, Washington

**AFCC 54th Annual Conference**  
May 31–June 3, 2017  
Sheraton Boston Hotel  
Boston, Massachusetts

#### AFCC Training Programs



**Nuts and Bolts of Parenting Coordination: Helping High Conflict Parents Resolve Disputes**  
Mindy F. Mitnick, EdM, MA

subject to availability and early reservations are encouraged to ensure a room at this rate—the AFCC hotel block has sold out in recent years. [Book online](#) or call 1-800-445-8667 and request the AFCC special rate.

**Honor a colleague or a program with a nomination for one of the following AFCC awards.** Nominations must be received by March 15, 2015. Awards will be presented Wednesday evening at the annual conference in New Orleans. The John E. VanDuzer Distinguished Service Award recognizes outstanding contributions and/or achievements by AFCC members; the Stanley Cohen Research Award, sponsored by the Oregon Family Institute, recognizes outstanding research and/or achievements in the field of family and divorce; and the Irwin Cantor Innovative Program Award recognizes innovation in court-connected or court-related programs created by AFCC members.

[Full award descriptions, criteria, and a list of recipients](#)

## Ask the Experts

### What is the Biggest Challenge Facing Conflict Professionals Today?

*Bernie Mayer, PhD, Creighton University—The Werner Institute, Kingsville, Ontario*

The greatest challenge faced by conflict professionals is not what you might expect. In this piece, Bernie Mayer discusses how we limit ourselves in the way we understand conflict and our role in resolving it. Although we understand and intervene in conflict by rejecting the polarized views often presented by disputants, we still assume our own polarities. Understanding our self-imposed polarities and challenging ourselves to move past them will help us develop tools with which we can take an integrative approach to conflict, building on our greatest strength as conflict professionals.

[Read more](#)

## AFCC Scholarship Fund

If you have already donated to this year's annual appeal, THANK YOU! If you have not yet donated—there is still time to help professionals and students attend AFCC conferences. As the scholarship applications for New Orleans come in, we are reminded of just how important this effort is. Although AFCC conferences are relatively inexpensive compared to other international and national professional education conferences, registration fees, travel and hotel expenses add up, making attendance difficult for many of our colleagues. This year's scholarship recipients will be incredibly

March 9–10, 2015  
Loyola University Chicago  
Chicago, Illinois  
[More information](#)

### When Nuts are Loose and Bolts Don't Fit: Advanced Practices in Parenting Coordination

Arnold T. Shienvold, PhD  
March 11–12, 2015  
Loyola University Chicago  
Chicago, Illinois  
[More information](#)

### AFCC Chapter Annual Conferences

#### Texas Chapter Annual Conference

*New Findings on Infant Overnights and Relocation*  
January 23, 2015  
Tarrant Family Law Center  
Fort Worth, Texas  
[More information](#)

#### Louisiana Chapter Annual Conference

*Current Issues in Family Court: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*  
January 30–31, 2015  
Staybridge Suites  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana  
[More information](#)

#### Arizona Chapter Annual Conference

*Tomorrow is Here: Confronting the Challenges of the Modern Family*  
February 6–8, 2015  
Sedona, Arizona  
[More information](#)

#### California Chapter Annual Conference

*Inventing the Future: Getting Ahead of the Curve for California's Families*  
February 6–8, 2015  
Westin South Coast Plaza Hotel  
Costa Mesa, California  
[More information](#)

grateful for your support.

[Donate today](#)

[Thank you to 2014-2015 contributors](#)

## **Basic and Advanced PC Trainings in Chicago—March 2015**

AFCC, in collaboration with [Loyola University Chicago School of Law's Civitas ChildLaw Center](#), is pleased to announce two new training programs, *Nuts and Bolts of Parenting Coordination: Helping High Conflict Parents Resolve Disputes*, with Mindy F. Mitnick, EdM, MA, March 9-10, 2015, and *When Nuts are Loose and Bolts Don't Fit: Advanced Practices in Parenting Coordination*, with Arnold T. Shienvold, PhD, March 11-12, 2015. Continuing education credit is available. AFCC members receive a substantially reduced rate on registration. Additional registration discounts apply when you register for both trainings. [See the training brochure for details, including presenter bios and timed agendas.](#)

