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IN THIS ISSUE

- President's Message
- Fall 2023 Virtual Conference
- Managing Children's and Adolescents Medical/Mental Health Complaints Amidst Parental Conflict
- Online Training Programs
- Upcoming Webinars
- FCR Going Digital

President's Message

Stacey Platt, JD - AFCC President

One of the best things about being a law teacher and clinic supervisor is that my job requires me to keep up with developing research and best practices so I can credibly share them with my students. AFCC is my learning hub: the place where I get the newest and most detailed information on children and their parents in family separation matters, and where I see high-level demonstrations of techniques from child interviewing to cross examination of experts. Having traveled a bit this year to represent AFCC at conferences of peer organizations, I feel even more certain that my decision twenty years ago to join AFCC and attend as many conferences as I could was one of the best decisions of my career. AFCC's conferences are unparalleled. [Continue reading.](#)

AFCC Fall 2023 Virtual Conference

Addiction, Family Violence and Mental Illness: Assessing and Managing Challenges to Contemporary Co-parenting

November 1-3 and 6-7, 2023

The AFCC Fall 2023 Virtual Conference starts next week, but there is still time to register!

AFCC Fall Virtual Conference

November 1-3 & 6-7, 2023



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AFCC Online Training Programs

The Fundamentals of Parenting Coordination
December 4-7, 2023

Advanced Issues for Family Law and Dispute Resolution Professionals
January 16-18, 2024

The Fundamentals of Conducting Parenting Plan Evaluations
March 11-14, 2024 and
March 18-20, 2024

This conference features two pre-conference institutes, 20 workshops, an opening session, and a plenary session - a total of 22 hours of content. All workshops and general sessions will be recorded and made available to all registrants live (33 hours of recorded content*)!

Members Outside of North America Register for Free!

In recognition of time zone limitations, all AFCC members who reside outside of North America may register for the conference at no charge and may attend the live sessions and also have access all conference recordings. Use the [online form](#) to register.

**AFCC can only provide a certificate of attendance for sessions viewed live - certificates will not be provided for recorded content.*

[Register Now!](#)

AFCC 61st Annual Conference

Boston, MA
June 5-8, 2023

AFCC Chapter Conferences

AFCC Indiana Annual Conference

October 27, 2023
McCordsville, IN

AFCC Arizona 41st Annual Conference

January 19 - 21, 2024
Sedona, AZ

AFCC California Annual Conference

February 2-4, 2024
San Francisco, CA

AFCC Washington Spring Conference

April 19, 2024
Seattle, WA

Managing Children's and Adolescents Medical/Mental Health Complaints Amidst Parental Conflict

Lyn Greenberg, PhD, ABPP



Children at the center of conflict, and those who have been exposed to other Adverse Child Experiences, are at higher risk of developing medical illness, psychological dysfunction, and conditions that reflect an interaction of the two. They often fail to master essential developmental milestones and coping strategies, such as learning to recognize and effectively communicate distress or to manage physical limitations or discomfort. According to the CDC, a staggering 40% of children experience a chronic medical (or mental health) condition with the potential to compromise quality of life.

Effective management strategies are available for many of these conditions. Failure to master those strategies can add physical symptoms, emotional distress, and a sense of unpredictability to children's lives. Conversely, children whose symptoms are well managed may see them resolve over time or at least become less of a barrier to normal activity. This allows children to maintain the age-normal activities and independent relationships that are so critical to successful adjustment over time. [Continue reading.](#)

Online Training Programs

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

The Fundamentals of Parenting Coordination

December 4-7, 2023

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



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

Presenters:

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

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

[Register Now!](#)

Advanced Issues for Family Law and Dispute Resolution Professionals

January 16-18, 2024

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

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

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

Presenters:

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

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

[Register Now!](#)

More information coming soon!

Webinar Corner

Affirmative Practice with LGBTQ+ Clients and Family Members

Allan Barsky, MSW, JD, PhD

Monday, December 11th, 2023

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

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

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

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Allan Barsky received his PhD from the University of Toronto Faculty of Social Work, his MSW from the Wurzweiler School of Social Work at Yeshiva University, and his Juris Doctor from the University of Toronto Faculty of Law. His teaching and research interests include social work practice theory and skill development, pedagogy, conflict resolution, professional ethics, and substance abuse. His book credits include *Ethics and Values in Social Work* (Oxford University Press), *Clinicians in Court* (Guilford Press), *Conflict Resolution for the Helping Professions* (Oxford University Press), *Interprofessional Practice with Diverse Populations* (Greenwood), *Successful Social Work Education: A Student's Guide* (Cengage), and *Alcohol, Other Drugs and Addictions* (Cengage). Dr. Barsky was awarded the "Distinguished Teacher of the Year" by CDSI students in 2005 and 2020, the "Researcher of the Year – Scholarly and Creative Works" by FAU in 2007, and FAU Scholar of the Year in 2020. Dr. Barsky chaired the National Association of Social Workers "Code of Ethics Review Committee" (2016-2017) and was awarded NASW's "Excellence in Ethics Award" (2015).



