



AFCC eNEWS

MONTHLY E-NEWSLETTER
VOL. 4 NO. 1
JANUARY 2009

Registration Open: AFCC Annual Conference

Registration is open for AFCC's 46th Annual Conference, *Children, Courts and Custody: Back to the Future or Full Steam Ahead?* The conference takes place May 27-30, 2009 at the Sheraton New Orleans. Conference registration fees are frozen at 2008 rates for AFCC members. Both the conferences and the conference hotels have sold out the last two years. Register early! To reserve a hotel room at the AFCC rate of \$165 per night, please contact the Sheraton New Orleans at (888) 627-7033 or (504) 525-2500, or click the link below for online reservations. Make sure to identify yourself with AFCC. Conference programs are being mailed this week. To register online for the conference, use the link below, or print and send a registration form from the PDF of the conference program.

[Online hotel reservations...](#)

[Online conference registration...](#)

[See the entire conference program...](#)

New Orleans Plenary Session Sneak Peek

The Evolving Family Court System: Progress at a Price?

In the last forty years, society has experienced major changes in the roles of men and women, demographics and socioeconomic and status of family court users. Domestic violence and child abuse have become major social concerns. At the same time, courts have added myriad dispute resolution services, problem-solving and child centered approaches, with a focus on self-determination, shared parenting and judicial case management. What is the appropriate role of the court system in the resolution of family disputes? Has the role of judges and lawyers changed? Has the infusion of "helping" professionals into the system helped or are court users now being coerced into processes that lack accountability and transparency? Are rights of parents and children appropriately protected in the new family court? This distinguished panel will examine the balance between past and present systems with an eye toward the future.

Presenters: Mary E. O'Connell, J.D., Arnold Shienvold, Ph.D., Hon. R. James Williams and Moderator Andrew Schepard, J.D.

[Read more about the presenters...](#)

[See the entire conference program...](#)

AFCC Announces Conference Scholarships

The AFCC Development Committee is pleased to announce that it



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UPCOMING CONFERENCES

46th Annual Conference

Children, Courts and Custody: Back to the Future or Full Steam Ahead?

May 27-30, 2009
Sheraton New Orleans
New Orleans, Louisiana
[Conference program...](#)

AFCC Regional Training Conference

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

will be awarding more than 40 scholarships to AFCC's 46th Annual Conference, May 27-30, 2009 in New Orleans. This year's unprecedented number of scholarships will be offered to graduate students, court services personnel, local and international professionals and others. The Committee has doubled the number of scholarships that include \$1,000 travel stipends from three to six. AFCC conference scholarships enable deserving professionals, who otherwise could not afford to participate in our conferences, the opportunity to develop their practice skills, network with like-minded colleagues and bring the latest innovations back to their communities. The application must be completed by March 1, 2009.

[Click here for scholarship application...](#)

[Click here to contribute to scholarship fund...](#)

Great Airfares to New Orleans

Sample round-trip airfares to New Orleans for the 46th Annual Conference found on Expedia.com on Feb. 15, 2009:

Boston \$218	New York (LaGuardia) \$228
Chicago \$230	Philadelphia \$160
Dallas \$138	Phoenix \$193
Denver \$248	San Francisco \$228
Los Angeles \$248	Seattle \$198
Miami \$176	St. Louis \$303
Minneapolis \$310	Tampa \$114
Newark \$248	Washington, DC (Dulles) \$173

ASK THE EXPERTS

Top Ten Tips on Court Program and Community Collaborations

By Linda Fieldstone, M.Ed., Honorable Sandy Karlan, and Honorable Judith L. Kreeger

An increasing number of domestic relations courts are recognizing that the needs of family litigants are often non-legal child related issues and are best served outside of the family court arena. Family Court Services of Miami-Dade County Domestic Relations Division was developed to fill the gap between the court and the community and bridge parents and children to the most appropriate providers in their neighborhoods. In this era of "do more with less," this function of the court has become even more crucial to the families we serve. These Top Ten Tips will help you build strong links between your court and community.

[Read more...](#)

RESEARCH UPDATE

Child Sexual Abuse, Early Family Risk, and Childhood Parentification: Pathways to Current Psychosocial Adjustment

Courtesy of J.M. Craig Press, Inc.

When families are stressed, there is a tendency for some parents to treat their children more as peers. This behavior has come to be called parentification and is defined as a situation in which children are assigned roles and responsibilities normally the province of adults. For many years, (mental health professionals) have assumed that such actions are harmful to children and

AFCC Trainings

[Training schedule & brochure](#)

Parenting Coordination: Working with High Conflict Families

Robin M. Deutsch, Ph.D.

