

REFLECTIONS ON THE STATE OF CONSENSUS-BASED DECISION MAKING IN CHILD WELFARE

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Consensus approaches to child protection decision making such as mediation and family group conferencing have become increasingly widespread since first initiated about 25 years ago. They address but are also constrained by paradoxes in the child protection system about commitments to protecting children and to family autonomy. In a series of surveys, interviews, and dialogues, mediation and conferencing researchers and practitioners discussed the key issues that face their work: clarity about purpose, system support, family empowerment, professional qualifications, and coordination among different types of consensus-building efforts. Consensus-based decision making in child protection will continue to expand and grow but will also continue to confront these challenges.

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When the concept of using mediation to promote a more constructive approach to family involvement in child welfare decision making first arose about 25 years ago, it seemed both obvious and absurd. Obvious because the need for a better approach to dealing with families who are reported for abuse or neglect and are naturally suspicious, resistant, and fearful about entering into a cooperative relationship with child welfare professionals seems essential to more effective intervention. Mediation offers one way of helping families and professionals work out an intervention approach that protects children, respects the role of the family, and encourages respectful dialogue. How child protection mediation (CPM)—and other family-centered approaches such as family group conferencing (FGC)—can lead to a more effective approach to protecting children and preserving families is described and documented in this issue of *Family Court Review*.

But the notion that mediation or other consensus-building approaches could be used successfully also seemed absurd (and to many still does). The child protection system is overstressed, inadequately funded, and bound by very strict parameters and timelines. Concerns about domestic violence, substance abuse, and mental illness are prevalent in many cases. The problems families face are systemic and long term. The resources to help them cope with these problems are limited. The idea that a short-term intervention, based on a cooperative communication model and emphasizing consensus-based problem solving could make a difference given all these structural obstacles seemed naïve and unrealistic. The last thing the system needed was yet one more hoop for professionals and families to jump through, especially given the limited time and resources available.

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PARADOXES IN CHILD PROTECTION

Twenty-five (or so) years after child protection mediation was first introduced, this paradoxical response continues to characterize how many view this approach. New programs inevitably face resistance from a system that is overburdened and underresourced. On the other hand, few child welfare experts deny that the predominant approach to decision making is inefficient, ineffective, and even toxic for children and families. Existing CPM and FGC programs continually have to justify their existence in the face of competing demands for resources and, even with stable funding, they are often faced with unreasonable expectations for how, when, with whom, and for how long they are to intervene. The growth of CPM has been steady but fitful. That is, there has been a gradual increase in the availability of these programs throughout North America (and elsewhere), but many new programs have not lasted. More and more, CPM and FGC have become integrated into child welfare decision-making procedures, but that does not mean that resistance to them has ended.

This ambivalent response to mediation and conferencing reflects the contradictions inherent in the child protection system itself, which both generate the need for collaborative approaches to decision making and cause resistance to it. Consider that:

- Decisions about child protection are made amidst value conflicts that are deeply embedded in our culture and are very long standing (even ancient). On the one hand, we are committed to protecting the defenseless, particularly children, but on the other hand the right of parents and families to raise children without the interference of the state is also highly valued. We also have significant differences about appropriate parenting, discipline, physical punishment, shared parenting, and gender roles, to name a few profound value differences concerning child rearing.
- The purported goal of child protection intervention is to preserve the family unit wherever possible while insuring that children are safe. Failing that, the goal is to achieve a durable, safe, permanent placement for children as rapidly as possible. In other words, in many situations the system needs to provide parents with the support and assistance they need to be effective and responsible parents while at the same time developing a reasonable alternative. This means giving the parents every chance to prove that they can be responsible and documenting all the ways in which they are not so that a case for termination of parental rights can be made if necessary. It also means seeking to respect their role as parents and their right to be involved in decisions affecting their children while at the same time limiting their power to do harm to their children.
- Child protection workers are required to develop a reasonable intervention and treatment plan to help parents deal with whatever issues brought them into the system to begin with: poor parenting skills, substance abuse, anger management problems, indigence, family conflict, domestic violence, or mental illness, to name a few. These tend to be long-term problems requiring long-term work. For example, serious substance abusers do not typically succeed in overcoming their addictions on their first effort—multiple attempts are needed. However, federal policy requires that a child in placement achieve “permanency” (a stable living situation in which they can be brought up) within 15 months (Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997; most states require that this be done in 12 months). This can be a return to their parents, placement in an adoptive home, a long-term foster care arrangement, or permanent

placement with other family members, but whatever it is, the plan has to be decided on and in place within 1 year. Practically speaking, this means that parents have at most 9 to 12 months to overcome serious problems and demonstrate that they have achieved genuine progress. As a result, what often happens is that intervention plans involve a whole slew of treatment requirements for parents—substance abuse intervention, parenting classes, individual therapy, vocational counseling, supervised visitation, and more. These are often piled on parents rather than introduced in a carefully sequenced way based on an ongoing assessment process.