Registration

Members: \$15

Non-Members: \$50

Certificate of Attendance

Members: \$15

Non-members: \$20

[Register Now!](#)

More Upcoming Webinars!

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

Bill Eddy, LCSW, Esq.

January 11, 2024

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

William V. Fabricius, PhD & Michael Saini, PhD

February 13, 2024

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

Susan Guthrie, JD

March 5, 2024

The "Good Enough" Parenting Plan Evaluation

Leslie Drozd, PhD

April 9, 2024

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

Barbara Fidler, PhD, CPsych & Stacey Platt, JD

May 8, 2024

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

Jeffrey Wittmann, PhD

June 18, 2024

Donate to the AFCC Scholarship Fund

The AFCC Scholarship Committee provides financial support to help family law professionals from all corners of the world convene at AFCC conferences. These scholarships enable access to some of the best continuing education along with an amazing network of collegial professionals. With your help, the Scholarship Committee can extend opportunities to more professionals.

Wouldn't you want your next opposing counsel, custody evaluator, and/or judicial officer to have the knowledge and appreciation of the research, practice, and approach of the system that you do?

[Donate Today](#)

Family Court Review Going Digital in 2024

The October edition of AFCC's quarterly journal, *Family Court Review (FCR)*, will be the last in-print edition, as FCR will be delivered in an entirely digital format beginning in January 2024. According to AFCC President Stacey Platt, "This reflects the AFCC Board's desire to support efficient, effective, and environmentally friendly dissemination of FCR, enabling publication of a greater number of high quality articles on an ongoing basis. Articles will be posted for Early View as soon as they are ready rather than waiting for print production."

Family Court Review is the world's #1 ranked family and juvenile law journal, according to the Washington & Less Law Journal Rankings. Since 2005, AFCC readership has expanded beyond AFCC membership from fewer than 150 print subscriptions to access by nearly 6,500 institutions worldwide, with more than 160,000 online article views annually.

[Access the FCR Online!](#)

Starting January 2024, AFCC members will be notified when new volumes are released. All *FCR* articles will be posted to the *FCR* archives which can be accessed via the member center on the AFCC [website](#). There you can read any new articles or previous articles you may have missed.

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

AFCC Member News

April Harris-Britt, PhD, AFCC member from North Carolina, was recently elected to serve a three-year appointment to the Board of Professional Affairs (BPA) for the American Psychological Association (APA), beginning in January 2024. The BPA works to provide strategic insights on practice and professional affairs issues and priorities, and to deepen and transform linkages with members of the practice community and stakeholder groups. The BPA is responsible for developing and recommending APA policy, standards, and guidelines for the profession of psychology, connecting with professional organizations and groups appropriate to its mission, recognizing contributions to the profession of psychology through awards and honors, proposing ways to enhance the profession of psychology, and fostering the application of psychological knowledge to promote public welfare.



Do you have a notable achievement to share? Email [Patrick Sommer](#) with your story and a professional head shot to be featured in next month's issue.

AFCC Chapter News

AFCC Utah organized Mediation Day at the 3rd District Courthouse in Salt Lake City on September 22nd. This event was a drive to provide free mediation services for self-represented family law litigants and to resolve numerous family law cases directly at the courthouse. The key to the event's success was the involvement of AFCC's members, who generously dedicated their expertise to support these pro se litigants and provide limited scope representation and document drafting services.

AFCC eNEWS

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

AFCC members are free to share eNEWS content.

EDITOR:

[Ann Ordway, JD, PhD](#)

ASSOCIATE EDITOR:

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President's Message: Access to AFCC

Stacey Platt, JD



One of the best things about being a law teacher and clinic supervisor is that my job requires me to keep up with developing research and best practices so I can credibly share them with my students. AFCC is my learning hub: the place where I get the newest and most detailed information on children and their parents in family separation matters, and where I see high-level demonstrations of techniques from child interviewing to cross examination of experts. Having traveled a bit this year to represent AFCC at conferences of peer organizations, I feel even more certain that my decision twenty years ago to join AFCC and attend as many conferences as I could was one of the best decisions of my career. AFCC's conferences are unparalleled.

