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President's Message

Hon. Linda Fidnick

In the wake of a successful in-person conference last May in Chicago, it is exciting to see how many of you have registered for our *15th Symposium on Child Custody* at Planet Hollywood in Las Vegas from November 10-12. As of October 18, we have nearly 500 people registered to attend.



It will be, as all of our conferences are, an outstanding opportunity to learn with and from colleagues of all disciplines engaged in helping adults and children who are experiencing divorce and separation. Come on Thursday, November 10, for one of the intensive day long institutes, followed by the opening session about the new *Guidelines for Parenting Plan Evaluations*. Then on Friday and Saturday, you can attend a fascinating plenary session on a new topic—concept creep—along with 90-minute sessions about topics ranging from the impact of affairs on parent-child relationships to the unique vulnerabilities of children

15th Symposium on Child Custody

Las Vegas, Nevada
November 10-12, 2022



Presenting Sponsor



SOBERLINK

AFCC Chapter Conferences

AFCC Maryland Annual Conference

October 21, 2022
Annapolis, MD

AFCC Illinois Annual Conference

with special needs.

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15th Symposium on Child Custody



From a Full House to Parenting Apart
November 10-12, 2022
Planet Hollywood Resort and Casino
Las Vegas, Nevada

The 15th Symposium on Child Custody is in less than a month! Get in on the action and join AFCC in Las Vegas! Read the [conference program brochure](#)!

Take advantage of intensive learning with an AFCC Pre-Symposium Institute

Choose from one of four full-day institutes:

1. When the Deck is Stacked: Sorting Stress from Trauma in Family Court
2. Playing Your Cards Right: Meaningful Integration of Test Data into a Parenting Plan Evaluation
3. Co-parent Coaching as Dispute Resolution
4. The ABC's and 123's of a Child Custody Evaluation

Book Your Room

The AFCC room block has sold out, but you can still [book](#) a room at Planet Hollywood Resort and Casino at the regular rate.

Exhibitor Prospectus

Exhibitors at AFCC conferences enjoy the opportunity to reach hundreds of professionals dedicated to the resolution of family conflict. Your business could hit the jackpot, too! Exhibitor spots were sold out, but we added a few additional exhibitor opportunities. Sign up soon to reserve your spot! [Read the prospectus](#) and contact [Patrick Sommer](#) to sign up now.

[Register Now](#)

Ten Tips for Using the *AFCC Guidelines for Parenting Plan Evaluations in Family Law Cases*

October 20, 2022
Chicago, IL

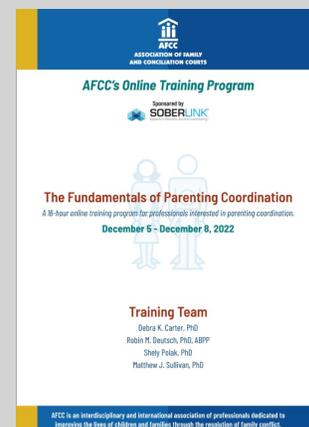
AFCC Colorado
October 28-29, 2022
Denver, CO / Virtual

AFCC Texas
Annual Conference
December 8-9, 2022
Austin, TX

AFCC Arizona
Annual Conference
January 20-22, 2023
Sedona, AZ

AFCC California
Annual Conference
February 10-12, 2023
Costa Mesa, CA

AFCC Virtual Training Programs



The Fundamentals of Parenting Coordination
December 5-8, 2022

Advanced Issues in Child Custody
January 17-19, 2023

The Fundamentals of Conducting Parenting Plan Evaluations
March 13-16, and
March 20-22, 2023

60th Anniversary Conference
May 31-June 3, 2023
Los Angeles, California

The AFCC Board of Directors approved the *Guidelines for Parenting Plan Evaluations in Family Law Cases* in May 2022. The *Guidelines* were developed by an AFCC Task Force that worked for more than two years on revisions to the *Model Standards of Practice for Child Custody Evaluation*. In this column, Task Force Chair Arnold Shienvold and Reporter Kathleen McNamara dispense advice on using the new AFCC *Guidelines*.

1) Be Prepared.