February 9-10, 2009
New Orleans, Louisiana

Attachment, Alienation and Access: Advanced Interventions for Parenting Coordinators

Arnold Shienvold, Ph.D.

February 11-12, 2009
New Orleans, Louisiana

Advanced Issues in Child Custody

Nancy Williams Olesen, Ph.D.

June 22-23, 2009
Chicago, Illinois

Parenting Coordination: Advanced Practice and Skills

Joan B. Kelly, Ph.D.

June 24-25, 2009
Chicago, Illinois

AFCC Chapters

Arizona Chapter Annual Conference

January 30-February 1, 2009
Hilton Sedona
Sedona, Arizona
www.azafcc.org

California Chapter Annual Conference

February 6-8, 2009
The Mark Hopkins Hotel
San Francisco, California
www.afcc-ca.org

Florida Chapter Annual Conference

February 27-28, 2009
Renaissance Hotel
Tampa, Florida
www.flafcc.org

Missouri Chapter Annual Spring Conference

March 12-13, 2009

counsel parents against doing so. This is the first article we have seen that scientifically investigates the issue. It provides some surprising conclusions.

[Read more...](#)

RECOMMENDED READING

Irwin Sandler, Ph.D. recommends an article that examines correlates of the adjustment of children in high conflict divorces: Trinder, L, Kellet, J. and Swift, L. (2008). **The Relationship Between Contact and Child Adjustment in High Conflict Cases after Divorce or Separation.** *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 13 (4), 181-187.

Connie Beck, Ph.D. recommends: Gattis, K.S., Simpson, L.E. and Christensen, A. (2008). **What about the kids? Parenting and child adjustment in the context of couple therapy.** *Journal of Family Psychology*, 22 (6), 833-842.

If you have a recommended reading, or have written an article or book, please email it to editor@afccnet.org.

FEATURED ARTICLE

Working Together After Divorce – The Mediated Road to Success

By Rikk Larsen and Blair Trippe, courtesy of Mediate.com

The world of divorce is a place with an infinite number of stories that play out as a short list of common themes. The biggies: the well being of the children, how to divide assets, who gets the marital home and the complications of a parenting plan. We also know that divorces are rarely the end of the relationship in the sense that once they are final you never have, or need to have, contact with the other party again.

[Read more...](#)

DIVORCE IN THE NEWS

Fewer Divorces in a Bad Economy

Courtesy of MSN.com

The potentially huge cost of splitting up is causing a growing number of couples to tough out bad marriages, even if they have to live in separate bedrooms.

[Read more...](#)

Custody Case Tip: Don't Bug Kid's Teddy Bear

By Todd Cooper, Courtesy of Omaha World-Herald

Turns out, Little Bear was nothing more than Big Brother. An Omaha man has sued his ex-wife after she or someone on her behalf inserted an audio recorder into their 4-year-old daughter's teddy bear during the couple's custody battle.

[Read more...](#)

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St. Louis, Missouri
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Massachusetts Chapter Annual Conference

April 3, 2009
Regis College
Weston, Massachusetts
www.maafccnet.org

Ontario Chapter Annual Conference

April 3, 2009
130 West Event Center
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
www.afccnet.org

Minnesota Chapter Annual Conference

April 24, 2009
St. Paul Campus
University of Minnesota
St. Paul, Minnesota
www.afccnet.org

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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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Sponsor; and **Fuerst & Godley**, Lake Charles, LA, Silver Sponsor, for their support of AFCC's 46th Annual Conference in New Orleans.

AFCC Award Nominations

AFCC is seeking nominations for the following awards to be presented at AFCC's 46th Annual Conference in New Orleans: The **John E. VanDuzer Distinguished Service Award**, which recognizes outstanding contributions and/or achievements by members of AFCC; the **Stanley Cohen Distinguished Research Award**, which recognizes outstanding research and/or achievements in the field of family and divorce and the **Irwin Cantor Innovative Program Award**, which recognizes innovation in court-connected or court-related programs. The nomination deadline is March 15, 2009.

[Click for more information...](#)

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AFCC welcomes your comments, questions or feedback. Please email the editor by [clicking here](#).



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Child Sexual Abuse, Early Family Risk, and Childhood Parentification: Pathways to Current Psychosocial Adjustment

Courtesy of J.M. Craig Press, Inc.

Fitzgerald, M. M., Schneider, R. A., Salstrom, S., Zinzow, H. M., Jackson, J., and Fossel, R. V. [2008]. Child Sexual Abuse, Early Family Risk, and Childhood Parentification: Pathways to Current Psychosocial Adjustment. Journal of Family Psychology, 22, 320 - 324.

