



AFCC eNEWS

MONTHLY E-NEWSLETTER
VOL. 4 NO. 8
AUGUST 2009

AFCC Regional Training Conference

Choose one of four pre-conference institutes to attend in Reno at *Interventions for Family Conflict: Stacking the Odds in Favor of Children*, November 5-7, 2009:

- *Children in Court*, designed for judges and lawyers, addresses the challenging issues related to children's involvement in the family court processes.
- *Challenging the Culture of Conflict: Advanced Parenting Coordination Strategies and Interventions*, focuses on how conflict develops and becomes entrenched in parenting partnerships and the role of parenting coordination in helping peace become a possibility and not just a pipe dream.
- *Advanced Mediation Techniques: Cognitive Behavioral Problem Solving and the Art of the Question*, will examine how the skillful use of questions can make or break a difficult mediation.
- *Conducting Brief Assessments*, designed for custody evaluators, will discuss three models of brief assessment, implementation and administrative issues, pitfalls and research findings. (See the Top Ten Features of Brief Focused Assessments below.)

[Conference brochure...](#)

[Online registration...](#)

ASK THE EXPERTS

Top Ten Features of Models of Brief Focused Assessments

by Linda Cavallero, Ph.D.

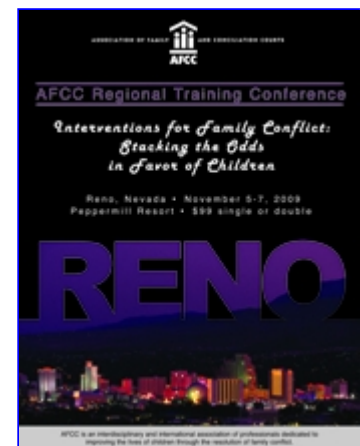
The AFCC Brief Focused Assessments Task Force is finalizing the Guidelines that are a product of several years' work and collaboration with members at open forums. Linda Cavallero, Ph.D., AFCC Member from Worcester, Massachusetts and the Co-Chair of the Task Force, has assembled these ten features shared by all brief models.

[Read more...](#)

Case Law Update

Divorcing Parents May Agree to Binding Arbitration of Custody Matters

The New Jersey Supreme Court ruled on July 1, 2009, that divorcing parents have the right, as part of their constitutionally protected sphere of parental autonomy, to sidestep the judicial process and agree to submit their custody issues to binding



UPCOMING CONFERENCES & TRAININGS

AFCC Regional Training Conference

Interventions for Family Conflict: Stacking the Odds in Favor of Children
November 5-7, 2009
Peppermill Resort
Reno, Nevada

Attachment, Alienation and Access: Advanced Interventions for Parenting Coordinators

Arnold Shienvold, Ph.D.
September 30-October 1, 2009
Kansas City, Missouri
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arbitration. This decision may be important to parent coordination as a process.

[Read more...](#)

RESEARCH UPDATE

Natural Children from Blended Families Bring No Benefit to Older Half-Siblings

Courtesy of J.M. Craig Press, Inc.

When people divorce, there is a high probability that they will remarry and have children with their new spouses. There has been very little research regarding how these children fare when raised with older half-siblings. This study addresses that issue.

[Read more...](#)

FLAFCC's Shared Parenting Bench Book Supplement

The Florida Chapter of AFCC (FLAFCC) Parenting Plan Task Force wrote a monograph entitled "Florida's New Shared Parenting Statute: What Professionals Need to Know." They also developed an education curriculum and presentation materials to accompany the monograph, as well as producing this Bench book.

[Click here to read the Bench Book Supplement...](#)

RECOMMENDED READING

Connie Beck, Ph.D., AFCC member from Tucson, Arizona, recommends an article that provides a thorough review of the different theories explaining intimate partner violence.

Bell, K.M. and Naugle, A.E. (2008). Intimate partner violence theoretical considerations: Moving towards a contextual framework. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 28, 1096-1107.

[Read abstract...](#)

Denver Call for Presenters

AFCC's 47th Annual Conference, *Traversing the Trail of Alienation: Rocky Relationships, Mountains of Emotion, Mile High Conflict*, will take place June 2-5, 2010 at the Sheraton Denver.

If you have an interesting workshop idea that you would like considered, please submit a proposal prior to October 5, 2009.

[Click here to view Call for Presenters...](#)

[Click here to submit a workshop proposal...](#)

Conference of Interest

Celebrating Past, Present & Future: Reflections and Visions presented October 22-25, 2009 by the International Academy of Collaborative Professionals in Minneapolis, Minnesota. This is IACP's 10th anniversary Networking and Educational Forum.

[Read more...](#)

FEATURED WEB SITES

Online Parenting Education Program

Children in the Middle Online is an interactive streaming video



AFCC 47th Annual Conference

Traversing the Trail of Alienation: Rocky Relationships, Mountains of Emotion, Mile High Conflict
June 2-5, 2010
Sheraton Denver
Denver, Colorado

AFCC Ninth Symposium on Child Custody Evaluations

October 28-30, 2010
Hyatt Regency Cambridge
Cambridge/Boston, MA

AFCC 48th Annual Conference

June 1-4, 2011
Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek Resort
Orlando, Florida

ASK THE EXPERTS

Do you have a question that you would like answered by an AFCC expert? Let us know and your question could be answered in the next *AFCC eNEWS*.

