



November 2022  
VOL. 17 No.11

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## AFCC Virtual Conference Returns Next Fall

In response to numerous requests from membership, AFCC will introduce a new virtual conference in November 2023. The online conference will replace the conferences formerly held in odd-numbered years (also referred to as AFCC Regional Conferences).

AFCC President Linda Fidnick said, “We have been trying to find a balance in order to meet the needs of those members who are unable to attend our very popular in-person conferences. We are not satisfied that a hybrid process produces high enough quality for those attending online or in person, so we will focus our efforts on doing both types of conferences in order to provide the greatest access to AFCC programs.”

The dates of the 2023 Virtual Conference will be November 1-3 and 6-7, 2023. It is anticipated that it will be recorded to enable participants the flexibility in attending. A Call for Proposals will be posted in late winter. The Symposium on Child Custody will remain an in-person event during the fall in alternate years, as will the AFCC-AAML Joint Conference on Advanced Issues in Child Custody.

## Helping Parents Release the

## 60th Anniversary Conference

May 31-June 3, 2023  
Los Angeles, California



ASSOCIATION OF FAMILY AND CONCILIATION COURTS  
AFCC

### 60th Anniversary Conference

60 Years of Asking the Difficult Questions

LOS ANGELES  
Westin Bonaventure • May 31-June 3, 2023

The questions may have changed, but the challenges remain. For six decades, AFCC members have addressed the most difficult issues for parents and children experiencing separation and divorce: Custody or non-custody? Joint or sole custody? Mediate or litigate? Children's rights or parents' rights? Best interests or rebuttable presumption? Take a deep dive into the children, not Adversity, high conflict, or abuse? Lawyers or pro se? Inlet oversight? Parental responsibility - what's a court to do? Virtual or in-person? Join us for our 60th Anniversary celebration in the heart of AFCC as we take on new questions and revisit those that just don't seem to go away.

**Conference Topics:**

- Access to Justice
- Cultural Issues in Family Law
- International Family Law Perspectives
- Direct and Cross-examination
- Family Court Reform
- LGBTQ+ Families
- New Ideas for Parent Education Programs
- Innovations in Family Court Services
- Perpetrated Coercive Problems
- Mediation: Choice or How to Fail?
- Parenting Plan Decisions
- Intra-Parent Violence
- What do Judges Need to Know?
- Parenting Coordinator
- Family Law and Mental Health
- Research in Family Law
- Allegations of Child Sexual Abuse
- Family Dispute Resolution Innovations

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## AFCC Chapter Conferences

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

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

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

# Marriage at the Heart of the Divorce

Sherry Cassedy, JD, MA

Although divorce is now part of our cultural fabric, it still comes as disruption, interruption, even eruption, bringing change to every aspect of life. For parents going through this major life transition, a critical though often not explicit part of the process is letting go of the intimate partnership that is ending. In the absence of community or cultural supports or rituals, the family court process often becomes the default forum for managing the complex emotional and psychological fallout of the lost marriage.

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## AFCC Online Training Programs

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

### The Fundamentals of Parenting Coordination

December 5-8, 2022

This comprehensive parenting coordination (PC) training is based on the 2019 AFCC Guidelines for Parenting Coordination and the Recommendations for Comprehensive Training of Parenting Coordinators. This program will include a comprehensive overview of the parenting coordination process, including definition of the role, responsibilities, and function of the parenting coordinator; an overview of family dynamics; specific PC strategies, techniques, and interventions; implications of intimate partner violence; cultural considerations; ethical issues; and use of technology.

Participants will learn about the parenting coordinator's scope of authority, strategies to help parents improve cooperation and communication, how to help clients utilize the process, and how to effectively write recommendations or decisions.