When families are stressed, there is a tendency for some parents to treat their children more as peers. This behavior has come to be called parentification and is defined as a situation in which children are assigned roles and responsibilities normally the province of adults. For many years, MHPs have assumed that such actions are harmful to children and counsel parents against doing so. This is the first article we have seen that scientifically investigates this issue. It provides some surprising conclusions.

The authors administered a number of questionnaires to 499 female undergraduates; 82% were Caucasian and most were from upper middle class homes. The authors hypothesized that a number of factors could contribute to children becoming parentified. These included family dysfunction, parental mental illness, substance abuse, IPV, and on occasion CSA.

They found that:

- Family dysfunction, including parental mental illness, substance abuse, and IPV all had a direct effect on children's maladjustment.
- Twenty-two percent of the participants reported being sexually abused beginning at an average age of 11.5 years.
- The major single contributor to parentification was family dysfunction, whereas CSA did not have such a direct impact.
- Children who were parentified had different outcomes regarding their emotional adjustment. Those who were drawn into adult relationships had poorer outcomes, whereas those who were required to take on parental roles with younger siblings were better adjusted.

Critical Analysis

A major value of this work is the empirical finding that all parentifying behavior is not necessarily harmful. In terms of limitations, the authors never explained why they only studied females, so we cannot know if the results would be comparable for men. Second, CSA was very broadly defined. Therefore the percentages of abuse reported may be too high. Third, in their statistical analysis, CSA was treated in such a way so as to risk over- emphasizing its contribution to parentification while potentially minimizing the effect of the other factors.

Recommendations

As we mentioned at the outset, MHPs have generally assumed that parentification is harmful to children. This research substantiates that belief in large measure. Children should not be brought into adult roles for which they are not prepared or equipped. On the other hand, these data are quite provocative regarding children who are expected to care for siblings. While these expectations are inappropriate, the authors found that filling these roles was not harmful. They speculated that this was so because "caring for siblings may confer skills and a sense of self-efficacy that are important to psychosocial adjustment, at least among young, female college students" [p. 323]. While further research is needed, these data caution us to be more careful in our assumptions regarding parentification and to look more closely at the factors contributing to it.

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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Mary E. O'Connell, J.D.

Professor Mary E. O'Connell is Professor of Law at Northeastern University School of Law in Boston, Massachusetts. Prof. O'Connell's research has focused on both substantive changes in family law and on changing family court processes. Her most recent work, *"Mandated Custody Evaluations and the Limits of Judicial Power"*, (*Family Court Review*, April, 2009) continues her exploration of the need to balance individual rights with family court interventions.

Prof. O'Connell served as Co-Reporter for AFCC's *Family Law Education Reform Project*. She has a long-standing relationship with the Child and Family Forensic Center at the University of Massachusetts Medical School in Worcester, Massachusetts, where she served as a Visiting Scholar during 2006-2007, and where she regularly participates in the post-doctoral forensics program. With her law students, Prof. O'Connell also runs a mentoring program for teens in state custody in Massachusetts.

Arnold T. Shienvold, Ph.D.

Arnold Shienvold, Ph.D. earned Master of Arts and Doctor of Philosophy degrees in clinical psychology from the University of Alabama. He specialized in child clinical psychology and completed his internship at the Ohio State University Hospital.

Dr. Shienvold 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. Additionally, Dr. Shienvold has served as a professional facilitator for group meetings.

Dr. Shienvold's professional affiliations include: Member of the American Psychological Association; Fellow of the Pennsylvania Psychological Association where he also serves on the custody evaluation work group; past president of the Academy of Family Mediators; past president of the Association for Conflict Resolution; Serves on the Board of Governors of the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts; Pennsylvania Council of Mediators, American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children.

Hon. R. James Williams

Justice Williams is a member of the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia, Family Division. He is an Associate Director of the National Judicial Institute.

Justice Williams has spoken at, and/or chaired, a number of national and international continuing legal education programs.

He is President of the Canadian Research Institute on Law and the Family (Calgary). He has co-chaired the Federation of Law Societies Summer

Program on Family Law since 1992 and has taught at Dalhousie Law School since 1978. He has been involved in a variety of community organizations.

Andrew Schepard, J.D.

Andrew Schepard is Professor of Law, Hofstra University School of Law and the Director of Hofstra University's Center for Children, Families and the Law. He is a 1972 graduate of Harvard Law School, where he served as Articles Editor of the *Harvard Law Review*, served as a Law Clerk to former Chief Judge James L. Oakes of the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit.

