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President's Message: Keep Calm! AFCC On!

Matthew Sullivan, AFCC President

We cannot prevent adversity, but adversity can make us more resilient. -Sheri Brisson

I did a speaking and training tour across Europe all of February—Barcelona, London, Edinburgh, and Milan, with the coronavirus hot on my heels. Milan started sheltering in place the day we left the country. It was unreal at that point. Since my return, the COVID-19 pandemic has become very real and the “P” in PTSD has not happened for me yet. Personally, and professionally, the pandemic spread has created incredible health, social, and economic disruption and uncertainty with accompanying anxiety and hardship, if not trauma, for most of us. [Read more.](#)

AFCC Special Webinar Series: Parent-Child Contact Problems

AFCC presents a [special webinar series](#) featuring the authors from the April 2020 Special Issue of *Family Court Review* on Parent-Child Contact Problems.

Thank you to our conference sponsors!

Diamond Sponsors



Platinum Sponsors



The series consists of sixteen webinars which will be held between May 12th and July 7th. **Each webinar has a maximum capacity of 500 attendees, so register early!**

See the Webinar Corner below or [the AFCC website](#) for more information.

Ask the Experts: Ten Things to Understand About Alienation

Bill Eddy, LCSW, Esq.



The 10th anniversary edition of Bill Eddy's book, *Don't Alienate the Kids: Raising Resilient Children While Avoiding High-Conflict Divorce*, is now available. We thank Bill and [High Conflict Institute](#) for supporting AFCC as a Platinum Sponsor of the cancelled 57th Annual Conference.

1. Alienation is the resistance or refusal of a child to spend time with one parent for no good reason (with whom there was a previously decent relationship), while extremely favoring the other parent. This is different from estrangement, when there is a proportionate reason for this resistance, such as extreme physical child abuse. [Read more.](#)

AFCC Responds to the Coronavirus with Online Conversations

AFCC, OurFamilyWizard.com, and Soberlink presented four online conversations featuring leaders in family law on relevant, timely topics like coparenting during the COVID-19 crisis, video conferencing, and post-pandemic strategies. Free recordings of these conversations can be accessed through the AFCC website, under Resources for Family Law Professionals on the [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Resources and Information page](#). A fifth online conversation will be added later this week.

Using Zoom to Conduct Online Mediation: Considerations and Resources for Community Dispute Resolution Program Centers

Longtime AFCC member Doug VanEpps is the director of the Michigan Supreme Court Office of Dispute Resolution, which has developed a resolution on many aspects of online mediation. The resolution is a living document; new content is added regularly to address emerging needs. For example, the resolution now includes an appendix to address online domestic violence screening. [Read the resolution.](#)

AFCC Special Webinar Series

ASSOCIATION OF FAMILY AND CONCILIATION COURTS
AFCC

AFCC Special Webinar Series on Parent-Child Contact Problems
In lieu of the AFCC 57th Annual Conference, *When a Child Says a Parent Isn't Part of the Problem or the Solution?* AFCC is offering a special webinar series featuring the authors from the April 2020 Special Issue of *Family Court Review* on Parent-Child Contact Problems.