The **training team** includes:

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

[View the program brochure!](#)

[Register Now!](#)

## AFCC Online Training Programs

### The Fundamentals of Parenting Coordination

December 5-8, 2022

The brochure features the AFCC logo at the top, followed by the title 'AFCC's Online Training Program' and the sponsor 'SOBERLINK'. The main title 'The Fundamentals of Parenting Coordination' is prominently displayed, along with the subtitle 'A 16-hour online training program for professionals interested in parenting coordination.' and the dates 'December 5 - December 8, 2022'. Below this is an illustration of a family and the 'Training Team' list: Debra K. Carter, PhD; Robin M. Deutsch, PhD, ABPP; Shely Polak, PhD; and Matthew J. Sullivan, PhD. At the bottom, a mission statement reads: 'AFCC is an interdisciplinary and international association of professionals dedicated to improving the lives of children and families through the resolution of family conflict.'

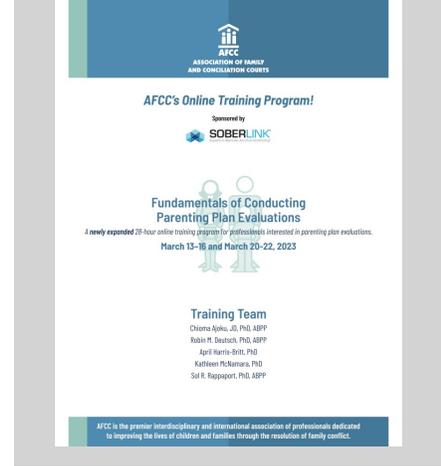
### Advanced Issues for Family Law and Dispute Resolution Professionals

January 17-19, 2023

The brochure features the AFCC logo at the top, followed by the title 'AFCC's Online Training Program' and the sponsor 'SOBERLINK'. The main title 'Advanced Issues for Family Law and Dispute Resolution Professionals' is prominently displayed, along with the subtitle 'A newly expanded 16-hour on-line training program for family law, mental health, and dispute resolution professionals.' and the dates 'January 17 - January 19, 2023'. Below this is a list of 'Topics Include: Child Sexual Abuse; Substance Use/Abuse; Forgiveness Interventions with Parent Child; Contact Problems; Intimate Partner Violence; Interviewing Children; Trusts and Beneficiaries'. The 'Training Team' list includes: Cheri-Joyce, JD, PhD, ABPP; Nancy J. Hirsch, Esq., MA; John A. Moran, Ph.D.; Stephanie Senechal, Ph.D., JD; and Nancy Van Dine, JD. At the bottom, a mission statement reads: 'AFCC is an interdisciplinary and international association of professionals dedicated to improving the lives of children and families through the resolution of family conflict.'

### The Fundamentals of Conducting Parenting Plan Evaluations

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



## Advanced Issues for Family Law and Dispute Resolution Professionals

January 17-19, 2023

This program addresses the challenges often associated with the most intractable family disputes, including intimate partner violence, parent-child contact problems (including parental alienation) and forgiveness interventions, child interviews, child abuse/neglect, and substance use/misuse. The program includes new content, and updates to familiar topics.

Presenters will examine how to address difficult challenges, including: the dynamics of intimate partner violence in parenting time disputes; the continuum for parent-child contact problems; effectively integrating child interviews and the voice of the child; and providing virtual services in a variety of contexts.

### Training Team:

- Chioma Ajoku, JD, PhD, ABPP
- Mindy F. Mitnick, EdM, MA
- John A. Moran, PhD
- Stephanie Tabashneck, PsyD, JD
- Nancy Ver Steegh, JD

[View the Program Brochure](#)

[Register Now](#)

## The Fundamentals of Conducting Parenting Plan Evaluations

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

This program will incorporate a complete overview of the parenting plan evaluation process; including the definition and roles of the parenting plan evaluator; as well as, the specifics of the evaluation process, including interviewing, recordkeeping, use of technology, and best practices for report writing and testifying.

Participants will learn the difference between a forensic role and a clinical role, how to review court orders and determine what information should be obtained, strategies for interviewing adults and children, how to assess co-parenting issues, how to develop and test multiple hypotheses, and how to craft recommendations.