- A further consequence of the dual purpose of intervention—to preserve the family unit and to achieve permanency—is the almost impossible role conflict in which child protection workers find themselves. They are expected to be counselors, resource providers, support figures, evaluators, and case managers. In effect, they are required to say to parents, “I am here to support you, to help you make your way successfully through this process, but I also may have to recommend to the judge that your children be removed from your care.” The most sensitive and capable professionals can find that these waters are difficult to navigate. Parents, on the other hand, are expected to be cooperative, forthcoming, and open but must also adjust to how they present themselves to professionals whose assistance they may need, who can help them work their way through a difficult system, but who can easily be seen as—or become—the enemy.
- Resources to assist families through this process are seldom adequate. In the survey and interviews that were done as a lead-up to the Think Tank on Child Protection Decision Making in September 2007 (Mayer & Kathol, 2007), service providers repeatedly bemoaned the absence of therapeutic services that have been demonstrated to be effective—for example, residential substance abuse programs to which parents can bring their young children, therapeutic day care, parenting training, and more. So, even if an ideal, nuanced, and carefully thought-through treatment plan can be worked out in a timely manner to which all parties agree, it is likely that the resources to put these into practice will be inadequate.
- Child protection professionals are asked to make incredibly difficult decisions about what is the best for children over time, how likely they are to be safe in a family setting, whether a treatment plan is likely to be effective, whether parents have genuinely bought into a change process, and whether children should be returned to the ultimately unsupervised care of the parents or placed out of the home permanently. In many cases, it is far from certain what the right answers are for these complicated and very consequential questions. However, judicial processes do not tend to reinforce judicious uncertainty. Whatever decisions are made have to be presented as clearly the correct ones. Furthermore, these very difficult decisions and casework challenges are generally the purview of overworked, undersupervised, undertrained, and certainly underpaid workers. Not surprisingly, at the line staff level of child protection agencies, turnover tends to be extremely high.
- Considerable lip service is paid to cultural sensitivity and to the importance of respecting the cultural values of the families. However, the child protection system has evolved out of a particular cultural framework and its whole structure reflects this. In many cultural contexts, for example, in an Alaskan native village, it is the extended family and indeed the whole community that takes responsibility for raising a child. Yet it is the parents who must successfully demonstrate their capacity to parent and to respond to dependency and neglect proceedings, not the community or the extended family system.

- Ideally, child protection intervention should be a child- and family-centered effort, but the decision-making process is normally dominated by professionals. Furthermore, the professional culture that imbues all child protection intervention is an alien one for most parents. This disconnect between families and professionals can be readily seen in the jargon employed, the formality of the process, the paperwork, the pacing, and the setting in which interactions take place. This dynamic is often reinforced by the different backgrounds, dress, and ages of professionals and family members involved.

These dilemmas, ambiguities, and contradictions are not the result of any maliciousness. They reflect genuine difficulties in attending both to the needs of the children and rights of families under circumstances of uncertainty and limited resources. But they do provide the background for the work of child protection workers, lawyers, court appointed special advocates, treatment providers, foster care programs, and of course CPM and FGC efforts as well. Every program administrator, mediator, facilitator, and child protection professional has to contend with these challenges in every aspect of their work. The potential of CPM and FGC to provide a more effective forum for deciding how to proceed in the face of these countervailing pressures is enormous and has been proven (Thoennes, 2009), but neither CPM nor FGC will alter these basic dynamics. Therefore, it is completely understandable that child protection professionals might ask themselves if these efforts are worth the additional energy and commitment demanded by them.