[Register today](#)

## **In Family Mediation, Caucus Less and Have the Parties Come Up with Solutions**

*Jennifer Shack, Director of Research, Courtesy of Resolutions Systems Institute*

If you're a family mediator, [research](#) from Maryland suggests you should minimize the amount of time spent in caucus and instead elicit ideas for solutions from the parents. The research focused on the effect of mediator strategies on parties' perception of their ability to work with the other party to overcome conflict, their understanding of the other party, their own understanding of what they want, etc. It also looked at the effect of the strategies on the outcome of the case and the agreement reached.

[Read more](#)

## **AFCC Publication of the Month *Innovations in Family Law Practice***

This volume of the *Innovations* series chronicles the changing landscape of family law practice. Chapters examine the development of new legal processes, implementation of new professional roles, promotion of family self-determination, and innovative responses to scarcity of resources. Kelly Browe Olson and Nancy Ver Steegh co-edited this volume. Contributors include: Susan A. Hansen, Gregory M. Hildebrand, David A. Hoffman, Forrest S. Mosten, Pamela Cardullo Ortiz, Carmelo Runco, and Andrea Kupfer Schneider. Members receive 15% off AFCC publications.

## **Washington Chapter Annual Conference**

*Shared Parenting*

*Predicaments:*

*Washington's Policy and Practice Concerns*

March 7, 2015

Washington Athletic Club  
Seattle, Washington

[More information](#)

## **Massachusetts Chapter Annual Conference**

*Parenting Plans and Shared Custody:*

*Recent Research and Implications for Family Law Professionals*

Friday, March 27, 2015

Conference Center at Waltham Woods

Waltham, Massachusetts

[More information](#)

## **Alberta Chapter Annual Conference**

*Professionals at the*

*Crossroads: Helping Families and Children Access the Legal System*

April 9–10, 2015

Providence Renewal Centre  
Edmonton, Alberta

[More information](#)

## **Oregon Chapter Annual Conference**

*The Rising Tides of Shared Parenting*

April 10, 2015

The Grotto Conference Center  
Portland, Oregon

[More information](#)

## **Australia Chapter Annual Conference**

*Building Bridges:*

*A Multidisciplinary Approach to Family Law*

August 14–15, 2015

Sydney Shangri La Hotel  
Sydney, Australia

[More information](#)

[Order online today](#)

## Chapter News

Congratulations to new chapter presidents!

**Florida**—Robert Merlin, JD, Coral Gables, Florida

**Indiana**—Christopher Barrows, JD, Indianapolis, Indiana

**Wisconsin** —Carlton Stansbury, JD, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

## Member News

**Renee Bauer**, Hamden, Connecticut, has written a book for children going through divorce, [Percy's Imperfectly Perfect Family](#), from Archway Publishing. Percy the perky penguin talks about his fears and works through the changes brought by his parents' divorce, helping parents to start a conversation with their own children.

**Justin Corbett** is the new Executive Director of the Association for Conflict Resolution (ACR). He is also currently the Chief Project Officer of Advancing Dispute Resolution. Justin was previously the Sections Director for the ACR Board of Directors, and a board member and Executive Director of the National Association of Community Mediators (NAFCM).

**Bernie Mayer**, Kingsville, Ontario, has written a new book for conflict professionals, [The Conflict Paradox: Seven Dilemmas at the Core of Conflict](#), from Jossey-Bass and ABA, a comprehensive guide to overcoming conflict to arrive at a satisfying resolution. The book outlines the seven major dilemmas that conflict resolution practitioners face. Readers will find guidance toward getting to the heart of conflict, and practical tools and techniques for more successful intervention.

## Family Law in the News

### What Ruth Bader Ginsburg Taught Me about Being a Stay-at-Home Dad

A young lawyer puts his former boss's ideals into practice.

*Ryan Park, courtesy of The Atlantic*

This past summer, on the last day of my clerkship with Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, she rose from her cavernous desk and, following a hearty goodbye hug, asked me what was next. I told her that the next morning marked the start of my new job as a stay-at-home dad. She smiled warmly and wished me luck.