### Training Team:

- Chioma Ajoku, JD, PhD, ABPP
- Robin M. Deutsch, PhD, ABPP
- April Harris-Britt, PhD
- Kathleen McNamara, PhD
- Sol R. Rappaport, PhD, ABPP

[View the program brochure!](#)

[Register Now](#)

# Ask the Experts: Neurodiverse Children and Parents in Family Court

Daniel Pickar, PhD, ABPP and Hon. Michelle Short

Within the family court system, neurodiversity is a much less recognized and far less discussed area of diversity than other traditional issues such as cultural and gender diversity, as well as non-traditional families. There have been recent positive developments in the family law arena regarding neurodiversity in children, as exemplified by the increasing attention given to the unique considerations of children with special needs in families undergoing separation and divorce.

Neurodiversity in parents also presents great challenges in family court, as when a parent has a neurocognitive disability or mental health condition (both of which come under the umbrella of neurodiversity), there is likely to be an automatic negative presumption that parenting capacity will be necessarily negatively impacted by this problem. However, viewing parents and children who have been diagnosed with neurocognitive or psychiatric conditions as *neurodiverse*, instead of *disordered* or *abnormal*, and viewing this diversity through a strengths-based lens, reduces bias in family court. It is thus an important framework for considering such a parent's strengths or assets, their ability to understand and advocate for their child, while looking at the individual needs of the child in addition to any areas of challenge.

[Continue Reading](#)

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## Webinar Corner

### Family Dispute Resolution Research

Marsha Kline Pruett, PhD, ABPP

**Tuesday, December 13, 2022**

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

**Registration will close on December 12, 2022 at 9:00am Eastern Time US/Canada.**



This webinar provides a bird's eye view of FDR today with a focus on newer models of mediation (child focused, child inclusive, community agency-based), online dispute resolution, parenting coordination, and parenting education. For each area, the presenter will summarize the state of the art, including its evidence base. The presenter will not be covering specific studies in detail, but instead, will offer a summary of information and themes for each type of FDR. This is an opportunity to get an introduction or refresher into areas of FDR that are of great interest to AFCC members and all other professionals working at the nexus between family law and family mental health. We will examine what we know, what we don't, and what questions are being asked to further our understanding of how best to use these programmatic forms of intervention.

**Marsha Kline Pruett, PhD, ABPP** is a licensed clinical psychologist and the Maconda Brown O'Connor Professor at Smith College School for Social Work. She is researcher, mediator, and consultant to couples, attorneys, and judges. Dr. Kline Pruett has a national reputation for the development, implementation, and evaluation of preventive interventions in courts and family-focused community agencies. She has written extensively for academic and lay audiences, coauthoring *Your Divorce Advisor* (2001) and *Partnership Parenting* (2009). She is a member of the board of editors of the *Family*

Court Review. She was awarded the AFCC Stanley Cohen Distinguished Research Award in 2004. The California Supporting Fatherhood Involvement (SFI) project is currently a major focus of her intervention and research efforts.



#### **Registration**

Members: \$15

Non-Members: \$50

#### **Certificate of Attendance**

Members: \$15

Non-members: \$20

[Register Now!](#)

## **More Upcoming Webinars!**

### **Child Abuse and Culture (DE&I Series)**

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

January 5, 2023

### **Access to Justice/Family Dispute Resolution Services**

*Jeannie Sato, JD; Loren P. Hildebrandt, JD*

January 11, 2023

### **Screening for Intimate Partner Violence**

*Beth McCormack, JD*

February 8, 2023

### **Coping Abilities Children Need (And How to Ensure They Get Them)**

*Lyn Greenberg, PhD, ABPP*

March 7, 2023

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## **AFCC 60th Anniversary Conference**

### **60 Years of Asking the Difficult Questions**

May 31-June 3, 2023

Westin Bonaventure

Los Angeles, California

For AFCC's 60th Anniversary Conference, we are going back to the birthplace of AFCC, Los Angeles, California. Join as we celebrate 60 years of AFCC.

### **Exhibitor, Sponsor, and Advertise**

If your business caters to the needs of family law professionals, please consider exhibiting with us in Los Angeles! AFCC already has several sponsors and exhibitors lined up for the conference, but we would like to welcome more! Confirming early lets you take advantage of lower prices, secure a better table location, and more.

