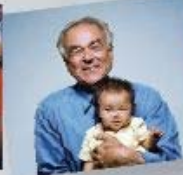




ASSOCIATION OF
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eNEWS

May 2017

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AFCC 54th Annual Conference

There's Still Time to Register

If you have not yet registered for the conference, not to worry. You can still [register online](#), over the phone by calling the AFCC office at 608-664-3750, fax in your registration form to 608-664-3751 or register onsite at the Registration desk. We can't wait to see you there!

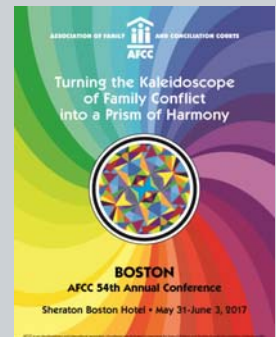
Donate to the Silent Auction

There is still time to support the silent auction by donating an item. The annual AFCC Silent Auction is an excellent opportunity to support AFCC's special projects and initiatives. If you would like to donate an item, please drop it off at the registration desk onsite. Make sure you also attend the silent auction on Friday, prior to the Annual Banquet, to bid on hotel and vacation stays, one-of-a-kind jewelry, sports memorabilia, and more!

MONTHLY
E-NEWSLETTER

VOL. 12 NO. 5

Upcoming AFCC Conferences



AFCC 54th Annual Conference

*Turning the Kaleidoscope
of Family Conflict into a
Prism of Harmony*
May 31-June 3, 2017

Check out things to do in Boston

During your free time at the conference, explore one of America's oldest cities. Here are a few lists to get you started:

[16 Best Things to do in Boston](#)

[31 Mouth-Watering Eats In Boston For Under \\$10](#)

Thank You to our Conference Sponsors

A special thank you to our Diamond Sponsor: **OurFamilyWizard**; our Platinum Sponsors: **Esdaile, Barrett, Jacobs & Mone**, **Stable Paths**, **Schmidt & Federico**, and **AppClose**; our Gold Sponsors: **OnlineParentingPrograms.com**, **Center for Divorce Education**, **Transitioning Families**, and the **Suzie S Thorn Family Foundation**; and our Silver Sponsors: **William James College**, **Boston Law Collaborative**, **Tony Pelusi & Associates**, **Lee & Rivers**, and **Verrill Dana**. To see a full list of all conference sponsors, [click here](#).

Ask the Experts

Stepfamily Dynamics: Ten Tips for Addressing Myths and Challenges for High Conflict Families in Custody Disputes

Ann M. Ordway, JD, PhD, Ruth O. Moore, PhD, LPC

The myths associated with blending two separate families into one create a series of untenable goals which establish unrealistic expectations and an often undeserved sense of failure. Unlike the prototypes created for entertainment, real stepfamilies face a multitude of challenges ranging from establishing a new household, to restructuring hierarchy, to navigating the turmoil which is sometimes introduced by prior spouses and other parents. Similarly, it can be very difficult to identify what role a stepparent should play in an on-going custody dispute, particularly when the stepparent is part of the problem rather than part of the solution. It is critical to be familiar with the challenges for stepfamilies connected to high conflict dynamics, and the professionals who work with them.

[Read more](#)

AFCC Webinars

Registration is now open for **NEW AFCC Webinar**:
LGBTQ Clients and Family Law in a Post-Obergefell Era

AFCC Conference Sponsors



ESDAILE, BARRETT, JACOBS & MONE



SCHMIDT & FEDERICO, P.C.
Counsellors at Law



Essential toolkit for co-parenting

Save the Date [AFCC-AAML Conference](#)

Advanced Issues in Child Custody: Evaluation, Litigation and Settlement
September 14-16, 2017
Westin San Diego
San Diego, California

[AFCC Regional Conference](#)

Beneath the Surface of High Conflict and Troubled Families
November 2-4, 2017
Hyatt Regency Milwaukee
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Allan Barsky, JD, MSW, PhD

June 20, 2017

1:00pm-2:00pm Eastern time

To read the description, [click here](#).

[Register now!](#)

NEW AFCC Webinar Series



Now introducing the new, 2017-2018 AFCC webinar series! Beginning in July, AFCC will be hosting a webinar each month! Topics include parent-child contact problems, stepfamily dynamics, interviewing children, evidence-informed approach to parental alienation, and more! Mark your calendar for these one hour,

outstanding presentations.