“Before anything else, preparation is the key to success.” - Alexander Bell

Parenting plan evaluations are hard to do well, and they can have a significant impact on families. To ensure a competent, ethical process and quality work product, be prepared for the challenging terrain, difficult conditions, and unexpected events that can, and often do, occur along the way.

[Continue Reading](#)



Ask the Experts

Six Secrets to Successful Co-Parent Coaching

Amy Armstrong, MSW and Hon. Randall Fuller

In Delaware County, Ohio, Domestic Relations Court, there is no shortage of innovative programs for resolving conflict. Judge Randall D. Fuller has brought in a Settlement Week twice a year, a successful Neutral Evaluation program, and Co-Parent Coaching to support families going through separation, divorce, or post-decree matters. The Co-Parent Coaching program is highlighted in one of the pre-conference institutes at the upcoming AFCC Symposium on Child Custody in Las Vegas. Judge Fuller is presenting along with Amy Armstrong, a co-parent coach who works part-time in Judge Fuller's court working with moms and dads with active court cases.

[Continue Reading](#)

AFCC Online Training Programs

AFCC's Fundamentals of Parenting Coordination returns in December! Join AFCC for a 16-hour online training program for professionals interested in parenting coordination!

The Fundamentals of Parenting Coordination

December 5-8, 2022

This comprehensive parenting coordination (PC) training is based on the 2019 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.

The **training team** includes:

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

[View the program brochure!](#)

[Register Now!](#)

Stay Tuned for More AFCC Training Programs

Advanced Issues in Child Custody

January 17-19, 2023

The Fundamentals of Conducting Parenting Plan Evaluations

March 13-16, and
March 20-22, 2023

Webinar Corner

Understanding Adults Who Sexually Abuse Children

Graham Hill, PhD

Wednesday, November 16, 2022

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

Registration will close on November 15, 2022 at 9:00am Eastern Time US/Canada.



This presentation aims to dispel some of the common myths that surround the behavior of adults who sexually abuse children. It outlines a conceptual model to describe how perpetrators develop and maintain their deviant sexual arousal to children despite the risk and consequences.

AFCC is approved by the American Psychological Association to sponsor continuing education for psychologists. AFCC maintains responsibility for the program and its content. The program is eligible for up to 1 hour of continuing education for psychologists.

Graham Hill, PhD is a British Criminologist and an expert in relation to the behavior of child sexual abusers. He is the founder and first Head of Behavioral Analysis for the UK Child Exploitation Online Protection Centre and a research Fellow at Leeds University in England. Graham's investigative career and research background gives him a unique perspective of sexual crimes against children, and he lectures internationally on a wide range of interrelated subjects. He is a member of the British Society of Criminology and a Visiting Research Fellow at Leeds University in England.



Registration

Members: \$15

Non-Members: \$50

Certificate of Attendance

Members: \$15

Non-members: \$20

[Register Now!](#)

More Upcoming Webinars!

Family Dispute Resolution Research

Marsha Kline Pruett, PhD, ABPP

December 13, 2022

Child Abuse and Culture (DE&I Series)

Nolanda Robert, MS; Kelly Browe Olson, JD, LLM

January 5, 2023

Access to Justice/Family Dispute Resolution Services

Jeannie Sato, JD, Loren P. Hildebrandt, JD

January 11, 2023

AFCC 60th Anniversary Conference: Make Your Hotel Reservations Today!

60 Years of Asking the Difficult Questions

May 31-June 3, 2023

Westin Bonaventure

Los Angeles, California

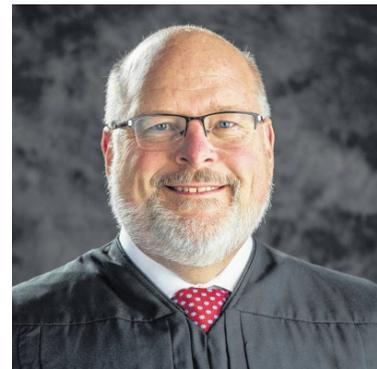
The room block for the AFCC 15th Symposium is sold out, but the Westin Bonaventure in Los Angeles is accepting reservations for the AFCC 60th Anniversary Conference, May 31-June 3, 2023. You can make your reservations [online](#) or over the phone by calling 800-937-8461 or 888-627-8520. Plan early to attend this amazing celebration of 60 years of AFCC!

