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President's Message

Michael A. Saini, PhD, MSW, RSW



As the vibrant colours of fall sweep across Canada's landscapes, I reflect on the beauty and importance of change. While those of us in the Northern Hemisphere are transitioning into

cooler months, our colleagues in places like New Zealand and Australia are embracing spring and summer. Wherever we are, this shift in seasons reminds us that change is constant, and our work in family law must continue to evolve.

In this spirit of change and renewal, I'm excited to invite you to two upcoming AFCC conferences that will inspire and energize your work. The AFCC 16th Symposium on Child Custody will be held in Columbus, Ohio, from November 14-16, 2024. This symposium offers an excellent opportunity to engage in skill-building workshops that address some of the most complex issues in family law today.

Check out this message from Michael Saini in [video form!](#)

[Continue Reading](#)

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

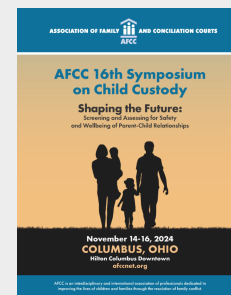
October 2024
Vol 19 No. 10

AFCC Conferences

AFCC 16th Symposium on Child Custody

November 14-16, 2024

Columbus, OH



Conference Sponsor [Soberlink](#)

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[Parenting Plan Builder
Bravo Care](#)

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Angel's Monitoring](#)

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AFCC Ohio Chapter](#)

AFCC 62nd Annual Conference

May 28-31, 2025
New Orleans, LA

AFCC Online Training Programs

[The Fundamentals of
Parenting Coordination](#)
December 2-5, 2024

New! [Advanced Issues in
Family Law: Parent-Child
Contact Problem](#)
January 13-16, 2025

[The Fundamentals of](#)

Don't miss out! The symposium is just a few weeks away!

[Register Now](#)

Earn Up to 18 Hours of Continuing Education Credit!

Psychologists, mental health professionals, lawyers, mediators, counselors, social workers, parenting coordinators, and other family law professionals have the opportunity to earn up to 18 hours of credit by attending the symposium and a pre-symposium institute. See the [conference portal](#) for additional information.

Pre-Symposium Institutes

Get more out of the symposium by signing up for a full day institute:

1. [Advanced Parenting Plan Evaluations](#)
2. [Advance Orientation Improves Ecological Validity in PPEs](#)
3. [Advanced Issues in Mediation](#)
4. [No Professional is an Island: How to Effectively \(or Successfully\) Coordinate Multiple Roles in Family Court Proceedings](#)

Opening Session: Unintended Consequences of Coercive Control Legislation

- Tracy Shoberg, JD
- Anadelle M. Martinez-Mullen, JD
- Carla R. Adkison-Johnson, PhD
- Magistrate Richard Altman (Ret.)
- Kathleen McNamara, PhD

Plenary Session: Including Children's Voices in Family Law Proceedings: Risks and Unintended Consequences

- Mindy F. Mitnick, EdM, MA
- Hon. Denise McColley (Ret.)
- April Harris-Britt, PhD
- Alexander D. Jones, JD, MSW
- Kelly Browe Olson, JD, LLM

Exhibit at the Symposium

Have an exciting product or service that family law professionals could benefit from? With over 300 family law professionals expected to attend, this conference is the perfect place to display your service or product! [Sign up now](#) to exhibit at the symposium.

[Register Now!](#)