[See the schedule](#)

Give to the AFCC Scholarship Fund

Contribute now to the AFCC Scholarship Fund and help a colleague in need attend a future AFCC conference. This year, AFCC was able to provide more than 50 scholarships to deserving applicants to attend the AFCC 54th Annual Conference. If you have not already given this year, please consider giving a gift today. Know that your gift reaches many, not only our colleagues, but the children and families they serve. Thank you to all who have already donated!

[Donate today](#)

Family Court Review Writing Competition

The *Family Court Review*, the interdisciplinary journal of AFCC, published in cooperation with the Center for Children, Families and the Law at Hofstra University School of Law, held its 8th Annual Family Law Writing Competition. There were a total of 18 submissions, from 10 different schools across the country!



AFCC Chapter Conferences

Australia Chapter Annual Conference

Decisions! Decisions!
Decisions!

August 17, 2017

Crown Conference Center
Melbourn, Australia

Florida Chapter Annual Conference

Serving Families in
Transition: Educate,
Inspire, and Empower
September 25-27, 2017
The FL Hotel &
Conference Center at the
FL Mall

Orlando, Florida

Colorado Chapter Annual Conference

October 13-15, 2017

Breckenridge, Colorado

Ontario Chapter Annual Conference

Breaking Down Barriers:
Targeting Resources to
Meet Families Needs

October 19-20, 2017

Toronto Reference Library
Toronto, Ontario

Arizona Chapter Annual Conference

January 26-28, 2018

Hilton Sedona Resort
Sedona, Arizona

EDITOR:

Leslye Hunter

lhunter@afccnet.org

[Read more about the winners](#)

ASSOCIATE EDITOR:
Corinne Bennett
cbennett@afccnet.org



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AFCC Chapter News



Meet Sharon Smith, President of the
Alberta Chapter

[Read more](#)



Meet Deana D. Klein, President of the
Missouri Chapter

[Read more](#)

AFCC Member News

AFCC member **Hon. Karen Adam** received the Martha K. Rothman Lifetime Achievement Award for her advocacy for the improvement of access to justice in Arizona. During her time as presiding Judge of Pima County Juvenile Court, she led major juvenile justice reform efforts. Congratulations, Karen!

Theo Liebmann, who is a member on the *Family Court Review* Editorial Board, is a co-recipient of the New York State Bar Association's Howard A. Levine Award for Excellence in Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare for his work on behalf of immigrant children who have been subjected to abuse, neglect, abandonment or similar family crises. Well deserved, Theo!

Nancy Gray-Eade received the Yuma County Employee of the Year Award for her exceptional work with the Yuma County Law Library. She is the Conciliation Court Manager with the Superior Court.

Center for Court Innovation Resources

The Center for Court Innovation has a plethora of resources on procedural justice, in hopes to improve public trust in justice by helping justice agencies treat individual litigants and victims with dignity and respect. CCI recently introduced an [online training video](#) about implicit bias by Professor Bryant Marks from Morehouse College.

[Check out the website](#)

Los Angeles Superior Court Family Law Division Announces Voluntary Settlement Project Pilot

The Family Law Division of the Los Angeles Superior Court is excited to announce the launch of a pilot project which will provide an opportunity for those with family law cases to participate in court-sponsored Voluntary Settlement Conferences (VSC).

[Read more](#)

Association of Family and Conciliation Courts (AFCC)

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eNEWS

VOL. 12 NO. 5
MAY 2017

Ask the Experts

Stepfamily Dynamics: Ten Tips for Addressing Myths and Challenges for High Conflict Families in Custody Disputes

Ann M. Ordway, JD, PhD and Ruth O. Moore, PhD, LPC

The myths associated with blending two separate families into one creates a series of untenable goals which establish unrealistic expectations and an often undeserved sense of failure. Unlike the prototypes created for entertainment, *real* stepfamilies face a multitude of challenges ranging from establishing a new household, restructuring hierarchy, to navigating the turmoil which is sometimes introduced by prior spouses and *other* parents. Similarly, it can be very difficult to identify what role a stepparent should play in an on-going custody dispute, particularly when the stepparent is part of the problem rather than part of the solution. It is critical to be familiar with the challenges for stepfamilies connected to high conflict dynamics, and the professionals who work with them.