That said, as someone who practices in a pro bono environment, I have been concerned that many AFCC members (and others) lack access to our outstanding educational resources, just as my clients' families struggle to pay for the services they require. I just returned from Washington, DC, and the AFCC-AAML Joint Conference on Advanced Issues in Child Custody: Evaluation, Litigation, and Settlement. What a great program, including a special trial track and substantive sessions on critical topics such as understanding adults who sexually abuse children, the latest social science in family law, parent-child contact problems, and culture and intimate partner violence. But the reality is that the cost of attendance and travel probably prevented many interested practitioners from joining us.

For that reason, next month AFCC will implement one of our lessons from COVID and hold a virtual conference, *Addiction, Family Violence, and Mental Illness: Assessing and Managing Challenges to Contemporary Co-Parenting*. The conference runs November 1-3 and 6-7, 2023, with pre-conference institutes, plenaries, and workshops on topics such as *Developing a Parenting Education Course for Indigenous Families*, *Trauma - Informed Lawyering*, and *Saying the Quiet Parts Out Loud: A Conversation between*

Advocates and Evaluators. The registration fee for AFCC members is less than half the price of a regular conference with no travel expenses. And we are offering free registration to all members outside of North America. The one thing we cannot figure out how to do for virtual conferences is create worldwide accessibility during the waking hours, so we are offering recorded sessions so our members in other time zones can choose to watch live programming late at night, in the wee hours of the morning, or just tune in to the recorded sessions any time of the day, wherever you are! I hope to “see” you all there.

In addition to our virtual conference, we continue to offer webinars and online training programs, which are updated on an ongoing basis. We recognize that for many people the online experience is not as fulfilling as in-person conferences. But since COVID, we have heard from so many members who are deeply appreciative of the opportunity to attend programs without taking the time away from family or work, or the expense and hassle of air travel and hotel. We hope offering in-person and online programming improves access to AFCC.

If you are fortunate enough to have the option to participate in person, the AFCC’s 61st Annual Conference will be at the Sheraton Boston, June 5-8, 2024. The theme is Coping with Transition: Individual, Family and Beyond. The conference committee is reviewing some amazing workshop proposals and plenary session, and institute planning are underway. We will also be in the midst of our own transition, in the form of the retirement of our executive director, Peter Salem, and the introduction of a new executive director who will lead AFCC into the future. Don’t forget your dancing shoes.

AFCC is a diverse organization, with more than a dozen disciplines and members in 35 countries. While we can’t be all things to all people, we have tried to find ways to bring the best of AFCC to our members throughout the world. Whether you enjoy your membership from the comfort of your home or office or find it more enjoyable to connect with your colleagues in person, I hope that you, like me, have found AFCC to be accessible, valuable, and supportive.



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Managing Children's and Adolescents Medical/Mental Health Complaints Amidst Parental Conflict

Lyn Greenberg, PhD, ABPP

Children at the center of conflict, and those who have been exposed to other Adverse Child Experiences, are at higher risk of developing medical illness, psychological dysfunction, and conditions that reflect an interaction of the two. They often fail to master essential developmental milestones and coping strategies, such as learning to recognize and effectively communicate distress or to manage physical limitations or discomfort. According to the CDC, a staggering 40% of children experience a chronic medical (or mental health) condition with the potential to compromise quality of life. Effective management strategies are available for many of these conditions. Failure to master those strategies can add physical symptoms, emotional distress, and a sense of unpredictability to children's lives. Conversely, children whose symptoms are well managed may see them resolve over time or at least become less of a barrier to normal activity. This allows children to maintain the age-normal activities and independent relationships that are so critical to successful adjustment over time.

Risks increase if children's physical symptoms become just another canvas for conflict, with parents and advocates blaming one another, interpreting symptoms to fit a legal agenda, and skipping essential steps for understanding and assisting children. It is a frequent observation of family court professionals that parents in conflict often overlook steps that could give their children relief, or refuse to cooperate with such steps, due to their overwhelming focus on the conflict. These dynamics can increase family dysfunction and escalate parent-child contact problems when parents disagree. The *Family Court Review* article referenced below includes greater detail regarding issues to consider and practical steps that can be taken by therapists, coparenting counselors, attorneys, judicial officers, and the health care professionals involved with the children. Here are some general suggestions for handling these issues.