Sponsored by



SOBERLINK

Conducting Parenting Plan Evaluations

March 10-13 and
March 17-19, 2025

AFCC Chapter Conferences

AFCC Texas Annual Conference

October 24-25, 2024
Austin, TX

AFCC Ontario Annual Conference

October 24-25, 2024
Toronto, ON

AFCC Indiana Annual Conference

October 25, 2024
Indianapolis, IN

AFCC Missouri Fall Conference

October 25, 2024
Virtual

AFCC Illinois Annual Conference

November 7, 2024
Chicago, IL

AFCC New York Annual Conference

December 13, 2024
New York, NY

AFCC Arizona Annual Conference

January 24-26, 2025
Sedona, AZ

AFCC California Annual Conference

February 7-9, 2025
Costa Mesa, CA

AFCC Alberta Annual Conference

March 13-14, 2025
Edmonton, AB

AFCC North Carolina Annual Conference

March 25, 2025
Chapel Hill, NC

Hypotheses

Christy Bradshaw Schmidt, MA, LPC



Identifying and documenting alternative hypotheses are important aspects of working with court-involved families regardless of your role. Whether you are a parenting coordinator, a therapist for an adult or a child, or a family therapist, considering all possible explanations for the behaviors that you are observing within the family system is vital to mitigate bias. Alternative hypotheses are particularly important in parenting plan evaluations.

The exploration of rival hypotheses has been identified through the literature as a basic element in forensic work. The development of alternative hypotheses, as well as the assessment of which hypothesis best fits the data acquired through multiple methods and multiple sources, provides parenting plan evaluators with an effective strategy for debiasing according to Hirt, Kardes, and Markman (2004 and 1995). With this in mind, it appears clear that the literature and best practice validate the importance of alternative hypotheses. However, the practical nature of how to identify and document alternative hypotheses during the evaluative process and within the final report is less clear. Here are a few tips to get you started.

[Continue Reading](#)

Webinar Corner

Ethical Decision-Making in the Face of Competing Guidelines

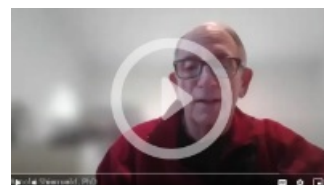
Arnold Shienvold, PhD

November 20, 2024

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

Registration will close on November 19, 2024, at 9:00am Eastern Time US/Canada.

Given the rise of hybrid process assist families in family law cases, one can find themselves in situations where standards and guidelines, not to mention personal moral positions, can come into conflict with one another. This webinar will briefly discuss the underlying foundations of ethical principles and offer a seven-step approach to assist in thinking through an ethical dilemma.



Check out this [video](#) from the presenter on why you should attend this webinar.

Arnold Shienvold, PhD is a Past President of AFCC. He was recently Chair of the Task Force for the AFCC Guidelines for Parenting Plan Evaluations in Family Law Cases.

Registration

Members: \$15

Non-Members: \$50

Certificate of Attendance

Members: \$15

Non-members: \$20



[Register Now!](#)

More Upcoming Webinars!

See below for a comprehensive list of upcoming webinars:

AFCC's monthly webinars are eligible for one-hour of continuing education credits for qualifying professionals.



Cutting to the Chase Competently: Brief Focused Custody Assessment

Ken Perlmutter, PhD & Christy Bradshaw Schmidt, MA, LPC
December 12, 2024



The Truth and Consequences of Kayden's Law: Emerging Trends

Lawrence Jay Braunstein JD; Robin M. Deutsch, PhD, ABPP; & Shely Polak, PhD, AccFM
January 8, 2025



Better or for Worse? Arguments for and Against Codifying Coercive Control in the Family Law Context

Tracy Shoberg, JD & Anadelle M. Martinez-Mullen, JD
February 12, 2025

Effective Collaboration Between Attorneys and Parenting Coordinators in Custody Cases

Bettina Thomsen, LCSW & Jenifer J. Foley, JD
March 4, 2025

AFCC Online Training Programs

The Fundamentals of Parenting Coordination

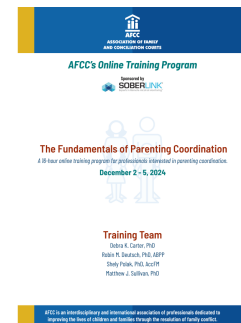
December 2-5, 2024

Interested in parenting coordination? Join AFCC in December for a program that will provide 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.