HOW CONSENSUS-BASED PROGRAMS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

In the face of all this, just how can CPM and FGC programs make a difference? Mediation and family group conferencing are similar in some respects—they both are efforts to bring the parents and family more fully into the decision-making process, to empower them to the greatest extent possible, and to do so using consensus-building methods. But they are also very different. They can, in theory, complement each other, and in practice they sometimes do, but in many jurisdictions only one process is promoted and this can put CPM and FGC programs in a competitive posture. The underlying assumption of FGC is that the families should lead the decision-making process about what happens with children and the professionals should follow. Only if the family cannot arrive at a responsible decision or provide the care that children need should other approaches take precedence. By putting the family at the center of decision making and not assigning them peripheral roles as support figures, advisors, or potential placement alternatives, the hope is to completely change the dynamic of accountability and responsibility for the care of children.

The underlying assumption of CPM is that parents and child protection professionals need to work together as part of a team and that in order to do so the nature of the interaction needs to change so that parents really are equal and empowered members of the team. This can be promoted by effectively bringing both parents and child protection professionals into a consensus-based problem-solving effort. The best way to do this is through the use of a process-oriented mediator who can change the dynamic of the interaction between parents and professionals from inquiry, interview, evaluation, and imposed planning (imposed by the professionals on the parents) to one of negotiation.

In negotiation, professionals can advocate for their concerns, insist that state and agency policies be respected, and refuse to agree to anything that they consider unwise, unsafe, or illegal. Similarly, parents can advocate for their interests, about parenting, intervention, and what they are willing to discuss among other things, and they can refuse to agree to anything that they feel is unsound (although their alternatives to agreeing may not appear great to them). In theory, although this is certainly limited in practice, they are on equal grounds in mediation and thus can be brought into the decision-making process in a more empowered way. Furthermore, this approach can be used without sacrificing any of the ability of child protection agencies to protect children.

How well does this work in practice? Remarkably well it seems. As documented in the Thoennes (2009) and Kathol (2009) articles and in the report of the Think Tank Survey and Meeting (Kathol & Mayer, 2007) the results of a variety of research and evaluation efforts are very encouraging (see also, e.g., Mayer, 1989; Thoennes, 1997, 2001; Gatowski, Dobbin, Litchfield, & Oetjen, 2005). CPM works at almost all stages of the process. Participants report high rates of satisfaction with the process, a greater commitment to the outcome, and higher compliance rates than in traditional approaches. The plans arrived at, while not substantively different from plans that are made through other processes, tend to be more customized and characterized by more liberal visitation arrangements for parents of children in placement. Interestingly, programs tend to commit to the use of mediation at only one stage of the process and tend to express a clear preference for its use at that particular stage (e.g., during the treatment planning, placement review, or at the stage of permanency planning or termination of parental rights), but the evidence from program evaluations suggests that it can be useful at any stage.

An important caveat is that the available research tends to evaluate results over a fairly short period. Long-term impact of mediation has yet to be determined. The basic message, however, is that, once mediation is instituted, the levels of satisfaction are high and the benefits seem to be significant. But even though practice suggests that the theoretical benefits of mediation are often realized, program administrators continually have to justify the resources expended on this service. Programs tend to be particularly vulnerable to the opinion of the judiciary. With a supportive set of judges or chief judge, programs are more likely to succeed, but when there is a less supportive or more skeptical judiciary, the going is a lot harder. Changes in judicial personnel have led to programs being significantly cut back or even terminated.

FACING THE CHALLENGES OF FGC AND CPM

A starting point for developing a strategy for addressing these contradictory responses, challenges, and opportunities can be found in the wealth of experience that has been developed since the early 1980s when CPM programs first began to emerge. CPM and FGC administrators face the pressures of developing new services; obtaining funding; training mediators and facilitators; generating support from the child protection system, the judiciary, the legal community, and families; and demonstrating the effectiveness of these services. But they tend to face these pressures in isolation from each other. While there are some forums for communication among programs, these tend to be sporadic, haphazard, and unstructured. This is unfortunate because almost all program administrators face somewhat similar challenges and the lessons and insights they have gained separately

can provide a pool of wisdom to assist all of their efforts. This, at least, was the hope that informed the development of the Child Protection Think Tank process.