1. **Respect the Journey.** Every family's experience with recoupling is unique and a cookie-cutter approach to resolving dilemmas that arise simply will not work. First and foremost, a professional working with a stepfamily dynamic in a custody case must take the time to understand the journey toward formation of the new family unit. Specific background facts will play a role in better understanding the current dynamic. Is the new stepmother someone with whom the children's father became romantically involved while still married to the children's mother? Have there been negative or even physical encounters between the new stepfather and the children's father in front of the children? Have there been specific experiences the children have had with the new stepparent that have caused the children to be resistant to parenting time (i.e. clear favoring of the stepparent's biological children over stepchildren without appropriate intervention from the children's biological parent). Depending on circumstances, some new spouses can feel threatened by close or amicable relationships between former spouses and seem to make it their mission to put an end to cooperative co-parenting. It is a common complaint of original co-parents that "we got along well before he met his new wife. We never had these problems."

2. Consider the Living Arrangements. It is important to understand who lives in which home, and how much time the children spend in each environment. Of equal importance is the origin of the home. Especially when both spouses enter a marriage with children from prior relationships, having one side move into the other's pre-existing home is a breeding ground for conflict, ranging from "how come I have to share *my* room now?" to "why are you letting them move into *Dad's house that Dad is paying for?*" These are potential conflicts which arise naturally – but which can also be fueled by the non-resident parent. It is also helpful to know the proximity between homes and the access each parent has to the children while they are in the other parent's home. A common complaint is an excessive number of calls, texts, emails, and face-time chats initiated from a custodial parent while the children are spending a weekend or a vacation with the other parents and his or her new partner. While it is important for children to have unfettered contact with both parents – excessive contact can be disruptive, especially when that is the intent. When possible, guidelines for contact should be put in place in custody agreements to limit disruptions when they exist. Another problem is the unwelcomed drive-by, which can range from sending the child in when parents are not home to retrieve something the child "forgot" or a parent stopping by to "drop something off." Children have been known to be instructed to tape record interactions or take video of the other parent's environment – all for court purposes. These behaviors are examples of potential invasions of privacy which are offensive, but not uncommon when there is tension between a biological parent and a stepparent.
3. Meet the Stepparent. Never assume that the stepparent is how they were described to be and never assume the stepparent is as nice as they appear to be. If there is a stepparent in a household who will be spending any kind of time with the children, that stepparent should be included in any forensic custody evaluation. A superficial meeting will be no more enough than would be a superficial meeting with either of the parents of origin. In your professional capacity, get to know the stepparent, including how they think, their regard or lack thereof for the children's other parent, the manner in which they interact with the children (watch the children's affect and response in addition to the stepparent's), and look for consistency. It is not surprising nor is it inappropriate for a stepparent to be upset and angry if the biological parent in the other household is intentionally trying to undermine the stepparent's relationship with the children. It is to be expected that the stepparent would be troubled by disruptions to their household and life created by constant feuding between the parents – their spouse and the spouse's prior spouse. It is important to remember that feelings are not wrong – it is what the stepparent does with those feelings that can be right or wrong.
4. Offer Proactive Step-parenting Guidelines. People often get caught up in what children call their stepparents. It is not fair to say that "mom" or "dad" is automatically inappropriate – nor should we assume that those titles are staged or forced. When a stepparent and a parent have a child together and that half-sibling is referring to the stepparent as "mom" or "dad" other children in the

household may follow suit. Sometimes children initiate those titles on their own because of a particular closeness with or fondness for a stepparent. It is important to understand where the title originated and most importantly *how the child feels*. Ideally, children can be encouraged to come up with a unique or special name for a stepparent that blends familiarity and respect, and allows the stepparent to be “not Mom,” but more than just “Sarah.” Suggestions can include the word for a parent in another language – or something that is cute for the children. My own stepchildren called me (Ann) “Mrs.” for a while to reflect that I was their father’s “Mrs.” It is also helpful when role identity parameters are established to avoid conflict over perceived or purposeful boundary violations. Sometimes, reactions seemingly amount to “much ado about nothing.” Reactions to a stepfather coaching his stepson’s football team, or a stepmother buying her stepdaughter’s first bra are based on feelings. Accordingly, preventing an eruption can be as simple as thinking about how the other parent might react before making certain decisions or engaging in certain activities.