Training Team:

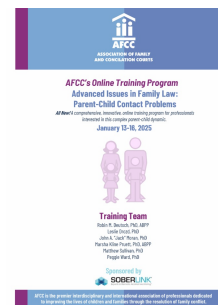
- Debra K. Carter, PhD
- Robin M. Deutsch, PhD, ABPP
- Shely Polak, PhD, AccFM
- Matthew J. Sullivan, PhD



Register Now!

New! Advanced Issues in Family Law: Parent-Child Contact Problem

This innovative, 16 hour course, examines best practice pathways and pitfalls when assessing and intervening in families with parent child contact problems. The course is organized around a hypothetical case study of a family, with multiple video clips per module designed to enhance concepts and encourage thinking. Audience participation is encouraged. The course will take place in two segments per day, two hours each, over the course of 4 days. Recordings of all sessions will be available for registrants.



The experienced faculty will use a multi-media approach to introduce a fictional family with many aspects of what attendees might encounter when working with actual parent-child contact problems in the field. Participants will learn more about assessing parent-child contact problems, including allegations and cross-allegations, to more effectively get to the underlying roots of the presenting problem, and to develop nuanced approaches to resolving some of these extremely difficult dilemmas. Attendees will learn more about how to develop and test multiple hypotheses, and how to craft recommendations that maximize successful outcomes and minimize risks for families. Through the use of video clips, teaching concepts, and group discussion, those attending this program will engage in a detailed examination of parent-child contact problems and the issues and challenges that frequently arise.

Training Team:

- Robin M. Deutsch, PhD, ABPP
- Leslie M. Drozd, PhD
- John A. “Jack” Moran, PhD
- Marsha Kline Pruett, PhD, ABPP
- Matthew Sullivan, PhD
- Peggie Ward, PhD

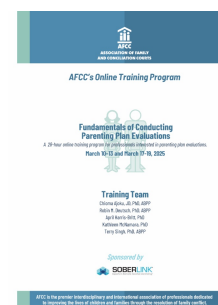
Register Now!

The Fundamentals of Conducting Parenting Plan Evaluations

March 10-13 and March 17-19, 2025

Join AFCC in March for a 28-hour online training program for professionals interested in parenting plan evaluations.

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

Register Now!

Family Court Review

The Journal of the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts

Volume 62 Number 4

October 2024

Leading dialogue in family court research, policy, and practice for more than half a century.

The October 2024 issue of the *Family Court Review* (FCR), AFCC's academic and research journal, has been fully published and is now available to read! AFCC members can access this issues articles by clicking on this [link](#) or by navigating to the [Family Court Review](#) on AFCC's homepage.

Donate to the AFCC Scholarship Fund

Supporting the AFCC scholarship fund is an impactful way to help professionals dedicated to improving family court practices and outcomes for children and families. By donating, you provide financial assistance to those who might otherwise be unable to access AFCC's conferences which, as you probably know, are crucial for advancing the knowledge and skills of judges, attorneys, mediators, mental health professionals, and others who work to resolve family conflicts in a fair and child-focused manner. If you have the means to do so, please consider donating to the [AFCC scholarship fund](#)!

AFCC 62nd Annual Conference

Bridging Perspectives: Pioneering Solutions in Family Law
May 28-31, 2025 | New Orleans, Louisiana

Save the date!

Join AFCC in New Orleans as we convene the world's leading experts to build bridges that span the gaps between professional approaches and priorities.

AFCC Member News



Jeffrey P. Wittmann, PhD, an AFCC member from New York, has recently released the second edition of his book [Evaluating Evaluations: An Attorney's Handbook for Analyzing Child Custody Reports](#). In this updated guide, Jeff shares the method he developed over years of experience as a trial consultant, helping readers navigate and assess child custody reports. Congratulations, Jeff!



Richard A. Warshak, an AFCC member from Texas, has co-written and co-produced the bestselling educational video [Welcome Back, Pluto: Understanding, Preventing, and Overcoming Parental Alienation](#). This 83-minute program encourages children to empathize with the pain of rejected parents while also gaining insight into the perspective of the favored parent. It aims to inspire alienated children and adults to rebuild positive relationships with their parents and other family members. Congratulations, Richard!