[Read more](#)

### Facebook to Post Amber Alerts for Missing Children

*Donna Leinwand Leger, courtesy of USA TODAY*

## 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**

Facebook will tap its 185 million U.S. users to help find and return missing children with a new initiative to push Amber Alerts to its popular social media news feeds.

[Read more](#)

[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 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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Erin Sommerfeld

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RESOLUTION SYSTEMS INSTITUTE

# COURT ADR

the eNewsletter of Resolution Systems Institute

C O N N E C T I O N

## **In Family Mediation, Caucus Less and Have the Parties Come Up with Solutions**

*Jennifer Shack, Director of Research, Courtesy of the [Court ADR Connection](#), [Resolutions Systems Institute](#)*

*What Works in Child Access Mediation: Effectiveness of Various Mediation Strategies on Custody Cases and Parents' Ability to Work Together, Maryland Administrative Office of the Courts, 2014.*

If you're a family mediator, research from Maryland suggests you should minimize the amount of time spent in caucus and instead elicit ideas for solutions from the parents. The research focused on the effect of mediator strategies on parties' perception of their ability to work with the other party to overcome conflict, their understanding of the other party, their own understanding of what they want, etc. It also looked at the effect of the strategies on the outcome of the case and the agreement reached.

Perhaps the most surprising finding is that when more time was spent in caucus the parties were less likely to believe that they could work with the other party to resolve their conflict or that they had multiple options for resolving it. This was measured as a shift in attitude from before the mediation to after it, and was true even after accounting for differences in complexity and tractability of the conflict.

The researchers also looked at groups of mediator behaviors that encompassed particular strategies. These included reflective strategies, directive strategies, eliciting participant solutions and offering their own perspectives. Eliciting participant solutions had the most positive impact on the participants. They were more likely to say they understood the other party, that they were clearer about their own desires and that the underlying issues had been revealed. They also were more likely to say that they could work with the other party to resolve the conflict and that they had multiple options for resolution. In addition, the greater the more that eliciting strategies were used, the more likely the case was to end with mediation and a consent order.

The research included pre-mediation surveys of the parties, observations of each session and post-mediation surveys. The mediators were also surveyed and case data was obtained six months after the last mediation session.

Click [here](#) for a two-page summary and additional findings.



ASSOCIATION OF  
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eNEWS

## Ask the Experts

### What is the Biggest Challenge Facing Conflict Professionals Today?

By Bernie Mayer, PhD, Creighton University—The Werner Institute, Kingsville, Ontario

While there is no shortage of challenges, those that conflict professionals most often focus on—marketing, approaches to mediation, institutional obstacles, training, certification, public acceptance—seem very secondary to what I believe is the most serious obstacle to our success and growth as a profession: the limits we (perhaps unintentionally) impose on ourselves by how we understand conflict and our role in it.

What makes conflict work vital, exciting, and durable is our outlook on conflict and conflict intervention. We bring a unique set of conceptual tools to conflict—tools that distinguish us from law, psychology, diplomacy, political science, and labor relations, to name a few other fields of practice that deal with conflict. While we draw on all of these fields—and for many of us they are our professional fields of origin—we differ from them in how we think about conflict and therefore how we approach it. But while we operate from a powerful set of concepts that guide our work, they are often embedded in our practice rather than something we consciously or fully embrace (they are our “theories in action”). As a result we are often vague about just what these frameworks are, and we don’t spend much effort trying to challenge, deepen, or intentionally connect them with what we actually do. This is unfortunate since they are the source of our strength and identity as a profession and they point the way to a broader utilization of our services.

At the heart of our way of understanding and intervening in conflict is our rejection of the polarized way in which most conflicts are framed. Disputants present conflicts as a choice between right and wrong, winning or losing, compromising or standing on principles. Conflict professionals try to help people look beyond these simplistic framings. Our approach is imbued with the belief that there is almost always a third way that integrates the most important beliefs, needs, and ideas of conflicting parties. We have many techniques for doing this. Perhaps the most prevalent is the principled interest based approach described in *Getting to Yes* (Fisher, Ury, Paton, 1991). We also encourage integrative negotiation, a systems approach, affirmation of shared underlying values, and a focus on mutual concerns. All of these can be seen as approaches to breaking down the polarized approach that disputants are prone to take in conflict.