Concepts, Controversies, and Considerations of Parent-Child Contact Problems Michelle D. O'Neil, PhD and Daniel J. Kelly, PhD May 12, 2020, 3:00pm-4:30pm Eastern time US	Parent Alienation: In Search of Common Ground for a New Understanding Theory John M. Meehan, PhD May 14, 2020, 3:00pm-4:30pm Eastern time US	Allegations of Child Abuse During Child Custody Disputes John M. Meehan, PhD, Bruce Park, JD, and Anne E. Roberts, PhD May 15, 2020, 3:00pm-4:30pm Eastern time US	Parental Alienation: False Accusations and Actual Coercion John M. Meehan, PhD May 15, 2020, 3:00pm-4:30pm Eastern time US
Responding to High Conflict Parenting and Responding to the Role of Children in the Parent-Child Relationship John M. Meehan, PhD May 15, 2020, 3:00pm-4:30pm Eastern time US	Intervention Programs for Prevention and Response to Contact Refusal, Alienation, Early Identification, and Resilient Children John M. Meehan, PhD, and May 15, 2020, 3:00pm-4:30pm Eastern time US	Alienation and Reason in Parent Alienation Disputes John M. Meehan, PhD May 15, 2020, 3:00pm-4:30pm Eastern time US	Parental Alienation in the United States: Current Status and Future Research John M. Meehan, PhD, and May 15, 2020, 3:00pm-4:30pm Eastern time US
Children Seeking Contact with a Parent: Can a Parenting Plan or Court Order be Enforced? John M. Meehan, PhD May 15, 2020, 3:00pm-4:30pm Eastern time US	Acting Parties in Two Cases: Practical Early Intervention in Parent-Child Contact Disputes John M. Meehan, PhD May 15, 2020, 3:00pm-4:30pm Eastern time US	Parental Alienation and Alienation-Prone Parents John M. Meehan, PhD May 15, 2020, 3:00pm-4:30pm Eastern time US	Parental Alienation and Alienation-Prone Parents: A Review of the Literature John M. Meehan, PhD May 15, 2020, 3:00pm-4:30pm Eastern time US
Responding to High Conflict Parenting and Responding to the Role of Children in the Parent-Child Relationship John M. Meehan, PhD May 15, 2020, 3:00pm-4:30pm Eastern time US	Responding to High Conflict Parenting and Responding to the Role of Children in the Parent-Child Relationship John M. Meehan, PhD May 15, 2020, 3:00pm-4:30pm Eastern time US	The Blind and the Elephant: When We See in Professional Disputes John M. Meehan, PhD May 15, 2020, 3:00pm-4:30pm Eastern time US	Responding to Severe Parent-Child Rejection Cases: A Review of the Literature John M. Meehan, PhD May 15, 2020, 3:00pm-4:30pm Eastern time US

For more information and registration go to [www.afccnet.org](#) or call 800-666-3759

AFCC Chapter Conferences

Florida Chapter Annual Conference

September 23-25, 2020
Orlando, Florida

Indiana Chapter Annual Conference

October 2, 2020

Colorado Chapter Annual Conference

October 9, 2020

Ontario Chapter Annual Conference

October 16, 2020
Toronto, Ontario

Texas Chapter Annual Conference

November 5-6
Austin, Texas

Resource of the Month

Toolkit for Emotional Care During Social Distancing: Practical Strategies for Separated Parents and their Children

Toolkit for Emotional Care During Social Distancing: Practical Strategies for Separated Parents and their Children

Jan K. Greenberg, PhD, APRF
Resources compiled by Kathleen Miller, Ad. Counselor and Sarah Wilkins, Pupil Liaison

AFCC and other professionals have published excellent guidance for supporting during the coronavirus crisis - specifically advising compliance with the parenting plan, transparency, flexibility, modeling good health care practices, generosity toward each's support and custody in supporting the other parent-child relationship. For many families, practical tools and problem-solving may be essential - not just for healthy co-parenting, but for supporting children through a crisis and promoting healthy adjustment.

Remember that you still have resources, for plans first distributed by the current situation, but professionals are modeling to meet it. If you have been working with a parenting coordinator, mediator, or therapist, that person may already be set up to continue working with you by telephone or remote video conferencing. Strategies associated with court-ordered parenting, school closures and social distancing requirements will impact everybody. You may find your co-parent to be unusually cooperative, or to react poorly with parents whose children suddenly suffer a crisis or serious illness. Do you need some assistance establishing common ground before your dispute will need or establish communication channels that you haven't needed before. For example, many parents have established the habit of sharing each parent's communication independently with their child's teacher, to decrease the need for direct interaction with the other parent. With schools closed, that option may not be available for a while. Nevertheless, many professionals can offer practical tools for exchanging educational information without conflict. Other strategies and community resources are described below and at the end of this article.

Remember a toolkit for managing stress and frustration. The stress associated with the COVID-19 crisis are requiring everyone. Many strategies are practical and not entirely available, but you can plan for them. Some simple preparations may help you manage these stresses and difficult situations before they become overwhelming, and if you have the full toolkit at home for cars and trucks, you can assemble a toolkit for managing stress. Engage

* Please see [James Goodlin's](#) [For Parents who are Divorced/Separated and Share Custody of Children During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)

AFCC Webinar Corner

AFCC Special Webinar Series: Parent-Child Contact Problems

Sixteen webinars will be offered between May 12 and July 7, 2020. The first four webinars in the series are listed below and the entire schedule is available [here](#). All times are shown as Eastern time US.