Do you have any news you'd like to share? Contact AFCC's Communication Coordinator, [Patrick Sommer](#).

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](#).

AFCC members are free to share eNEWS content.

EDITOR:

[Ann Ordway, JD, PhD](#)

ASSOCIATE EDITOR:

[Patrick Sommer, BS](#)

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AFCC President's Message

October 2024

Vol 19 No. 10

Michael Saini, PhD, MSW, RSW

Dear Colleagues,

As the vibrant colours of fall sweep across Canada's landscapes, I reflect on the beauty and importance of change. While those of us in the Northern Hemisphere are transitioning into cooler months, our colleagues in places like New Zealand and Australia are embracing spring and summer. Wherever we are, this shift in seasons reminds us that change is constant, and our work in family law must continue to evolve.

In this spirit of change and renewal, I'm excited to invite you to two upcoming AFCC conferences that will inspire and energize your work. The **AFCC 16th Symposium on Child Custody** will be held in Columbus, Ohio, from November 14-16, 2024. This symposium offers an excellent opportunity to engage in skill-building workshops that address some of the most complex issues in family law today.

One session I'm particularly looking forward to is **Coercive Control: Policy and Practice in Custody Evaluations**. This workshop will focus on identifying and assessing coercive control in family dynamics—a critical issue that requires careful attention in parenting plan evaluations. Participants will gain practical tools to better understand and address coercive control, which is often a critical factor in determining the best outcomes for children.

Another valuable session, **Navigating Parent-Child Contact Problems with a Risk Management Lens**, will explore strategies for managing contact resistance or refusal cases. This workshop will provide insight into early screening for risk factors such as intimate partner violence, helping professionals develop balanced approaches to challenging cases.

Additionally, I am interested in attending the session on the **Ethical Integration of AI in Family Court Practice**. As AI becomes more prevalent, understanding how to incorporate it ethically into our work is essential. This session will guide maintaining ethical standards while leveraging technology to improve efficiency in family court processes.

These sessions exemplify the practical, research-driven learning that AFCC is committed to providing, ensuring that we continue to be leaders in promoting and supporting innovative solutions to complex family law challenges.

Our **62nd Annual Conference** in New Orleans, from May 28-31, 2025, will focus on “**Bridging Perspectives: Pioneering Solutions in Family Law.**” This theme reflects our dedication to fostering collaboration and exploring new approaches to family law. The pre-conference institutes will provide an opportunity to dive deeply into critical topics, pushing us to think creatively and collaboratively about the future of our work. The AFCC Conference Committee is busy reviewing a record number of submitted proposals for this conference, and we are working on an exciting lineup of plenary speakers and events.

In addition to these conferences, I want to highlight two upcoming training opportunities: **Parent Coordination (PC)** and the new **Parent-Child Contact Problems (PCCP)** training in January. The PCCP training will address one of the most challenging areas in our field—resolving contact resistance or refusal between parents and children. It will equip participants with the latest research and tools to manage these cases, focusing on child well-being and healthy family relationships.

Finally, I want to recognize the exceptional efforts of our AFCC staff. Their hard work ensures that our conferences, training, and daily operations run smoothly, allowing us to focus on advancing our shared mission.

As we move into the year's final months, I encourage you to think about how you can continue contributing to our collective work. Whether attending the **Symposium in Columbus**, the **Annual Conference in New Orleans**, or participating in upcoming training sessions, these opportunities are invaluable for professional growth and collaboration.

I look forward to seeing many of you soon as we continue this important work together, on behalf of the children and families we serve.

For more information and registration details, visit [AFCC Conferences](#).

Michael Saini, PhD, MSW, RSW

President, AFCC



Exploring Possibilities: 5 Tips for Documenting Alternative Hypotheses

October 2024
Vol 19 No. 10

Christy Bradshaw Schmidt, MA, LPC

Identifying and documenting alternative hypotheses are important aspects of working with court-involved families regardless of your role. Whether you are a parenting coordinator, a therapist for an adult or a child, or a family therapist, considering all possible explanations for the behaviors that you are observing within the family system is vital to mitigate bias. Alternative hypotheses are particularly important in parenting plan evaluations.