But even as we believe in the essential importance of breaking through a polarized approach to conflict, we adopt our own polarities; this interferes with our ability to make



sense of a conflict and our effectiveness as interveners. Our biggest challenge, therefore, is to understand these polarities, challenge ourselves to move past them, develop ever more sophisticated tools for taking an integrative approach to how we understand conflict, and thereby build on our greatest strength as conflict professionals. For example, consider three of these polarities:

### ***Competition and Cooperation***

When divorcing parents are fighting over parenting plans, we instinctively want to encourage a cooperative approach to negotiation, problem solving, and parenting, and to discourage competition. We equate cooperation with lower levels of conflict, more effective parenting, and better adjusted children. We associate competition with high conflict, adversarial approaches to negotiation, and more traumatized children.

Conflict professionals exhibit similar attitudes with regard to labor relations, environmental disputes, international conflicts, and political negotiations. For example, we think that the way to end the dysfunctional polarization of our political culture is to be more cooperative and less competitive.

But it's not. Competition is a necessary and healthy part of our political system—democracy depends on it. Similarly, the way to help parents through divorce is not simply to tell them to stop competing and start cooperating. Suppressing competition often means marginalizing a parent. The problem in both situations is that there is in fact a need to do *both*—to compete and to cooperate—and in fact you can't have the one without the other. To preach to parents that they simply need to cooperate and all will be well denies a reality that they are very well aware of—that they are in a relationship that has competitive components, just as our national political parties are. The challenge is to compete effectively and to cooperate effectively, and to see the two as inextricably intertwined.

Effective parenting, particularly when parents have different views about how to parent and about education, religion, discipline, nutrition, etc., necessitates that parents find a constructive way to articulate their different views, advocate for their beliefs, and figure out how to move forward despite their differences. A genuinely cooperative parenting relationship requires that parents learn to compete in a cooperative manner and to cooperate in competing. Our capacity to help parents do this, and to understand this challenge, is essential to promote a healthy co-parenting relationship, one in which both parents are genuinely involved in all aspects of their children's lives. The alternatives (which are sometimes the best we can do) are to suppress genuine disagreements, create artificial barriers in parenting decision making, marginalize a parent, or subject children to dysfunctional conflict.

As anyone who has worked with high conflict parents knows, this is no simple challenge, and simply recognizing it does not solve it. However, if we fail to appreciate the reality of the competitive element of cooperative parenting, then we are not being realistic, we are not meeting parents where their experience is, and we are failing to use our most important conceptual tools for helping people in conflict.

### ***Logic and Emotions***

Most conflict professionals understand that you cannot simply apply logic to address a conflict. We recognize that emotions play a major role in how we address conflict and that we often have to “work through” our emotions in order to reach a more rational, objective, and constructive place. However, we sometimes think of these as separate processes. We seem to believe that we have to help disputants deal with their emotions just enough so that they can be put aside, allowing disputants to do the logical and rational work (the “real” work) necessary to deal with conflict.

But that is a myth. Emotions can take over, but so can logic. An overly logical approach is no more realistic or effective than an overly emotional one. Emotions are essential to clear thinking. Our challenge is not to move past emotionality, but to integrate it with rational processes so that people can make wise decisions. The neuroscientist Antonio Damasio (2005) found that people who had damaged the part of their brain that processes emotions could still engage in rational analyses of the pros and cons of different courses of action, but they could not make decisions. Emotions are not only essential to good decision making, they are essential to the capacity to make decisions at all.

So when we try to help people (or ourselves) work through their emotions so that they can engage in a more rational approach to conflict we are onto something, but we only have it half right. Our more profound challenge is to help people use their rational tools to handle their emotions so that their emotions can be brought to bear on their rational process. We ought not ask divorcing parents to put aside their sad, angry, scared, or upset feelings, for example. This cannot be done in a healthy way. Instead, we need to help them accept and understand these emotions (using rational processes) so that these can be integrated into their thinking about their choices and concerns in an effective and meaningful way.