Read the [exhibitor prospectus](#) for more details and contact [Patrick Sommer](#) to sign up.

### Reserve Your Room Today!

Planning on joining us in Los Angeles? Book your room early at the Westin Bonaventure Los Angeles today. You can make your reservations [online](#) or over the phone by calling 800-937-8461 or 888-627-8520. Do not delay as AFCC room blocks frequently sell out.

### Scholarships

There will be several scholarships available for those in need of assistance attending the 60th Anniversary Conference. The scholarship application and other details will be coming soon.

### Conference Brochure

The 60th Anniversary program brochure is in the works and is expected to be published on AFCC's [website](#) by mid-December. Please check back soon.

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## Donate to the AFCC Scholarship Fund

The AFCC Scholarship Committee provides financial support to help family law professionals from all corners of the world convene at AFCC conferences. These scholarships enable access to some of the best continuing education along with an amazing network of collegial professionals. With your help, the Scholarship Committee can extend opportunities to more professionals.

Wouldn't you want your next opposing counsel, custody evaluator, and/or judicial officer to have the knowledge and appreciation of the research, practice, and approach of the system that you do?

[Donate Today](#)

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## APA Guidelines for Child Custody Evaluations in Family Law Proceedings

The APA recently released their updated guidelines on Child Custody Evaluations in Family Law Proceedings. These Guidelines promote evidence-based and ethically informed practices when it comes to child custody evaluations, disputes over decision making, and parenting time.

[Read the Guidelines](#)

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### AFCC eNEWS

The *AFCC eNEWS* is the monthly e-newsletter of the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts. The *eNEWS* provides up-to-date information for professionals including practice tips, international news, and the latest initiatives in family law and conflict resolution. The *AFCC eNEWS* is provided at no charge to you; anyone can subscribe. [Subscribe here](#).

*AFCC members are free to share eNEWS content.*

#### EDITOR:

[Ann Ordway, JD, PhD](#)



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## Top Ten Tips for Helping Parents Release the Marriage at the Heart of the Divorce

Sherry Cassedy, JD, MA

Although divorce is now part of our cultural fabric, it still comes as disruption, interruption, even eruption, bringing change to every aspect of life. For parents going through this major life transition, a critical though often not explicit, part of the process is letting go of the intimate partnership that is ending. In the absence of community or cultural supports or rituals, the family court process often becomes the default forum for managing the complex emotional and psychological fallout of the lost marriage.

As family court professionals, we need to support clients to release the lost intimate partnership and begin to envision a new configuration of healthy coparenting, which will endure for better or for worse until death do, they part. Here are ten ways that we can help our clients to let go and move forward.

1. **Emotional Intelligence.** From loss and grief to anger and resentment, to relief, ambivalence, guilt, or disorientation, separating parents experience intense emotions. Acknowledge and affirm these natural emotions and the importance of working them through so they don't become entrenched or hardened obstacles to future coparenting.
2. **The Gift of Time.** Accept the client where they are without judgment and give them time to acclimate to the new reality. Some clients may be in shock, denial, or strong resistance to the separation. Others may be ambivalent with contradictory feelings that paralyze them in moving forward. Still others may be anxious to move forward quickly without looking back. And rarely are both parties in the same phase of letting go, creating additional conflict about pacing. Moving more slowly at the outset and allowing each party to adjust may lead to more constructive progress in the long run.