The exploration of rival hypotheses has been identified through the literature as a basic element in forensic work. The development of alternative hypotheses, as well as the assessment of which hypothesis best fits the data acquired through multiple methods and multiple sources, provides parenting plan evaluators with an effective strategy for debiasing according to Hirt, Kardes, and Markman (2004 and 1995). With this in mind, it appears clear that the literature and best practice validate the importance of alternative hypotheses. However, the practical nature of how to identify and document alternative hypotheses during the evaluative process and within the final report is less clear. Below are a few tips to get you started:

1. **Gather comprehensive background data with an open mind.** Work to avoid initial assumptions, and when you catch yourself making an assumption, make a note to consider alternative hypotheses. In other words, show your work! When an attorney or a work product reviewer reads your evaluation and your file, notations regarding your considerations of alternative hypotheses from the onset of your evaluation provides additional validity to your methodology.
2. **Identify each party's concerns about the other party and begin to consider all the possible explanations for those concerns.** Think outside the box, think critically, and think creatively. Don't simply dismiss one party's stated concern just because it seems absurd on its face. Seek consultation when needed to help ensure that you are thoroughly examining the issues before you. Consultation is a key component of bias mitigation according to Dr. Itiel Dror.
3. **Conduct additional parent-child observations and interviews of the parties, the children, or professional and personal collaterals with your alternative hypotheses in mind.** Add new hypotheses to your list as new possibilities surface. For example, the research suggests that victims of IPV dynamics can appear overly reactive on the surface, while perpetrators can come across as gregarious and even charming. First impressions are not all there is and are not always accurate. Dig deeper. Is it possible that the person who has been victimized in the IPV dynamic is just clamoring to be heard because they

have been repeatedly told no one will believe them? Is it possible that one party is just very good at charming the audience? What is going on beneath the surface? Are there additional possibilities that you have not explored? What is the data telling you?

- 4. Collect collateral data that are relevant and available with a focus on verifying AND refuting your alternative hypotheses.** Data from medical providers, mental health providers, educational providers, law enforcement, and child protection agencies often contain significant information that may assist you in verifying or refuting the hypotheses you develop. You may also develop new hypotheses for exploration based upon the data you uncover.
- 5. When you summarize your findings in your report, identify the alternative hypotheses you considered and which hypothesis/hypotheses are more likely than not supported by the data.** Dr. Jonathan Gould's work dating back to 2006 denotes how critical it is that our testimony and our opinions are scientifically informed and not based on our personal beliefs and values. In turn, our opinions must show that we have considered plausible, alternative hypotheses. Such transparency only increases our credibility.

Obviously, evaluators maintain discretion in determining how to identify and document alternative hypotheses in both their file and in their final report. However, one thing is clear. Alternative hypotheses cannot be minimized, ignored, or forgotten all together. We are all prone to bias in the work that we do, and alternative hypotheses serve a vital role in ensuring that we remain open-minded to all the possible explanations for the parties or the children's behavior.

Alternative hypotheses encourage us to remain curious, to think critically, and to be diligent and thorough in the data we acquire. We, as parenting plan evaluators, must prioritize the documentation of alternative hypotheses to counteract bias and enhance the validity of our assessments. Our role demands that we remain open to various explanations for the behaviors of the families we serve. The well-being of these families depends on our commitment to thorough, unbiased evaluations.

For more on this important topic, please join [Dr. Victoria Harvey and me at the 16th Symposium on Child Custody in Columbus, Ohio](#), for a deeper dive into alternative hypotheses in Workshop 7 - Riddle Me This: How to Explore and Document Alternative Hypotheses in Parenting Plan Evaluations beginning at 1:45 pm on Friday, November 15, 2024. We look forward to examining practical ways to refine your approach and enhance your evaluative practices.



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. Christy is also available to provide strategic legal support to attorneys and their clients in a consulting role.