AFCC Member News

Nicholas Bala, AFCC member from Ontario, is this year's Dena Moyal Distinguished Service Award recipient. The award is presented by the Ontario Chapter of AFCC and honors a member for exemplary contributions to the Ontario Chapter. Nick's contributions to the AFCC-Ontario and the greater family justice system of Ontario and beyond have been exemplary, sustained and much of it interdisciplinary. It includes the AFCC-Ontario Parenting Plan Guide and Template, an initiative that Nick proposed when he was a member of the Board of Directors of AFCC-Ontario and led to a successful conclusion and release in January 2020—since updated and translated into French. Congratulations, Nick!



Hon. Randall D. Fuller, AFCC member from Ohio and judge of the Delaware County Common Pleas Court, Domestic Relations Division, has been appointed to the Ohio Judicial College Board of Trustees. The appointment is for a three-year term. Randy stated, "The Ohio Judicial College does an excellent job providing important and educational information to judicial officers, court personnel and guardians." He noted, "I have enjoyed working with the Ohio Judicial College staff. It is an honor to be appointed to the Board of Trustees for the Ohio Judicial College." Congratulations, Randy!



Leslie Ellen Shear, AFCC member from California, was elected last month as a fellow of the Fellows of the American Bar Foundation: The Fellows is a global honorary society of attorneys, judges, law faculty, and legal scholars whose public and private careers have demonstrated outstanding dedication to the highest principles of the legal profession and to the welfare of their communities. Membership in the Fellows is limited to 1% of licensed lawyers in a jurisdiction. Congratulations, Leslie!



Archana Medhekar, AFCC member from Ontario, has completed her LLM focused in Dispute Resolution from Osgoode Hall Law School. In addition to her studies, Archana also makes contributions to AFCC as a member of the AFCC Chapter Committee. Congratulations, Archana!



Shely Polak, PhD, AFCC member from Ontario, has been recognized for her outstanding contribution to success of the Ontario Chapter of AFCC. Shely is a former president of the AFCC Ontario Chapter. Congratulations, Shely!



AFCC Chapter News

Congratulations to the new North Carolina Board of Directors!

President: April Harris-Britt
Vice President/President-Elect: Danielle Kestnbaum
Secretary: Lisa Marie Johnson
Treasurer: Elysia Prendergast-Jones
Maria Curran
Hon. K. Michelle Fletcher
Jonathan W Gould
Nancy L Grace
Cynthia Sortisio
Whitney Taylor
Kimberly A. Wallis

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:

[Patrick Sommer](#)



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President's Message

Hon. Linda Fidnick



In the wake of a successful in-person conference last May in Chicago, it is exciting to see how many of you have registered for our *15th Symposium on Child Custody* at Planet Hollywood in Las Vegas from November 10-12. As of October 18, we have nearly 500 people registered to attend.

It will be, as all of our conferences are, an outstanding opportunity to learn with and from colleagues of all disciplines engaged in helping adults and children who are experiencing divorce and separation. Come on Thursday, November 10, for one of the intensive day long institutes, followed by the opening session about the new *Guidelines for Parenting Plan Evaluations*. Then on Friday and Saturday, you can attend a fascinating plenary session on a new topic—concept creep—along with 90-minute sessions about topics ranging from the impact of affairs on parent-child relationships to the unique vulnerabilities of children with special needs.

Most of you reading this know how professionally valuable AFCC conferences are – whether you are there for CEUs or to learn how better to handle a difficult type of case. Then there are the remarkable networking moments – you will meet a stranger at lunch from a state or country far from your own whose insights and experience indelibly affect and improve your own practice.

But today I'd like to focus on the other ways that you personally can benefit from an AFCC conference. A common thread that binds us all is that we work in a stressful field. Our daily experiences involve domestic violence, child abuse, and high conflict families. We are often working alone, the information we receive may be confidential, and we have no ability to process it with others. The powerful impact on each of us of being witness to such painful scenarios cannot be overstated. When you come to

AFCC, you are among colleagues who understand first-hand what you are experiencing. You are not alone.