3. **Rear-View Reflection.** Encourage the client to appreciate the marriage for what it was. Often the story of the marriage is rewritten at the time of separation to blame and denigrate the partner and devalue the relationship. Although this makes it easier to let go, negative distortion of the marriage does not ultimately serve the client or the future coparenting relationship. Honest reflection on the relationship -- what was good, what was difficult, what each contributed -- will help not only in releasing the former relationship, but in building a new one.
4. **Divorce Navigation System.** Take the larger view and chart a course for the client through the divorce transition. Educate the client on the elements of a healthy coparenting relationship, the difference from intimate partnership, and the benefits for the children of a functionally restructured family system.
5. **Children's Best Interests.** Keep children as the focal point and motivation for positive movement. Holding an awareness that the child is "one-half" the other coparent can soften the tendency to devalue and denigrate the former spouse.
6. **Future Vision.** Affirm positive visions of future family life and relationships. Share models of coparenting from cooperative exchanges to more parallel or disengaged interactions for managing conflicted coparenting. Help the client begin to imagine and envision the flow of coparenting, new interactions, and children's healthy connections to both parents.
7. **Rites of Passage.** Mark the transition. Ritual is a way of acknowledging and effectuating life transitions. Often the only divorce ritual families have is through the court process. Adversarial interactions tend to entrench interparental conflict. Conduct the process with courtesy and respect. Create a legal ritual such as a formal signing or resolution session with the professionals, providing words of encouragement, sending forth, and closure. We can also encourage our clients to create their own simple rituals whether individually or as coparents, such as a letter to extended family and friends stating their intention for the future, a joint sit-down with the children to share their ongoing love for and commitment to the children, a physical representation of the new family structure.
8. **Words of Wisdom.** We are just beginning to formulate language for a positive post-divorce family. Create and model positive language using "former spouse" or "coparent" rather than "ex" or "new family," "Mom's house, Dad's house," "shared parenting" rather than "broken family" or "child custody." Notice the negative and contentious language as it arises and help expand the new vocabulary.
9. **Resources for the Road.** Establish ongoing coparenting supports for the client or family to return to when they encounter bumps along the way. Healthy coparenting will be difficult at times and clients can regress to contentious interactions. Preparing parents for these future challenges with resources to manage them will help keep them on a positive track.

10. **Celebrate Good Times.** Acknowledge and celebrate markers of progress for the new family. Children's events are a natural opportunity for celebration of successful coparenting. When both parents can be present for the big game, the musical performance, graduation, and eventually perhaps a wedding, the child is supported and allowed to be the center of their own celebration. Coparents should acknowledge and congratulate themselves and one another in these shared celebrations as the fruit of their joint efforts.

**Sherry Cassedy, JD, MA**, is a family law attorney, mediator, marriage and relationships educator, and best-selling author of the recently published "Marriage Unveiled: The Promise, Passion, and Pitfalls of Imperfectly Ever After (River Grove Books). Sherry is a long-time member of AFCC and much longer-time partner of AFCC past-president, Dr. Matt Sullivan. Learn more at [www.marriage-unveiled.org](http://www.marriage-unveiled.org).





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## Ask the Experts: Neurodiverse Children and Parents in Family Court

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Within the family court system, neurodiversity is a much less recognized and far less discussed area of diversity than other traditional issues such as cultural and gender diversity, as well as non-traditional families. There have been recent positive developments in the family law arena regarding neurodiversity in children, as exemplified by the increasing attention given to the unique considerations of children with special needs in families undergoing separation and divorce.

Neurodiversity in parents also presents great challenges in family court, as when a parent has a neurocognitive disability or mental health condition (both of which come under the umbrella of neurodiversity), there is likely to be an automatic negative presumption that parenting capacity will be necessarily negatively impacted by this problem. However, viewing parents and children who have been diagnosed with neurocognitive or psychiatric conditions as *neurodiverse*, instead of *disordered* or *abnormal*, and viewing this diversity through a strengths-based lens, reduces bias in family court. It is thus an important framework for considering such a parent's strengths or assets, their ability to understand and advocate for their child, while looking at the individual needs of the child in addition to any areas of challenge.

We will highlight some key issues for family law professionals to consider with both neurodiverse children and adults.

### Considerations with Neurodiverse Children

1. **Parenting Plan Considerations:** Most common developmentally based parenting plan arrangements recommended to the court have been developed with the neurotypical child in mind. However, many neurodiverse children, such as those who have intellectual impairment or developmental delays, may be

functioning below their chronological age, so a plan based upon developmental milestones for that age group may not be optimal for such children.