5. Identify Role Parameters. Some complications can be avoided when the new couple establishes role parameters early in the relationship. On one hand, it makes sense for the primary parent to discipline their own children when discipline is needed. Discipline and consequences should be clearly defined between spouses – lest a stepparent who believes in spanking and spans his or her own children spank a stepchild to the dismay of the biological parent not living in that household. It is equally critical to establish that the stepparent also has parenting authority in the household so the children listen when their biological parent is not around. Some parenting agreements call for children to be returned to the other parent when a parent will be out for the evening or away on business. When there is a remarriage, should the children still be returned to the other parent or should they remain with the stepparent, who should be an integrated part of that household?
6. Quickly Address an Overstepping of Boundaries. As a professional involved in a custody case with a stepfamily component, quickly address any infractions or indiscretions as soon as they are identified. Some parents, primary or step, are oblivious to the feelings of the other parent involved. A fun gesture of taking a stepdaughter to get her ears pierced when the stepmother was doing the same for her own like-age daughter can turn into something ugly when the girl’s biological mother feels that her opportunity or privilege has been usurped. This is particularly true if the girl previously asked to get her ears pierced and the mother declined. Addressing boundary issues is sometimes about correcting aggressive, irresponsible, or inappropriate behavior – but can also represent seizing opportunities to build empathy. One needs to know what the boundaries are in order to overstep them. Some behavior is the result of being oblivious rather than intentional. As a professional, it is important to recognize the difference and respond with the appropriate guidance.
7. Encourage the Development of Clear House Rules. Rules should be clearly and uniformly established to avoid resident children being treated differently than

non-resident children simply on the basis of who spends more time in the household. This is another breeding ground for accusations of favoritism, some children “not being welcome” or “not being treated fairly,” and leads to stepsibling rivalry as well. Rules should be discussed with children and posted in a prominent place so there is no question what they are. Some rules are imposed by a consensus between parents in that household, while others can be negotiated with input from children. Rules do not have to neatly align with the rules in the other parent’s household – but again, a major complaint is that Dad and stepmom allow the children to go to bed at 10 on a school night to deliberately get under Mom’s skin with a violation of her 8:30 pm rule. Some rules matter and others do not. A child must take prescribed medication. An occasional cookie before dinner may not be catastrophic.

8. Consider Feelings and Presentation. Before putting a stepparent on the stand, consider how that person will come across. Are they supportive and kind toward the children – or will they immediately begin to berate and demonize the biological parent in the other household? What impression will be left for the court when a mother immediately launches into a tirade about the new stepmother because of the role she played in the end of the marriage even though she is actually good to the children. The more each party considers the perceptions and feelings of the other, the more likely they will be able to navigate around potential family landmines without incident.
9. Encourage Positive Dialogue between Step and Bio Parent. Stepparents sometimes are excellent bridges between the original parents and communicate better regarding critical issues than the original spouses. Though one marriage failed because the parties were not well-suited for each other, a second marriage with a more aligned partner can be successful. A stepfather and father can find commonality in their role as “father” – and sometimes find camaraderie in joking about certain quirky personality traits of the children’s mother or in admiring her talent for making lasagna. Common ground is a foundation for negotiation, compromise, and resolution – and when the feud between parents is significant, a stepparent can be a conduit for change. This can be particularly true when the stepparent entered the picture long after the original parents ended their relationship. As professionals in cases with stepfamily components, it is helpful to identify whether a stepparent is “friend” or “foe” and then to proceed accordingly.
10. Accept and Adapt. It has been said that we cannot change other people – we can only change ourselves. Sometimes the best way to adjust a dynamic is to stop trying to change the problematic behavior of one party and to rather work on changing the responses those behaviors receive. In other words, if a stepfather is bad-mouthing a biological father to the children, the biological father can opt not to engage, and instead be consistent, reliable, and supportive with the children. While it is certainly okay to acknowledge that the negative comments are really not acceptable, responding only demonstrates to the children that neither adult is behaving responsibly. Sometimes, the negative behavior cannot be stopped and courts are unlikely, in most states, to change custody just because a new

stepparent is stirring the pot between parents. Though language which suggests that “neither parent will speak ill of the other to or in the presence of the children” might be inserted in a court order, it is difficult to police and harder to enforce. Accepting that the problem cannot be eliminated often reduces the stress associated with trying to change the unchangeable. Instead, focus placed on creating a positive experience for the children in the household the parent can control will naturally reduce some of the conflict and lead to a better, though not perfect, situation.