So, in addition to taking away substantive information from the conference, please give yourself the opportunity to connect with others who understand and empathize with your experiences.

Each morning at 6:30 am there will be a yoga and meditation session led by Sherry Cassidy, an AFCC member who is also a yoga instructor. (For those coming from the East Coast, don't forget that it will feel like it is held at a leisurely 9:30 am.)

Each day offers chances to meet new people at breakfast, lunch, receptions, and the dine-arounds. AFCC attendees are notable in how open and friendly they are. It is remarkably easy to start up a conversation with someone you have never met. Do it, and you will likely find a new friend.

This year there is a new event, the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Open Forum and Dine Around, led by DE&I Committee members Chioma Ajoku and Carlton Stansbury. These fantastic events will provide an opportunities for informal discussion for individuals who identify as members of underrepresented communities to have a safe space to share experiences, provide support and offer solutions, followed by dinner together.

We are all in this together, and we can help and support each other in our work, and in our lives. I am looking forward to seeing you all in just a few weeks.



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Ten Tips for Using the *AFCC Guidelines for Parenting Plan Evaluations in Family Law Cases*

Kathleen McNamara, PhD and Arnold Shienvold, PhD

The AFCC Board of Directors approved the Guidelines for Parenting Plan Evaluations in Family Law Cases in May 2022. The Guidelines were developed by an AFCC Task Force that worked for more than two years on revisions to the Model Standards of Practice for Child Custody Evaluation. In this column, Task Force Chair Arnold Shienvold and Reporter Kathleen McNamara dispense advice on using the new AFCC Guidelines.

1. Be Prepared.

“Before anything else, preparation is the key to success.” - Alexander Bell

Parenting plan evaluations are hard to do well, and they can have a significant impact on families. To ensure a competent, ethical process and quality work product, be prepared for the challenging terrain, difficult conditions, and unexpected events that can, and often do, occur along the way.

2. Read the *Guidelines* before you start the evaluation.

“Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four hours sharpening the axe.” - Abraham Lincoln

The Guidelines can be thought of as a roadmap to guide you to your destination. Notice that they outline the necessary areas of education, training, and competency. They also describe a methodology and set of processes that can ensure a fair and balanced evaluation and provide guidance about reliable approaches to gathering data and maintaining evaluator impartiality and objectivity while simultaneously the parties' due process rights.

3. **Guiding Principles and Values keep you grounded.**

“A highly developed values system is like a compass. It serves as a guide to point you in the right direction when you are lost.” - Idowu Koyenikan

While the Guidelines offer clear and specific guidance for the practice of parenting plan evaluation, practitioners still must exercise professional judgement, particularly when unforeseen circumstances arise. The guiding principles and values contained in the Guidelines can serve as a compass to orient and guide you when obstacles are found on the journey. They are the underpinnings for the Guidelines and can assist you to make ethical, safe, fair, and defensible decisions. Ground yourself in the values of Informed Practice, Objectivity, Just and Equitable Practice, Transparency and Accountability, Respect for Scope and Boundaries, and Balancing Thoroughness with Avoidance of Unintended Harm.

4. **Improve your policies and procedures.**

“Quality is not an act; it is a habit.” - Aristotle

Use the Guidelines to review your current policies and procedures and reflect upon important updates and refinements to your processes. Take some time to determine if your paperwork for the parties, attorneys, and others are up-to-date, clear, and complete. Review, and if necessary, improve your proper record keeping system. The Guidelines can help you consider what is missing and what can be improved.

5. **Expand and enhance your skills and training.**

“I am still learning.” - Michelangelo, age 87

The Guidelines provide a thoughtful and comprehensive list of the areas in which evaluators should gain foundational knowledge and advanced training. Use the list to help you determine the areas in which you need training to become skilled and competent.

6. **Increase your knowledge of the law and legal system.**

“If you ask me anything I don't know, I'm not going to answer.” - Yogi Berra

Evaluators are most effective when they have a strong working knowledge of the legal system, the laws and rules that govern their role, and the legal standards pertinent to the issues that are central to the evaluation. The Guidelines identify the areas of legal knowledge that will enhance your competence and effectiveness. Use the information found in the appendix of the Guidelines to create a plan for increasing your knowledge of the law and legal system.