2. **Is Shared Physical Custody Best for the Neurodiverse Child?:** Presently, the laws in many states presume that a shared physical custody schedule is in the best interest of children. This, in turn, has created a bias in some courts toward an equally shared parenting plan arrangement when making custody orders. However, in the case of a highly rigid ASD child with a high degree of symptom severity, such a child may do best with consistency in routine and home-setting, while being far less flexible than the neurotypical child in going back and forth between homes. School week transitions may also be especially difficult for children with Attention- Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Therefore, with some neurodiverse children, the need for consistency of routine and stability of home environments may supersede a parenting time schedule that involves equal time with both parents. As a cautionary note, however, some neurodiverse children may still do well with equally shared parenting plan arrangements, but the neurodiverse child with a higher level of symptom severity will likely have the most difficulty with such arrangements. It is important to look to the individual child's needs, and not make presumptions based on diagnosis.
3. **The Neurodiverse Child and Joint Decision-Making/Joint Legal Custody:** Many states also presume that joint legal custody is best for a child. However, when there are parental disputes about a child's needs, diagnosis, treatment, or educational plan or accommodations, a shared legal custody order is not always in the neurodiverse child's best interest. Again, the court, parents and evaluators must look to the specific needs of a child to see if joint legal custody best serves the child, and if not, how that can be addressed while providing for the child's needs and ensuring that both parents are involved in decision making.
4. **Use a Risk Assessment Model for Developing Parenting Plans for Neurodiverse Children:** In family court cases, a risk assessment model specifically designed for use with neurodiverse children should examine a range of risk and protective factors for neurodiverse children, based upon their specific neurodiversity and level of severity. Such a model should examine safety issues that may be involved for the neurodiverse child, parenting skills (including whether a parent has "acceptance" or "denial" about their child's diagnosis), ability of each parent to be an assertive advocate for needed educational, medical, and therapeutic services, as well as the ability of the parents to cooperatively coparent a high-risk child. For example, if a parent is "in denial" that they have an ASD or ADHD child, that parent will not be an assertive advocate in getting the best educational, medical, and therapeutic services for their child. Therefore, such a child being mostly in the custody of the parent who accepts the diagnosis may be in the child's best interests. Also, the parent who fully understands and accepts the neurodiversity of their child, may need to have legal decision-making authority. (Note: One such risk assessment model was

developed by Pickar and Kaufman (2015), *Family Court Review*, Vol. 53, 113-133).

5. **Listening to the Voice of the Neurodiverse Child:** Another important concept in family law decision-making is the idea of “listening to the voice of the child.” A challenge, though, is that with neurodiverse children who suffer from language or intellectual impairment, such children will have a harder time having their voice be heard regarding the legal decisions that impact them. However, such a child’s “voice” is no less important. Therefore, it is incumbent for court-involved mental health professionals, attorneys and judges who work with these children, to understand that many neurodiverse children express their “voice” in a variety of ways, not only through verbal communication. For mental health professionals, effective listening involves “looking and observing” these children with each parent, their degree of comfort with each parent, and the parent’s differential emotional attunement to their child’s needs. With neurodiverse children, family law professionals must also rely on the collective wisdom from pediatric medicine and child psychiatry and or therapists regarding the developmental needs, risk factors, and protective factors of such children, and apply this knowledge to the post-divorce context for the neurodiverse child.

### **Considerations with Neurodiverse Adults**

**Implicit Bias in Legal Decision-Making:** There have been numerous research studies showing that implicit biases (i.e., biases that occur automatically, or unintentionally) can affect legal outcomes in a variety of areas, such as employment, criminal and personal injury law. With neurodiverse parents in family court, implicit bias can also negatively impact legal decision-making in such cases. Unfortunately, the legal rights of many parents may be curtailed by disclosing a history of either neurocognitive or mental health challenges. For example, with a neurodiverse parent on the spectrum, there may be an automatic presumption that parenting capacity will be uniformly negatively impacted by their condition, or they may be viewed as a “not competent” parent. Such biases are problematic and should be challenged.