Concepts, Controversies, and Conundrums of Parent-Child Contact Problems

Nicholas Bala, JD, LLM, and Barbara Fidler, PhD
May 12, 2020, 3:00pm-4:30pm

Parental Alienation: In Search of Common Ground for a More Differentiated Theory

Matthew J. Sullivan, PhD
May 14, 2020, 3:00pm-4:30pm

Dynamics, Not Diagnoses: Assessing and Responding to the Best Interests of the Polarized Child

Benjamin D. Garber, PhD
May 19, 2020, 3:00pm-4:30pm

Multidisciplinary Programs for Prevention and Responding to Contact Failure: Education, Early Identification, and Timely, Effective Judicial Intervention

Judge Philip Marcus, LLM, (Ret.)
May 21, 2020, 11:30am-1:00pm

Participants must register for each webinar individually. **Registration is limited to 500 attendees for each webinar.**

The price to attend a webinar (\$15 for members; \$50 for non-members) includes a certificate of attendance. Recorded webinars will be available at no charge for AFCC members. Webinar registration fees are non-refundable.

Each webinar is eligible for up to 1.5 hours of continuing education for psychologists. AFCC is approved by the American Psychological Association to sponsor continuing education for psychologists. AFCC maintains responsibility for the program and its content. Lawyers, judges, social workers, counselors, and other professionals seeking continuing education credits may use the AFCC Certificate of Attendance to verify attendance when applying to their state, provincial, or other regulatory or licensing agency. **You must attend the live webinar to receive a certificate of attendance.**

[View the schedule](#)

AFCC Judicial Officers Webinars



Family court judicial officers are frequently faced with issues that require proficiency in substantive issues that are typically associated with the mental health profession.

To help bridge this gap, the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts has produced a [series of webinars](#) presented by interdisciplinary teams of judicial and mental health professionals and designed specifically for judicial officers. These webinars are provided free of charge.

This month's featured judicial officers webinar:

As Children Get Older: Developmental Issues and Judicial Dilemmas

Lyn R. Greenberg, PhD, ABPP and Hon. Tom Altobelli

Chapter News

As you know, AFCC has had to be creative and flexible during this pandemic. [AFCC chapters](#) have been doing the same for their members, including (as reported so far):

- Rescheduling conferences and/or substituting webinars (Colorado, Indiana, Missouri, and New Jersey)
- Holding board meetings by Zoom (Ontario)
- Voting by Zoom (New Jersey)
- Holding elections by email and mail-in ballots (Colorado)
- Publishing relevant COVID-19 case law and posting a resource page on their chapter website (Ontario)
- Hosting virtual supper club presentations (Alberta)

AFCC members are all trying to meet their educational and emotional needs, as well as the needs of our clients, in this very trying time; and we are all looking to the future when a form of normalcy reappears.

Member News

Forrest "Woody" Mosten, JD, AFCC member in La Jolla, California, is an active member of the Southern California Mediation Association (SCMA). He was recently presented with the Inaugural SCMA Star Award, which was created in his honor and will bear his name in future years as the Forrest "Woody" Mosten Star Award for Excellence and Innovation in Family Mediation. Congratulations, Woody!



Barbara Sunderland Monouso, PhD, AFCC member in Houston, Texas, was recently featured in two interviews. The first is a [video](#) from InstantMediation.com titled *The Efficacy of Online Mediation*. The second is an [article](#) in *Houston Woman Magazine*, includes Barbara and two other local women who own successful businesses. Congratulations, Barbara!



Do you have a notable achievement to share? Email [Gina Wentling](#) with your story and a professional head shot (JPG or PNG preferred), if you have one, to be featured in next month's Member News!

Membership Notice of AFCC Board Nominations

At the AFCC virtual membership meeting, Thursday, May 28, 2020, at 4:00pm ET, the following individuals will be nominated to serve on the AFCC Board of Directors for a

three-year term beginning July 1, 2020 and concluding June 30, 2023: Larry Braunstein, Leslie Drozd, Linda Fidnick, Beth McCormack, Ann Ordway, and Stacey Platt.