7. Start with an Appointment Order with which you agree.

“A goal properly set is halfway reached.” - Zig Ziglar

The Guidelines stress the importance of the Appointment Order. Because an appointment order will define expectations about your role, methodology and goals in the evaluation, as well as many other aspects of your process, make sure you agree with what the order directs *prior to* beginning your evaluation. Be an active member of the team that defines and directs the evaluation while remaining neutral to the outcome.

8. Show your work.

“If you can't describe what you are doing as a process, you don't know what you're doing.” - W. Edwards Deming

Rather than simply stating their opinions, evaluators “show their work,” meaning they explain the basis and reasoning for their opinions. The Guidelines provide guidance about data-gathering, presentation of data, and interpretation of data. Use the Guidelines to assist you in thinking about the reliability of your methods, limitations of your data, and whether your data adequately supports your opinions.

9. Keep a library of relevant literature.

“When in doubt go to the library.” - J.K. Rowling

The Guidelines advise evaluators to provide an evidence-informed basis for their opinions and to be prepared to discuss case information and peer-reviewed literature that have informed their opinions. To make your job easier, keep a library of literature to refer to when analyzing data and formulating your opinions. Your library will grow over time, and it will create greater efficiency and save you time when you are citing the professional literature you relied upon in forming your opinions.

10. The future is now.

“To talk about the future is useful only if it leads to action now.” - E.T. Schumacher

Remote technology is here to stay and its use in evaluations has become standard operating procedure in many areas. Use the Guidelines to help you explain to parties and other end-users what platform you're using, what expectations to have about the use of the technology, the advantages and disadvantages encountered in the use of remote technologies, how problems will be handled in their use, and limitations to the evaluation due to the use of remote technology.



Arnold Shienvold, PhD has specialized in dealing with high conflict families since he began his practice. He is recognized locally and nationally as an expert in the areas of custody evaluations and family mediation. In addition to his direct clinical practice in those areas, Dr. Shienvold has consulted to public and private agencies, taught, and lectured at a multitude of professional conferences and schools and published papers on these topics. Dr. Shienvold continues to see individuals and couples in therapy, and he has an active forensic practice. Dr. Shienvold is a past president of AFCC.



Kathleen McNamara, PhD is a psychologist in private practice in Fort Collins, Colorado. She received her master's in counseling from Ohio State and doctorate in counseling psychology from Penn State. She was a tenured associate professor of psychology at Colorado State University before devoting herself to full-time practice. She specializes in working with high conflict families. Dr. McNamara is a past president of the Colorado Chapter of AFCC and is currently on AFCC's executive committee as Treasurer. She also serves on the AFCC Resource Development committee, Chapters committee, and Continuing Education for Psychologists committee. She is a past chair and current member of the Colorado Psychological Association Ethics Committee.



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Ask the Experts: Six Secrets to Successful Co-Parent Coaching

Amy Armstrong, MSW and Hon. Randall Fuller

In Delaware County, Ohio, Domestic Relations Court, there is no shortage of innovative programs for resolving conflict. Judge Randall D. Fuller has brought in a Settlement Week twice a year, a successful Neutral Evaluation program, and Co-Parent Coaching to support families going through separation, divorce, or post-decree matters. The Co-Parent Coaching program is highlighted in one of the pre-conference institutes at the upcoming AFCC Symposium on Child Custody in Las Vegas. Judge Fuller is presenting along with Amy Armstrong, a co-parent coach who works part-time in Judge Fuller's court working with moms and dads with active court cases.

Judge Fuller often asks Amy, "Is it you? Or can someone else get the same good results?" Judge Fuller reports he and Amy like to explore this question by identifying the key characteristics and skills co-parent coaches use to engage moms and dads experiencing high-conflict. Read on to see what they have discovered!

- 1. Provide a clear, structured framework for coaching.** Following International Coach Federation standards and competencies, the coach engages the parents by providing clarity on the purpose and possibilities for a coaching conversation. The coach must take the time to explain the coach role carefully, as many parents have never heard of coaching let alone experienced this transformational process.