It would be helpful if Judges and Magistrates were better able to hold badly-behaving adults accountable for the negative effects on children and the disruptions caused for the other household. However, as noted above, it is difficult in some situations to know who is at fault and whether certain behavior is the catalyst or is reactionary.

Considering the increasing number of stepfamilies forming every day, this is not a problem that will soon go away. Training on stepfamily dynamics and protocols for the appropriate integration of stepparents in high conflict custody disputes, especially when the stepparent is brought front and center, will be critical for more successful outcomes and management of these cases.

Ann M. Ordway, JD, PhD, is a Counselor Educator and a full-time faculty member at the University of Tennessee Chattanooga. Ann practiced family law in New Jersey for nearly 25 years, first focusing her practice on high conflict family matters, and later on mediation, parenting coordination, and child advocacy. She is a certified stepfamily coach and counselor; the author of several articles, and a frequent presenter on topics related to family dynamics. She is proud matriarch of a successful stepfamily; through which she shares a combined total of 9 children with her husband of 15 years.

Ruth O. Moore, PhD, LPC, is a Counselor Educator and a full-time faculty member at Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas. She has more than 25 years of experience in private practice, and more recently as a School Counselor. Dr. Moore’s work has included evaluation and therapy for abused children and court-involved practice involving complex high conflict families. She is a frequent presenter, and author of several articles related to high conflict divorce, parental alienation, and the impact of challenging family dynamics on children. She resides in Savannah, Georgia.



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Meet Sharon M. Smith, President of the Alberta Chapter

Sharon has been the clinical director and founding partner of Creating Solutions Inc. since 1997. She has a 25 year history in providing therapy to families that has spanned across families identified as at risk by Child Protection Service Agencies, in office voluntary family therapy with intact; as well as, separating and divorcing families, family mediation and working as a Child Specialist in the Collaborative Family Law Practice, teaching family therapy for City University Edmonton Campus, and working with Court Ordered high-conflict post-separation families, including family reintegration therapy in post-separation contact resistant families.

During the last three years, she has served on the Board for the AFCC Alberta Chapter. She launched Edmonton's AFCC Supper Club that includes monthly meetings for AFCC members and interested individuals to learn more about AFCC, to hear professional presentations and network with other professionals. She's looking forward to an exciting year of expanding membership and meeting members' needs through this role.



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VOL. 12 NO. 5
MAY 2017



Meet Deana D. Klein, President of the Missouri Chapter

Deana D. Klein is an attorney in private practice in St Louis, Missouri. She graduated with a J.D. and M.S.W. from St Louis University. Her practice is largely family law focused. She works in many different roles as a parent's attorney, mediator and frequently serves as a Guardian ad Litem. She is also a trained Parenting Coordinator. Deana has been involved in AFCC since she began practicing and attended area conferences and workshops as a law student. She joined the AFCC board in 2014 and is excited to continue bringing the work and mission of AFCC to assist Missouri families involved in the Courts. Deana is married with three small children.



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The Family Court Review 8th Annual Family Law Writing Competition

The Family Court Review (FCR), the interdisciplinary journal of AFCC, published in cooperation with the Center for Children, Families and the Law at Hofstra University School of Law, held its 8th Annual Family Law Writing Competition. There were a total of 18 submissions, from 10 different schools across the country!

The first place winner was Sara Alpert, a 2017 JD candidate from New York Law School with her piece on “The Past and Future State of ‘De Facto Parents’ in New York.” She discusses the need to redefine “parent” after the 2015 *Obergefell v. Hodges* decision. First place received a \$500 cash prize, courtesy of the Center for Children, Families and the Law at Hofstra University.

The second place winner was Abigail Hogland-Shen, a 2017 JD candidate from William and Mary Law School. Her piece “Direct-to-Consumer Genetic Testing, Gamete Donation, and the Law,” discusses the growing phenomenon of direct-to-consumer genetic testing. Second place received a \$250 cash prize. Both winners were picked for publication in the FCR July 2017 issue.