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 Elect: Mindy Mitnick; Vice President: Linda Fidnick; Secretary: Stacey Platt; Treasurer: Dolores Bomrad. Larry Fong and Matthew Sullivan automatically become President and Past-President, respectively, per AFCC bylaws.

Where in the World is AFCC?

Shelter in place with AFCC! Send a picture of yourself wearing your AFCC hat in your favorite room in the house! Post the picture in an AFCC hat on social media using [#AFCCChats](#) [#whereintheworldisAFCC](#). Email your photo to afcc@afccnet.org with a subject line "AFCC hats."



Members of the AFCC Board of Directors from across the world, all wearing AFCC hats, participated in a video conference! The American West, East, and Midwest were represented, as were Canada and Australia.



Former AFCC President Christine Coates on safari in the Serengeti in Tanzania (pre-pandemic).

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, case law and research updates, international news, and the latest initiatives in family law and conflict resolution. The *AFCC eNEWS* is free and you do not need to be a member of AFCC to subscribe. [Subscribe here.](#)

AFCC members are free to share eNEWS content.

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ASSOCIATION OF
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eNEWS

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President's Message: Keep Calm! AFCC On! *

Matthew Sullivan, AFCC President

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-Sheri Brisson

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As the pandemic unfolded, my plans for the rest of my AFCC presidential year were blown out of the water and my efforts have now been focused on supporting AFCC's response to this crisis. Fortunately, AFCC is prepared by having developed ample human and financial resources over the years, putting our organization in the best position to adapt to an extreme challenge like COVID-19. The reasons: a long legacy of gifted and committed leadership; visionary strategic plans; financial conservatism; and serving members by providing cutting-edge programs and guidance from the leaders in our field. More recently, AFCC has developed more web-based capability, which has been invaluable to keeping connected to our membership. Critical to AFCC's resiliency is the individually competent and collectively collaborative AFCC staff. Dawn Holmes, Director of Operations, has overseen the provision of member services in a seamless fashion. Peter Salem, utilizing his incredible Executive Director skills developed over 25 years, has provided exquisite navigation through these troubled waters.

Decisions made by leadership based on present information are almost by definition reactive and potentially come too late. To get ahead of a virus like this one, AFCC has relied on projections of the future impact of the pandemic to take prudent action in the present. As the crisis has unfolded, AFCC leadership stayed ahead of the “curve,” focusing as proactively as possible on our Community's *health*, then *mitigation*, and now (hopefully) *recovery*.

On March 15, we reluctantly cancelled the AFCC Annual Conference in New Orleans, taking the stress off our membership and organization about all of the uncertainty. We made a proactive decision based on the epidemiological forecasts that conference gatherings might not be possible

in late May and our membership's needs to make economic and personal plans as the uncertainties and stresses increased.

We then immediately shifted our resources to mitigation during the escalating devastation of this pandemic. We've offered our membership and family justice community practical guidance from our leading legal and mental health experts on Covid-19 related issues through a variety of online discussions, led by AFCC members who, at a moment's notice, were willing to drop everything in service of our membership.

Our own strength and resiliency have enabled AFCC to collaborate with and contribute to others, working with our sister organizations and partners to provide guidance and support to the larger family justice community. We are also implementing a program to provide financial relief to members who have special economic needs due to COVID-19, utilizing our Resource Development Fund to subsidize membership costs for those in need over the next year.

Currently we are working to support recovery and return to more normal organizational operations, programs, and services. Though the timing of this phase is uncertain, we are confident it will come! AFCC is planning optimistically to hold our Symposium on Child Custody in Las Vegas (Stacking the Deck!) and a majority of presenters scheduled for New Orleans have already committed to present at the Annual Conference in Boston in 2021.

*This version of the phrase was coined by AFCC Vice President Mindy Mitnick.



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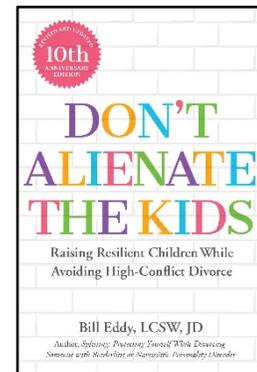
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Ten Things to Understand About Alienation (Resistance or Refusal to See a Parent)

Bill Eddy, LCSW, Esq.