1. **Importance of a Neurodiversity Framework:** The *neurodiversity* framework, as opposed to viewing individuals as abnormal or disordered, is an important model for considering such an individuals’ strengths or assets, in addition to areas of challenge. Such a neurodiversity framework, where parents are viewed for both of their strengths and weaknesses, can also reduce implicit bias in family court.
2. **Negative Presumptions About Neurodiverse Parents:** Family court professionals must be educated to not presume that a parent who is neurologically different or has a mental health condition, cannot be a competent parent. Each parent in family court must be considered uniquely for their parenting strengths and weaknesses, irrespective of their neurodiverse or mental health condition. A parent on the spectrum is often a very effective parent, but

perhaps with some parenting challenges. While an ASD parent **may** have challenges with empathy and relational reciprocity, if they have an ASD child, such a parent may have a keen emotional attunement to their child on the spectrum, stemming from their own experience growing up with ASD. While a parent with ADHD may have challenges with parenting their own child with ADHD, they may have an elevated energy level for their child's high activity level. Such a parent with ADHD may also have a special attunement to the social challenges their child with ADHD might face, due to impulsivity. A neurodiverse parent is likely to bring other skills, talents, and unique approaches to both neurodiverse and neurotypical children.

3. **Is the Neurodiverse Parent Seeking Support?:** The most important issue for a neurodiverse parent with challenges arising from their neurodiversity status, is whether they are receiving support and accessing resources during times of heightened stress. As the saying goes, "while rain may be a negative stressor, it is less so for the person who has an umbrella."
4. **Neurodiverse Parents and their Counsel:** It is important for neurodiverse parents who are involved in child custody litigation, when seeking out an attorney, to seek counsel with knowledge about their neurodiverse condition. This will assist in reducing bias by making sure that the neurodiverse parent's many strengths are presented in court and any challenges can be addressed. A competent family law attorney with neurodiversity knowledge can also assist in combatting the ex-spouse who may try to use a neurodiverse parent's condition against them, by portraying their ex-spouse as an incompetent parent.
5. **Neurodiverse Individuals are Heterogeneous:** When working with any family where neurodiversity is present, whether in a parent or child, it is key that family court professionals remember that neurodiverse individuals are heterogeneous. As brilliantly stated by Dr. Stephen Shore related to autism, "If you've met one individual with autism, you've met one individual with autism." The same is true for all areas of neurodiversity. If you have met one neurodiverse person, you have met one neurodiverse person. As Dr. Temple Grandin wisely and compassionately offered, "Different, not less."

**Daniel B. Pickar, PhD, ABPP** is board-certified psychologist who conducts child custody evaluations, consultation to family law attorneys, and psycho-educational evaluations of children. He has published numerous journal articles and book chapters in the areas of child custody evaluation, mediation, and children with special needs in divorce. His last publication, "Considerations Regarding Child and Parent Neurodiversity in Family Court" was published in the *Family Court Review* (2022, Vol. 60, 492-506). He regularly presents workshops at state and national AFCC



and AAML conferences and serves on the Board of Directors of AFCC and the Editorial Board of the Family Court Review. In 2019, Dr. Pickar was awarded the Judge Rex Sater Award for “Excellence in Family Law” by the Sonoma County Bar Association.

**Honorable Michelle Short** was appointed to the Los Angeles Superior Court as Judge in 2018. Prior to appointment, she was elected Superior Court Commissioner in 2015. From appointment to 2021, Judge Short heard family law matters. Prior to taking the bench, her practice was exclusively Family Law. She was regularly appointed as minor’s counsel for both neurotypical and neurodiverse families. She also worked with parties in complicated and highly contested custody and visitation issues, as well as litigated the issues of property, child support and spousal support. Throughout her tenure as a judge and commissioner, Judge Short has presented at conferences and judicial education on the issues of Taking Testimony from Children, Minor’s Counsel, Neurodiversity in the Courtroom, and Special Education. Most recently, Judge Short presented at the Stanford University Neurodiversity Summit. Judge Short also has a Master of Science degree in Educational Psychology.