The idea for a gathering of experienced CPM and FGC practitioners, researchers, and administrators began with informal conversations among several program directors in different parts of North America, all of whom had developed remarkably effective programs in very different settings (e.g., Alaska, New York, Connecticut, California, Louisiana, Ontario, British Columbia, and Arkansas). Over the course of the past year (June 2007–2008), surveys of program administrators and others involved with CPM and FGC were conducted, a series of interviews took place, and two Think Tank sessions occurred (a 2-day meeting in Columbus, Ohio in September 2007 and a 1-day meeting in Vancouver in Mays 2008—both attached to AFCC conferences). Perhaps the most salient aspect of these discussions, aside from the initiation of an ongoing structure for interaction and sharing, were the common issues almost all of these programs faced—and the wealth of wisdom that existed about how to respond to them. In this issue, several of the participants address different aspects of the challenge and response. A fuller report on each of these meetings can be found at the AFCC Web site. Looking at the whole set of discussions involved in this process, it seems that several key issues were of almost universal interest:

- What is the essential *purpose* of CPM and FGC?
- How should *success* be defined and measured?
- How can system *buy-in* be obtained and maintained?
- How can families be genuinely *empowered* to participate in a system that is stacked against them in many ways?
- What *qualifications* do mediators or facilitators need to possess?
- How can CPM and FGC *work together*?

A consideration of these questions is in essence a review of the current state of consensus decision-making processes in child protection.

PURPOSE AND SUCCESS

While the most generic purposes, namely protecting children, preserving families, and achieving safe, durable permanency in a timely manner seem clear, the specific purpose, particularly of CPM programs, is more complicated. On the one hand, achieving consensus-based agreements, thereby avoiding court contests, seems to be of particular interest to the courts, lawyers, and child protection staff. This goal is the most tangible, easily measured outcome and therefore the most often cited statistic about results. And it is the one that best assists program administrators in making the case for continued funding and support. However, achieving specific agreements may be a less significant goal than creating a genuine dialogue between parents and professionals and engaging their participation in considering the best approach to intervention and treatment. The problem is that creating a genuine dialogue is less tangible and harder to use as evidence for the worth of a program. A number of program administrators suggested that it really is for the parties to decide what their goals for CPM or FGC are and that a discussion about this is a key agenda item for the mediation or conferencing session.

Some programs are structured to press rigorously for executable agreements that can be taken to court. Some mediation efforts resemble settlement conferences, putting parents in a more peripheral role and, if not abdicating the goal of making parents and families part

of a team, then at least relegating this to a very secondary purpose and one that is not likely to be readily achieved in the highly pressured atmosphere of a settlement driven process. But other programs are much more interested in promoting a conversation, one in which parents, other family members, lawyers, child protection workers, and others who may be involved can have the kind of exchange that promotes a more genuine sense of teamwork in support of the children.

Most programs have to pursue the goal of settlement in order to maintain the support of system players, but many programs also try to encourage a more constructive approach to engagement of families as well. This bifurcated purpose can sometimes lead to awkward moments, but it is the reality of the environment in which CPM and FGC programs operate.

SYSTEM BUY-IN

Obtaining the buy-in of key system players—child protection workers and supervisors, attorneys, advocates for children, and the judiciary—is a constant challenge to program administrators. The key variable that leads to successful programs appears to be the degree to which this buy-in and support is developed and maintained. In most successful programs, someone has been assigned or taken on the task of working with these system players—explaining the process, discussing their concerns, dealing with any problems that might arise, and in general working to ensure that they stay committed and connected to the program. Without someone taking on this task, programs are unlikely to survive very long. How people approach this task is of course varied, and when program administrators or supervisors discuss how they do this, they often sound like community organizers approaching a political challenge. Some of the approaches that were repeatedly mentioned include:

- Create a stakeholders group to organize, advise, monitor, and evaluate programs
- Meet regularly with key stakeholder groups like the judiciary
- Present at conferences stakeholders attend
- Collect data to address their concerns
- Provide training to stakeholders
- Demonstrate how the process works, and
- Bring in system players from areas with successful programs.

Obtaining buy-in is a constant and ongoing challenge. The effort needs to begin before programs are initiated. Obtaining and maintaining buy-in can be very time consuming, but it is essential to the ongoing effectiveness and survival of these programs. This is a symptom that, despite their growing acceptance, CPM and FGC programs are still seen as expendable and peripheral to the main work to be done in child protection cases in many locations. For a comprehensive discussion of this issue, see Giovannucci and Largent (2009).