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program for co-parents, endorsed by the US Dept. of Health and Human Services as a Model Program. Courts in a growing number of states are referring separating and divorcing parents to this program in lieu of attending classes. The program teaches conflict resolution and communication skills, as well as improving parenting skills, and attitudes that promote sensitivity to children's needs during and after separation. See www.divorce-education.com/online and email Dr. Gordon (gordon@mind.net) for a complimentary password to view the entire program.

FEATURED ARTICLE

Professionalization Of Conflict Resolvers

by Deborah Sword, courtesy of Mediate.com

Those of us speaking out against creating certification for conflict resolvers don't seem to have a lot of allies. The weight of popular opinion is that certification with standardized credentials should (must) be done. I appreciate an opportunity to present a cautionary point of view.

[Read more...](#)

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Media Rules Cause Chaos in Family Courts

Courtesy of guardian.co.uk

Three months after family courts were opened to the press, the presence of journalists is still causing havoc, even as the government is promising to change the law to open up the courts even more.

[Read more...](#)

McClelland Announces Review of Family Law Act to Tackle Domestic Violence Laws

Courtesy of Australian Divorce Blog

"The primary aim of this work will be to address inconsistencies so as to ensure women and children are better protected under both Commonwealth and State laws," Mr. McClelland said.

[Read more...](#)

Advanced Parenting Coordination Training

AFCC, in collaboration with the AFCC Missouri Chapter and the University of Missouri at Kansas City School of Law, will be offering *Attachment, Alienation and Access: Advanced Interventions for Parenting Coordinators* on September 30-October 1, 2009. Arnold Shienvold, Ph.D. will focus on how to work effectively with the most challenging clients and issues, including those with personality disorders and attachment problems.

[Read more...](#)

Correction

An early version of the July eNEWS was sent with the incorrect link to the revised Arizona Statute providing access to the current Statute, before revision. The revised Statute will not be posted online by Arizona until the end of September. AFCC will provide that link, as soon as it is available, in the eNEWS.

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ABOUT AFCC eNEWS

AFCC eNEWS is a monthly e-newsletter published by the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts (AFCC). *AFCC eNEWS* provides professionals with time sensitive and up-to-date topics including practice tips, research innovations and international news.

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Professionals dedicated to improving the lives of children and families through the resolution of family conflict



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Natural Children from Blended Families Bring No Benefit to Older Half-Siblings

Courtesy of J.M. Craig Press, Inc.

Halpern-Meekin, S. and Tach, L. [2008]. Heterogeneity in Two-Parent Families and Adolescent Well-Being. Journal of Marriage and Family, 70, 435-451.

When people divorce, there is a high probability that they will remarry and have children with their new spouses. There has been very little research regarding how these children fare when raised with older half-siblings. This study addresses that issue.

The authors had two hypotheses: First, shared children in blended families will have significantly poorer outcomes than shared children in simple [intact] families. Second, shared children in blended families will not have significantly different outcomes from step-children in blended families.

The participants consisted of 1,292 children. Six hundred and eighty-seven were from intact families; there were 122 biological children from those who had remarried, and in those families there were 186 step-children. Also, there were 167 step-children who had no additional siblings despite a new marriage. The teens were interviewed twice, and they and their parents all completed questionnaires.

The authors found:

- Children who lived in intact families did best on all measures..
- Step-children in blended families reported the fewest activities with their parents, the fewest protective factors, the worst relationships with their half-siblings and were least likely to have received recent medical care.
- Shared children who lived in blended families had closer parental relationships than did step-children from previous marriages.
- Step-children had the worst outcomes whether the blended family had shared children or not.
- Shared and step-children had significantly higher delinquency rates than did those in intact families. They also had more depressive symptoms and more problems in school.

The authors concluded that "Youth in both blended and step-families report significantly worse academic, behavioral, and psychological outcomes than children in simple two-parent families . . . even though shared children in blended families reside with both of their biological parents and are commonly classified as residing in two-parent families in the youth outcomes literature, their outcomes are significantly worse than the children who actually reside in simple two-parent families" [p. 445]. A limitation of the study is that the children were only interviewed twice over a period of two years.

Critical Analysis

A major strength of this study is that both the parents of the intact families and step-families had been together for a number of years at the time of the study. Second, those children whose parents had divorced remained in contact with their non-resident parents and them at least 50% of the time. In terms of limitations, this study did not examine gender differences in the children. Since other research has shown that girls and boys adjust differently post-divorce [See Digests: 5, 2; 6, 6; 7, 5; & 8, 9.], it is surprising that the authors did not examine this issue.

Recommendations

We have known for some time that step-children generally do not do as well post-divorce as those children whose parents remain together. This study confirms that this is the case even when the children of divorce remain in contact with and see their non-resident parent a significant percentage of the time.