For the most part, disputants intuitively understand this. Conflict professionals come close to getting this right when they acknowledge feelings, stay with them, accept them, and do not try to rush people through them. But too often, we view emotions as something to deal with and then move beyond so that the real work can be done. Emotional work is just as much real work as rational analyses. And these aspects of conflict processing cannot be separated.

### ***Principle and Compromise***

We often get this right as well. We do not ask people to relinquish their principles so that they can compromise as necessary to deal with a conflict. We are more likely to ask them to be flexible in how they understand their principles or to think harder about what principles are critical to them. If parents say, for example, that equal parenting time is an essential principle for them about which they are unwilling to compromise, we are likely to accept this but to ask them to delve a bit deeper into why this is so important to them.

But what we may not always recognize is that without appropriate compromise no principle is meaningful—and without adherence to principle, compromise has no purpose. The challenge of integrating principle and compromise is part of almost every important move we make in conflict; as with competition and cooperation, or emotion and logic, our challenge is to take a truly integrative approach. Principle and compromise are not simple choices, but essential components of an ethical and effective approach to conflict.

As conflict professionals, we often fall into these and other polarities (e.g. outcome and process, neutrality and advocacy, avoidance and engagement). But we are also well situated—by our experience and by the values that undergird our work—to find an integrative approach to the dualities they represent. So our biggest challenge, both in terms of our thinking and our practice, is directly related to the biggest asset we bring to conflict, namely, our commitment and experience in helping disputants move beyond a polarized, dualistic approach to their conflicts. And as with most important challenges, the clearer we can articulate the issue, both the easier and more challenging it becomes to deal with.

These and other conflict dilemmas are described, illustrated and analyzed in [\*The Conflict Paradox: Seven Dilemmas at the Core of Disputes\*](#) by Bernard Mayer (Jossey-Bass/Wiley and the ABA, January, 2015).

Explore this topic further at the AFCC 52nd Annual Conference in New Orleans. Dr. Mayer will present a full day pre-conference institute, *The Conflict Paradox: The Challenge at the Heart of Conflict*, Wednesday, May 27, 2015.

**Bernie Mayer, PhD**, Professor of Dispute Resolution, The Werner Institute, Creighton University, is a leader in the field of conflict resolution. Bernie has worked in child welfare, mental health, substance abuse treatment, and psychotherapy. As a founding partner of CDR Associates, Bernie has provided conflict intervention for families, communities, and governmental agencies throughout North America and internationally. Bernie's latest book, *The Conflict Paradox, Seven Dilemmas at the Core of Disputes*, is just out (January 2015). Earlier books include: *The Dynamics of Conflict*, *Beyond Neutrality*, and *Staying with Conflict*. Bernie is the recipient of the 2013 President's Award and the 2009 Meyer Elkin Award, both presented by the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts.

## References

Damasio, A. *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*. New York: Penguin Books, 2005 (originally published in 1995 by G.P. Putnam's Sons).

Fisher, R., Ury, W. and Patton, B. *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In*. Second Edition. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1991.



## President's Message *Dick Altman, Napoleon, Ohio*

As I write this message it is seven degrees outside with about three inches of snow on the ground; not bad since last year at this time it was -10 degrees with 24 inches of



snow. But as my wife often reminds me, I love living in Northwest Ohio. On the other hand, it also makes me smile to think that in just a few short months we will all be in New Orleans at the 52nd AFCC Annual Conference, *Children in the Court System: Different Doors, Different Responses, Different Outcomes*.

One of the benefits of being on the board is that we have the opportunity to see the first drafts of the conference brochure. I

guarantee that this one will grab you. From front cover to back page, it is an eye-catcher. The conference opens with a terrific keynote address with Julie Kenniston, the co-author of *Handbook on Questioning Children: A Linguistic Perspective*. This session is a must for anyone who works with and interviews children. Then, Friday morning we have two great plenary sessions, *Children in the Court System: Different Doors, Different Responses, Different Outcomes*, followed by *Access to Justice: Different Strokes for Different Folks*. There is also the opportunity to attend one of eight pre-conference institutes on Wednesday, May 27. The conference itself offers 84 sessions on an incredibly wide range of topics.