- (1) **Consult the appropriate professionals – relief may be available!** If a child complains of chronic headaches, allergic symptoms, or has severe performance problems in school, what would ordinarily be done? Court-involved professionals need to pay close attention to procedures, informed consent, and balanced information gathering, but sometimes the obvious answer is a legitimate one. The child's physician may be perceived as neutral even when other professionals are not, and evidence-based protocols exist for many common childhood problems. There are effective medications for allergies, protocols for assessing and managing headaches and stomach aches, evidence-based treatments for depression, anxiety, and disruptive behavior. Many problems can be effectively addressed without implicating the parenting plan. When parents or children present medical complaints or disputes about medical conditions, obtaining a medical consultation (or formally recommending that the parents do so) is a basic first step – so much so that MHPs can be accused of unethical practice if they skip that step. Collaborating with the physician may also help ensure that the process is manageable, and children receive the full benefit of medical care and that organic medical conditions aren't missed or mismanaged. Many physicians in community practice avoid dealing with parties' lawyers but appreciate assistance from neutral professionals who can assist in structuring communications or help parents to understand medical information.
- (2) **Keep an open mind, encourage parents to do so as well.** While it may seem obvious to each parent that the child's suffering is the fault of the other parent, more than one factor is typically involved. Even if mild symptoms aren't masking serious disease, conflict-based assumptions can lead to missed diagnoses and neglected opportunities to provide relief to the child. A useful exercise is to have the parents list all of the possible causes they can think of, and then to access resources such as those provided on the HealthyParents.org web site from the American Academy of Pediatrics to increase that list. Structured discussion may reveal important information, such as a family or parent history of similar conditions, or a cultural context surrounding emotional and physical complaints.
- (3) **Structure a process and follow progress.** Professionals unfamiliar with family law may face inordinate and uncompensated demands on their time and pressures to side with one parent's interpretation of the child's physical symptoms, particularly if that parent is more familiar to them than the other parent. Some children may even lose access to a familiar physician if it becomes a nightmare for the physician to deal with the children's parents. Court-involved professionals can provide essential collaboration by structuring a process that allows both parents to have input, helps parents identify information to present to the doctor, assists in managing communication, and tracks how well each parent, and the child, is cooperating with the physician's recommendations. For example, many physicians will offer suggestions for providing immediate relief, such as taking over-the-counter medication as soon as a headache begins or tracking the occurrence of physical symptoms over time. How parents respond to low-risk, practical suggestions, and what cooperation they require from the child, can be

illuminating as to overall family dynamics. For parents whose anxiety or anger is overwhelming their self-management skills, parenting coordinators and other neutral professionals may be an essential “buffer” between parents, and between parents and the physician or other professionals. If peaceable management cannot be achieved, that data obtained by tracking parents’ cooperation is often quite clear and can be expressed in plain language which can be readily understood by legal professionals. Counsel may be able to help parents by underscoring how their refusal to cooperate may appear to the court.

- (4) **Focus on Relief and Healthy Functioning.** Collaborative relationships between mental health professionals and physicians allow us to learn from one another. Pediatricians commonly encounter symptoms in children that are temporary and resolve with minimal intervention. They may weigh the stress involved in extensive evaluation against attempting simple interventions to relieve symptoms. Mental health professionals can work with the increasing research on mind-body connections to help children learn to recognize and manage stress, recognize physical triggers, and seek adult help. When conditions are likely to be persistent (for example, asthma), patient education programs are available to help parents and children manage the condition without impairing the child’s ability to participate in life. The skills mastered in learning to cope with medical issues may also be applicable to the psychological distress arising from the child’s exposure to parental conflict.

There is, of course, a subset of parents who can unite to deal with medical problems in their children, particularly when the problems are acute, temporary or life threatening. Cooperation under those circumstances can, in some cases, create an experience of success that can be built upon for more successful coparenting. Chronic conditions, or those that fluctuate in their severity, create a different set of challenges. Early intervention and appropriate guidance can help some parents and many children to manage the conditions successfully, maintain active lives and achieve healthy emotional adjustment. Conversely, if these situations are allowed to deteriorate or become another unmanaged canvas for conflict, the result can be seriously damaging to the child.

**This article reprises some essential practice points from Greenberg, L. R., McNamara, K., Weisz, B. E., Altobelli, J. T., & Davis, F. (2023). Managing children's and adolescents' medical complaints amid parent conflict: Strategies and tools for professionals. *Family Court Review*, 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1111/fcre.12730>. Additional resources and citations can be found in that article.

Join Lyn Greenberg, PhD, April Harris-Britt, PhD, and Honorable Bruce Cohen for the ***Opening Session Children, Mental Health, and Family Law at the AFCC Virtual Conference*** on November 2, 2023, from 1:30pm to 3:00pm eastern time.