This study takes us a step further and is a caution to those who remarry and wish to create their own families by having more children together. Step-children will not have more positive outcomes simply because their natural parent remarries and has more children. Thus, the notion that having more children with a new spouse will somehow be a benefit to the existing children does not appear to be the case.

This study describes the life of teens. While children of divorce do not do as well as adults as those from intact families, the reader should be cautious about extrapolating these findings to adulthood since the teenage participants were rather young.

For this as well as other valuable research visit J.M. Craig Press online at www.jmcraig.com or call (877) 960-1474. AFCC members receive a 25% discount on all J.M. Craig Products.

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Intimate Partner Violence Theoretical Considerations: Moving towards a contextual framework

Bell, K.M. and Naugle, A.E. (2008). Intimate partner violence theoretical considerations: Moving towards a contextual framework. Clinical Psychology Review, 28, 1096-1107.

Abstract

Several theories have been developed to provide a conceptual understanding of intimate partner violence (IPV) episodes. Although each of these theories has found some degree of empirical support, they are limited in their explanatory power of IPV episodes and their ability to significantly impact the efficacy of IPV prevention and treatment programs. The current paper provides a review and critique of current IPV theories and highlights strategies for improving upon these theories. An alternative theoretical conceptualization is introduced that incorporates existing IPV and functional analytic literature into a contextual framework for conceptualizing IPV episodes. Components of the IPV contextual framework include distal, static and proximal antecedents; motivating factors; behavioral repertoire; discriminative stimuli (i.e. environmental cues/signals); verbal rules; and IPV consequences. The proposed theoretical framework offers two primary advantages over former IPV theories. First, it provides a comprehensive conceptualization of IPV by integrating components of previous IPV theories and their related empirical findings into one, cohesive conceptual framework. Additionally, it allows for a more fine-grained analysis of more proximal variables potentially related to discrete IPV episodes. A discussion of how the proposed theoretical framework may influence future IPV research and clinical practice is provided.

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Top Ten Features of Models of Brief Focused Assessments

By Linda Cavallero, Ph.D.

1. Some family matters involve issues limited in scope.

BFA models presume that in some family court cases there are discrete issues, limited in scope, that do not require a comprehensive family evaluation to assist the court in judicial decision-making.

2. Specific referral questions must be identified by a judicial officer.

A BFA addresses specific referral question(s) identified by a judge or designated judicial officer in a court order. These narrowly defined issues can be assessed at different stages in the legal process, whenever the judge requests a focused assessment.

3. BFAs are by nature more limited in scope than CCEs.

A BFA differs from a comprehensive child custody evaluation in its narrower scope, more descriptive reporting of data and, consequently, more limited inference making. Comprehensive evaluations, by contrast, are designed to provide data on more broadly based questions about general family functioning and parenting capacity that are not appropriate to a BFA model.

4. BFAs can be an efficient as well as timely tool for addressing time sensitive issues.

A BFA can be an efficient and cost effective tool to assist in judicial decision-making in family situations. By their nature, BFAs involve more circumscribed inquiry into family issues, and are therefore likely to be less intrusive to the family than comprehensive custody evaluations. BFAs can provide information to the court more quickly than a comprehensive evaluation, avoiding some of the delays in the resolution of issues that can exacerbate tensions in families. A BFA can be used to assist judicial decision-making when there are acute questions regarding individual or family problems, especially those related to time sensitive, child safety issues.

5. BFAs best address well defined questions that require clinical judgment.

A BFA best addresses questions that are well-defined, narrow in scope and require clinical judgment, e.g., to what degree is a child's custodial preference based on developmentally appropriate reasoning?; is supervised visitation needed to protect a child's safety or well being while with a parent in light of some aspect of the parent/child relationship?; whether and under what conditions to reunite an estranged parent and child(ren).

6. The assessor or their agency must be named in a court order for assessment.

Prior to commencing a BFA, the assessor must secure a court order that includes a well-defined referral question(s) and specifically names the clinician or their agency to conduct the assessment.

7. Assors select data gathering methods to address the referral question.

Assessors should design the BFA by selecting data gathering methods

designed to provide sufficient information to address the referral question (s) of the court.

8. Clinicians interview family members, consult relevant collaterals and review records.

In a BFA, an appropriately trained clinician, in a court, agency or private setting, conducts interviews with parents and their children, observes parent-child interaction, reviews relevant records and consults relevant collateral contacts. The assessment process is guided by the focused question(s) provided by the court or judicial officer.

9. Qualified mental health professionals with appropriate education and training can conduct BFAs

BFAs should be performed by qualified mental health professionals who are independent practitioners or part of a family court system, by court services employees or by individual practitioners or teams qualified by statute or court rule. Brief focused assessors should possess appropriate education and training.

10. Assessors provide relevant information making clear its limitations.

As impartial assessors, clinicians who perform BFA's must strive to provide reliable, relevant information to the court in a timely fashion, make clear the limitations of the assessment and to identify important issues not assessed.

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