EMPOWERING PARENTS AND FAMILIES

CPM and FGC both address an underlying tension about empowerment. In order to protect children, the state (i.e., the courts, public attorneys, and the child protection agency) has intervened in family life. Whether the intervention was justified or not, the state has nonetheless intruded into the heart of family life, and the power of the family has

accordingly been curtailed. In order to maximize the chance that the family can continue to function as the primary caretakers of children in a safe and constructive way, the power of the family has to be respected and supported. In other words, the power of the family and the parents has to be circumscribed and enhanced at the same time. This requires a great deal of finesse which may run counter to the structure and culture of court and child protection systems. Both CPM and FGC are efforts to empower families and parents to the extent possible within the limits of the state's responsibility for protecting children.

This is easier said than done. Almost all program administrators face the challenge of empowering parents and families to take part in CPM and FGC in the face of some very significant obstacles. Firestone discusses some of these obstacles in detail in his article in this issue (Firestone, 2009). He discusses, in particular, concerns about substance abuse, mental health, and domestic violence, and he also discusses the cultural factors at play. The structure of the child protection system is likely to be off-putting to families. The jargon, professional environment, evaluative framework, and the frequent ethnic and class differences between the professionals and the families can create significant barriers to empowerment. In addition, the way the child protection system first entered the picture is also likely to make parents feel very vulnerable and defensive. Imagine very young parents with a high school education (or less), who are struggling financially, and perhaps with substance abuse, and who have been accused of behaving in an abusive or neglectful way, sitting across the table from older, experienced lawyers and social workers, perhaps from a different ethnic background and likely previously acquainted with each other, and having to discuss just what they, the parents, are going to do to change how they parent. It is almost impossible to imagine what empowerment means in such a setting, and it is also impossible to imagine what it means to promote a "level playing field."

FGC and CPM respond to this challenge in somewhat different ways. FGC attempts to deal with the empowerment of families by excluding all or almost all professionals from the room for a significant part of the discussion. Firestone (2009) and Giovannucci and Largent (2009) discuss different approaches that CPM programs can adopt to deal with this challenge. They discuss parent education, ways to conduct a mediation session, the use of individual meetings, support figures, and many other tactics for dealing with power dynamics. Effective programs keep this concern at the forefront of their design, training, and service approach. But the structural inequalities are so great that, no matter how much attention is paid to this, the concern will always loom large, and the expectation that power can in some way be equalized is unrealistic. However, families can experience a significant increase in power, influence, and voice through these processes from what they have previously experienced in their interaction with the child protection and judicial systems and from what they have come to expect—and this change is very important. It is what brings them into a new relationship to the whole process.

MEDIATOR AND FACILITATOR QUALIFICATIONS

In the surveys conducted prior to the Think Tank and reported in Kathol (2009), the importance of well-trained, experienced, culturally sensitive, empathic, and skilled mediators was repeatedly referenced. The skill of the mediators, rather than their specific approach (e.g., transformative, facilitative, etc.), was what was seen as critical. However, an additional factor was also mentioned repeatedly and that was substantive knowledge of family dynamics, the child protection system, the legal framework for child protection intervention, and issues related to intervention in child abuse and neglect (e.g., family

violence, substance abuse, child development, and attachment). Even if the mediator's role is primarily process oriented, knowledge of substance is seen as critical. Why?

Partly this knowledge is a matter of credibility. If mediators do not understand the regulations governing permanency, for example, they are likely to be distrusted by child protection professionals. The belief that substantive knowledge is essential also stems from the view that mediators should be resources for helping families to gain clarity about how the system operates (although this may require that they deviate from a purely facilitative role). But the largest concern appears to be that mediators—and facilitators—ought not to allow the conversation to drift into a serious consideration of unrealistic or impossible alternatives. A skilled mediator will use the expertise in the room to deal with this concern rather than their own control of the agenda, particularly if they are oriented toward encouraging constructive engagement among the participants, but participants in the Think Tank process were almost unanimous in their belief that process skills were not enough to ensure a productive discussion. They felt that mediators and facilitators need to understand the substantive issues and system realities in some depth.

Something else that jumps out from the surveys and the discussions is that concerns about mediator qualifications, while real, were of a second order of importance to issues of purpose, buy-in, and empowerment. It was as if most administrators felt that they knew what they had to do to identify or develop qualified mediators, whereas these other issues were more overwhelming. The one area where concerns about mediators and facilitators seemed more intractable had to do with cultural match. Finding mediators from the same background as parents, especially in those areas where most of the professionals are from a different background, is in many (although not all) locations a very significant challenge.