Bill Eddy is co-founder, Chief Innovation Officer, and Vice President of High Conflict Institute, a training and consulting firm helping professionals understand and manage high conflict disputes and challenging people.

The 10th anniversary edition of his seminal book, *Don't Alienate the Kids: Raising Resilient Children While Avoiding High-Conflict Divorce*, is now available. We thank Bill and [High Conflict Institute](#) for supporting AFCC as a Platinum Sponsor of the cancelled 57th Annual Conference.



1. Alienation is the resistance or refusal of a child to spend time with one parent for no good reason (with whom there was a previously decent relationship), while extremely favoring the other parent. This is different from estrangement, where there is a proportionate reason for this resistance, such as extreme physical child abuse.
2. Alienation is not a typical result of separation or divorce, but reportedly occurs in 10-20% of cases and appears to be increasing. Alienation is not a common symptom of child abuse or domestic violence. Most children want the abuse to stop, but also want a relationship with both parents. Alienation is not a gender issue, as both fathers and mothers have been the rejected parent, and grandmothers and grandfathers have been rejected too.
3. Alienation is not a syndrome, such as parental alienation syndrome, as neither the mental health community nor the legal community has agreed on one single cause of alienation. However, there is general agreement among professionals that alienating behaviors can contribute to alienation. For this reason, courts generally consider evidence of behavior, but generally won't hear testimony regarding a syndrome.

4. Alienation is a family systems issue commonly associated with high-conflict divorce, which often involve a parent with a pattern of all-or-nothing, unmanaged emotions, extreme behaviors, or a preoccupation with blaming the other parent. The other parent may have good parenting skills and a previously secure relationship with the child; or may reinforce the conflict with anger and similar blaming behavior; or reinforce the rejection with passivity or withdrawal.
5. Alienation appears to be primarily driven by *emotional repetition in isolation*, as one or both parents lacks emotional boundaries and repeatedly passes intense emotions to the child regarding the other parent. When a child is isolated with such a parent, this emotional repetition may become absorbed by the child with neither the parent's or the child's conscious awareness. For this reason, non-contact orders should be avoided, using supervised contact if there are safety concerns. Parents who have been cut off by the child may send cards and letters to the child sharing life events and positive life lessons so the child knows they still care.
6. Treatment of alienation requires a family systems approach, with family counseling for both parents and the children, to teach and reinforce flexible thinking, managed emotions, moderate behavior, and checking oneself rather than blaming others. Child counseling alone or reunification counseling just between the rejected parent and child consistently fail because the family system remains unchanged.
7. Professionals often join the family system in alienation cases by contributing their own all-or-nothing thinking, unmanaged anger, and blaming behavior, which is then passed to the child by one or both parents because of their lack of emotional boundaries. Thus, alienation usually grows during litigation. Professionals need to manage themselves with significant emotional self-restraint and care in these cases.
8. Courts can reduce the risk of alienation from the start of a case by asking parents to name three positive qualities of the other parent; by saying three ways they will protect the child from their upset emotions during the case; and by admonishing parents to avoid an itemized list of potentially alienating behaviors.
9. In severe cases, consideration should be given by the Court to temporarily suspend contact with the favored parent when interventions with the goal of reconnecting a child and rejected parent have been undermined by the favored parent. Intensive weekend programs or camps for the child with the rejected parent have been found to show promise in reuniting them.
10. There are many cases of success in reunifying children with their rejected parent with a family systems approach as described here. Careful management of cases as early as possible can help.

Bill Eddy, LCSW, Esq., is a lawyer, therapist, mediator, and the co-founder of the High Conflict Institute. He is the developer of the *New Ways for Families*® method of teaching conflict resolution skills to both parents and children in counseling, coaching, and online formats. He is the author of several books, including *Don't Alienate the Kids: Raising Resilient Children While Avoiding High Conflict Divorce, 2nd Ed.* (2020). His website is www.HighConflictInstitute.com. Alienation is a controversial issue and the above tips represent the views of the author.