For this conference we explore a slightly different aspect of the family law system. Many sessions will relate to conference title, *Children in the Court System: Different Doors, Different Responses, Different Outcomes*, and will look at how children are impacted differently depending on how they enter the courts. We will explore how we can improve our processes inside those doors to provide better outcomes for these children; examining issues like equitable access to services for children whose parents are self-represented. This conference will include many of the usual top-notch presenters from AFCC, but also many first time presenters talking about some truly great projects from around the world.

Not only will our 52nd annual conference be outstanding from the perspective of education, it is also difficult to imagine a more exciting venue. New Orleans offers something for almost everyone: rich culture, incredible music, unbelievable nightlife, fine cuisine and, if you are like me and would prefer to be fishing to almost anything, I understand that the end of May is an excellent time to fish in the shallows around New Orleans for redfish and other shallow water species. I encourage all of you to pick up the conference brochure—you will receive it in the mail any day now—and immediately register for this conference. And don't forget to reserve your hotel room!

While the annual conference will examine children's journeys through the court system, much of children's and family's outcomes are determined by the quality and availability of programs and services, often those made available through the courts. To that end, I am pleased to share with you the new AFCC Access to Family Court Services Task Force. Co-chaired by the Hon. Dianna Gould-Saltman (Compton, California) and Jacqueline Hagerott, JD, LLM, CCM (Columbus, Ohio), this project is designed to look at court services provided to litigants in family court matters around the world. The goal is to identify existing programs and develop information to help those working in court-related agencies, so that they adopt and implement successful programs without reinventing the wheel.

The project consists of three main categories. The first branch is a survey of family courts and family court professionals, looking at the services provided, as well as areas where the courts and professionals believe that services are lacking. This branch of the project is being led by Michael Saini, PhD (Toronto, Ontario). The second branch is a review of existing family court services from around the world, the results of which will be catalogued such that they will be of use to family courts and family court professionals. This project is being led by Linda Fieldstone, MS (Miami, Florida), former AFCC President. The final branch will be materials for family court professionals working with self-represented litigants, as well as self-represented litigants themselves. This branch of the project is being led by Andrea Clark, MS (St. Louis, Missouri) and Stacey Platt, JD (Chicago, Illinois).

In addition to the individuals identified above leading this project, my thanks and gratitude also to the many AFCC members who are assisting with this project; our colleagues at the Institute for the Advancement of American Legal System (IAALS), who are collaborating with AFCC on related projects; and the many other professionals we have reached out to. When this project is completed, the information will be made available to AFCC members. We hope it will be of assistance to you in your respective practices.

Finally, I would like to tell you a little bit about the incredible staff we have working for us at the headquarters in Madison, Wisconsin. As AFCC President, I have had the opportunity to attend several national and international conferences this year. At every one of these events I was approached by numerous colleagues and told that AFCC conferences are the absolute best conferences they attend. Much credit for this goes to our dedicated members who make up most of the faculty, but also to our AFCC staff.

From top down the AFCC staff is 100% devoted, not only to the organization, but also the AFCC mission, vision and values. No matter what the task, whether it is extremely time-consuming or something that may seem almost trivial, they immediately take hold and accomplish it. What is even more impressive is that in the past 11 years AFCC has grown by more than 3,000 members, more than tripling the size of the association. In 2003, there were eight chapters; there are now 22. And those numbers seem to keep increasing. All of this without a substantial increase in staff. Over the past few years our annual conferences have begun to consistently draw close to 1,000 or more participants, and the staff handles it with ease. What you may not know is that at every conference, they are at the registration desk working before 6:00am most mornings and they don't stop working until late at night. When staff returns to Madison after a conference, they don't kick back. They are in the office Monday morning working on the next conference and their many other duties.

While the space in this message doesn't allow me tell you about each staff member individually, let me just say they are without question, some of the most talented, hard-working, and thoughtful individuals I have ever had the pleasure of working with.

When you are at the conference in New Orleans, I encourage all of you to stop by the registration desk and introduce yourself to the staff and thank them for all the work they do.

Wishing all of you a prosperous New Year and looking forward to seeing you in New Orleans.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dick Altman". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Dick Altman  
AFCC President



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