Professor Schepard is the editor of the *Family Court Review* and the author of *Children, Courts and Custody: Interdisciplinary Models for Divorcing Families* (Cambridge University Press 2004). He has written many law review articles in family law and alternative dispute resolution. Professor Schepard writes the Law and Children column for the *New York Law Journal*.

Professor Schepard is the Reporter for the Uniform Collaborative Law Act sponsored by the National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws. He is a member of the American Bar Association's Youth at Risk Commission. He was the Reporter for the *Model Standards of Practice for Family and Divorce Mediation* approved by the American Bar Association, the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts and the Association for Conflict Resolution and the Reporter for the American Bar Association's Leadership Summit on Unified Family Courts. He founded Hofstra Law School's Child and Family Advocacy Fellowship Program that awards full tuition scholarships and paid externships to students pledged to a career in the field. He is also a founder of Parent Education and Custody Effectiveness (P.E.A.C.E), an education program for divorcing and separating parents on how to manage their conflicts over their children responsibly.

He is the Chair of the Family Law Education Reform Project co-sponsored by Hofstra Law School and the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts. He is an attorney member of the Judicial Conference of the State of New York. Professor Schepard is also Program Director for the National Institute of Trial Advocacy's course in Modern Divorce Advocacy and has served as Program Director for NITA's Child Advocacy, Deposition and Trial Advocacy courses.

Professor Schepard has received numerous awards from the American Bar Association and the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts for his work with families and children in conflict. Professor Schepard is an elected member of the American Law Institute and a Fellow of the American Bar Foundation.

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ASK THE EXPERTS

Top Ten Tips on Court Program and Community Collaborations

By Linda Fieldstone, M.Ed., Honorable Sandy Karlan, and Honorable Judith L. Kreeger

An increasing number of domestic relations courts are recognizing that the needs of family litigants are often non-legal child related issues and are best served outside of the family court arena. Family Court Services of Miami-Dade County Domestic Relations Division was developed to fill the gap between the court and the community and bridge parents and children to the most appropriate providers in their neighborhoods. In this era of “do more with less,” this function of the court has become even more crucial to the families we serve. These Top Ten Tips will help you build strong links between your court and community:

1. Define the Need

Let the judges define their needs and develop a system that meets their expectations; create easy forms and meaningful procedures to structure a program to meet the expectations of the court first. Remember that a court services program would not exist without the confidence of the court.

2. Know Your Customers

Understand the types of services that are best suited for these families and search for them in various parts of the community; if you don't find what you are looking for, help to create them.

3. Tailor Each Referral to the Unique Needs of Each Family

Administer a comprehensive intake to ascertain needs of the family, including location, language, affordability/fee structure, insurance, date/time restrictions, gender preferences, domestic violence and abuse history, special training required, prior services utilized and special needs of any family member.

4. Don't Forget the Vet

Remember to check if either parent is eligible for veteran's benefits; collaborate with your local Veteran's Administration to provide a strong link to the appropriate provider.

5. Be Aware of Cross Cultural Issues

Make sure that the services that you offer are cross cultural in nature so to avoid frustration and further barriers to healing for the parents and children that are referred.

6. Be On Guard When Referring Families with Domestic Violence and Abuse Issues

Check if referral sources have appropriate safety precautions in place before referring families with domestic violence and abuse history, such as separate entrances and waiting areas, security cameras, security guards, specific security procedures in place, detailed verbal and written orientation to policies and procedures and special training for providers.

7. Be Prepared for Crises Intervention Services

Develop the capacity to assist the court with a parent or child that requires immediate attention, threaten to hurt themselves or others. Provide a link

to the most appropriate agency and/or law enforcement to ensure the safety of those in proceedings.

8. Support Your Community Providers

Provide networking opportunities and on-going trainings for community providers regarding the challenges in working with family court litigants, differentiation in high conflict and domestic violence and abuse cases, appropriate interfacing with the court and specific court procedures to follow. Invite judges too. Trainings provide a special link between the court and community; providers feel appreciated and supported.

9. Create a Family Court Council

Coordinate a meeting with the Chief Judge of the Division (or designees) and the service providers in your community to open the dialogue between the court and the community providers. This will eliminate unfulfilled expectations of one another and provide a smooth working relationship.

10. Establish Quality Control

Develop measures for quality control management and assessment of the providers that the Court is using, as parents will trust the program because the Court sent them. The providers are interested in working with the Court and getting our business, so don't be afraid to thoroughly verify their credentials and accomplishments.

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