FGC AND CPM

FGC and CPM are similar in that they both aim to bring families into the decision-making process in a more powerful and meaningful way. They both rely on consensus-based processes, and their end goal is to respect the power and ability of families to make good decisions and to take care of their own given the opportunity and support that is necessary. But they are very different processes as well. FGC emphasizes the lead role of the family in decision making. The role of the child protection professionals in FGC is to provide information to the family about the needs of the children and about relevant policies and laws to assist in their discussions. The focus of CPM is on assisting parents, other family members as appropriate, and child protection professionals to work together to make good decisions about appropriate intervention and care of children. The role of professionals in CPM is as full participants in the decision-making process. Furthermore, there is sometimes tension between proponents of each approach because they are occasionally in competition for limited resources and they reflect somewhat different perspectives as to what is needed at times.

The bulk of the survey and most of the discussion (but certainly not all) at the Think Tanks focused on CPM—partly because of who organized the event and the primary experience of most of those who were in attendance.¹ In principle, everyone present agreed that both approaches were necessary, viable, and could work well in tandem with each other. There is also the possibility of exploring hybrid approaches as well. But doing so in practice often presents challenges.

CPM tends to be under the auspices or at least more oriented toward the processes of the courts whereas FGC is more likely to be organized or overseen by child protection

agencies. So, sometimes the decision as to which approach to utilize becomes caught in the different cultures and struggles of these two systems. Furthermore, simply out of a need to clarify the choices available to families, it is often easier to emphasize one approach or another. My sense is that this struggle is a temporary phenomenon. Both approaches serve important purposes in different ways. As time goes on, I suspect agencies and courts will turn more and more to consensus-based decision-making processes, and the proverbial pie will indeed expand, allowing for more creative ways of integrating these two, as well as other consensus-based approaches.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The best reason to feel confident in the continued growth of CPM and FGC programs is that there really are no good alternatives. The child protection system needs approaches like these and therefore, as time goes on, will continue to rely on them. This is not because of abstract values about empowerment or ideology about the power, importance, or sanctity of the family. If it were, the future for CPM and FGC would be much bleaker. The system needs these approaches because the contradictions or ambiguities described above are not theoretical considerations but factors that impinge on the work of child protection professionals every day of their working lives. Parents need to be empowered and their power needs to be limited. The system needs the help of families, but the setup discourages family involvement. The best way to protect children in most situations is through supporting parents to be more effective in that role, but the system creates barriers to productive work with parents. Neither CPM nor FGC, nor for that matter any other approach, fixes this problem. But FGC and CPM do address them better than any currently available alternative. Therefore, in fits and starts, with one step backward for every two forward, these programs will become more prevalent and more institutionalized within the child protection system.

That does not mean that all the challenges of obtaining support, empowering parents, dealing with system resistance, and coping with inadequate resources will not continue to be concerns. The challenges will preoccupy the attention of CPM and FGC program administrators for a long time. But these approaches, or variations on them, will continue to become ever more important to the overall functioning of the child protection system. Perhaps the greatest danger is that, in becoming increasingly incorporated into the system, some of their greatest assets may be compromised, namely their ability to counteract the systemic pressures to bureaucratize the problem, marginalize parents and families, and discourage constructive family involvement. But avoiding system cooptation is the natural challenge of successful intervention approaches.

In the years to come, we will have to develop our ability to address the issues of purpose, success, buy-in, empowerment, intervener skills, and coordination between different approaches. That is why it is critical to develop an ongoing structure for interaction among administrators, practitioners, and students of CPM and FGC. Hopefully, the Think Tank process is a start in this direction. With the support of organizations like the AFCC, National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, National Center for State Courts, American Humane Association, and the Werner Institute, there is hope that an ongoing structure for interaction can be built.

From a very hesitant and uncertain start in a number of isolated locations in the early 1980s, the use of CPM and FGC has grown tremendously. These programs are still a small part of the system, but an increasingly important part. Unlike many areas of conflict

intervention, this is truly a demand driven arena. These approaches have grown and spread not so much because of effective proselytizing on the part of conflict practitioners, but because child protection workers, family advocates, judges, and lawyers have all realized the critical importance of building effective bridges to families and have looked for better ways of doing this. Our most essential task is to continue to develop our ability to provide these services effectively, efficiently, and ethically.

NOTE

1. It is relevant to say here that my experience is primarily with CPM as well.

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