In each coaching session, whether individual or joint with both parents, the coach guides the parents to determine the topics for discussion. The coach helps the parents understand the coach has no authority to make a decision. The coach is a catalyst for change as the keeper of a safe space for validation and exploration.

- 2. Check expectations at the door.** The magic of coaching flows when the coach is able to be open to unexpected twists and turns in the coaching conversations. While professionals often want "good" outcomes, it is essential that the coach not attach any specific expectation to what a "good" outcome is for the family.

From the start, the coach demonstrates validation of the coachee's perspective. Instead of challenging parents to compromise or shift their thinking, the coach simply asks the coachee's what they want to do with their differences based on their own goals and needs. The coach may also ask what if anything the coachee notices about how their perspective and their goals or desired outcomes align.

- 3. Never correct or argue with a coachee.** "The customer is always right" takes on new meaning in a coaching conversation. Coaching shines a spotlight on the coachee's words and experience, opening up possibilities for developing awareness and responsibility. Family law professionals can interfere with growth or responsibility when trying to persuade the coachee to see things another way. Instead, the coach gives feedback and continues to inquire with genuine curiosity.
- 4. Demonstrate the skill of observation.** Phrases like, "I just noticed...", "I heard...", "It seemed like...", or "I am sensing..." followed by an invitation to reflect give the coachee a chance to check in and see if what the coach is observing matches the coachee experience. This skill of observation builds awareness in the coachee of the coachee's thoughts, feelings, beliefs and perspective.

Humans learn from their own experiences, not from being told what to learn! Once a coachee hears observations from the coach, the coachee starts to observe the self. Of course, some people pick up on this skill much more quickly than others.

- 5. Make sure the parents direct the agenda and next steps.** Many parents don't really know what to talk about or how to best utilize the service of co-parent coaching. The coach offers strong guidance to support the parents in determining what they need to discuss and what next steps to try.

At the beginning of coaching sessions, the coach asks questions to identify what the parents are willing and able to discuss. Sample questions include, "What needs to happen for you to say things are getting better?" "How would it impact you to resolve your conflicts?" or "What will your child experience when the co-parenting is improved?"

These "big picture" questions set the tone for a brighter future for co-parents. They start to imagine a shift toward positive change, then lean into it with the help of the coach. Eventually parents state ideas and create experiments to try temporarily as a way to break through the old, habitual, negative interactional patterns.

To learn more, join Judge Fuller and Amy Armstrong for Pre-Conference Institute #3 on Thursday, November 10th at the 15th Symposium on Child Custody in Las Vegas.

Amy Armstrong joined the staff at the Delaware County, Ohio Domestic Relations Court in 2020 where she serves as a resource coordinator for parents and leads the co-parent coaching program. With over 25 years working with parents and families as a parent educator and parent coach, Amy engages parents in a transformational approach to conflict. Amy is an active member of the Ohio Chapter of the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts, and actively serves on committees for The Ohio Supreme Court to support other professionals and help identify best practices for parenting coordination and other professional roles. Special areas of focus include reunification processes and high-conflict dynamics. She also launched an International Coach Federation accredited coach training program, the Center for Coach Development, Amy published her first book, *Real-Time Parenting*, in 2021 and is scheduled to launch her second book, *The Conflict Cure*, in early 2023.



Judge Randall D. Fuller was elected to serve as Judge of the Common Pleas Court of Delaware County, Ohio, Domestic Relations Division in 2016. He is the first Judge of the newly unified Common Pleas Court Domestic Relations Division. Judge Fuller is the immediate Past President of the Ohio Chapter of AFCC, President Elect of the Ohio Association of Domestic Relations Judges, and a member of the Board of Trustees for the Supreme Court of Ohio Judicial College. Judge Fuller has presented on behalf of the Ohio Judicial College to Ohio Domestic Relations Judges and Magistrates and assisted with training of new judges. He has testified before the Ohio House of Representatives, Civil Justice Committee, and the Ohio Senate, Judiciary Committee, on behalf of the Ohio Judicial Conference.

