



Fall Newsletter

OCTOBER 8, 2018

VOLUME 2018, NUMBER 2

MA AFCC

President:
Patricia Brady,
LMFT, LMHC

Chapter
Administrator:
Rebecca Ryan

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Web!

<http://www.maafcc.org>

WE HAVE A REQUEST TO ALL WHO RECEIVE THIS NEWSLETTER

WOULD YOU BE KIND ENOUGH TO LOG INTO THE [AFCC WEBSITE](#) AND TO MAKE SURE THAT YOUR PROFILE IS UP TO DATE? WE HEARD FROM SEVERAL MEMBERS THAT THEY DID NOT RECEIVE THE FIRST EDITION OF THE NEWSLETTER FROM US; INSTEAD THEY SAW IT ON EITHER THE MA AFCC OR MAGAL LIST SERVE! OTHERS HAVE TOLD US THAT THEY'VE NOT RECEIVED RENEWAL NOTICES FROM NATIONAL. WE WANT TO ENSURE THAT WE HAVE UP TO DATE CONTACT INFORMATION FOR EACH MEMBER. AND WHILE YOU'RE AT IT, YOU MAY ALSO WANT TO ADD YOUR NAME TO THE [MEMBER DIRECTORY](#) – THIS IS A MA CHAPTER WEBSITE WHERE MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND POTENTIAL CLIENTS CAN LOOK TO FIND

PROFESSIONALS

THANK YOU!
The Board

President's Message

Greetings to All,

I hope that your summers were pleasant and restful. As a Board, we are excited to enter the Fall with some fabulous plans. We are making great progress with the Substance Abuse Guide, and hope to have a final production in early 2019. The Board has welcomed new members, Lisa Gallagher, Patricia West, Emmanuel Doctor, Steve Burns, and Kate Potter. Kate Potter has recently taken on the role as Treasurer, and we are quite grateful. At the same time, we wish Alisa Hacker well on her new position.

The Fall and Winter has much to offer and we hope you can join us. We look forward to a Member Mingle/Toy Drive in December, which will provide a nice opportunity to socialize with colleagues. In January, the Massachusetts Chapter of AFCC will sponsor a symposium with Chief Justice Paula Carey and Dr. Peggy Ward offering their expertise.

We hope you will join us for the events and opportunities we have planned, and invite you to join us at a Board meeting, as we welcome ideas to enhance the Mass Chapter's mission.

Please join me and the entire Board in wishing our very own Harry Somers all the best, as he takes on his battle with cancer, with tremendous courage, hopefulness, and strength. Harry has given us all so much and I am so grateful to have the opportunity to work with him. All the best to you, my friend, and on behalf of the Board of Directors and the entire membership, we are right there with you and truly just a phone call away.

Enjoy this second edition of our Newsletter and mark your calendar for the events we have planned.

Warm Regards,

Pat

Welcome New and Renewing Members!

Hon. Joan Armstrong, Steve Nissenbaum, Jeff Soilson, Kate Potter Barbara Drury, Jennifer Mott, Eric Schutzbank, Deborah Roth-Howe, Amy Koenig, John Baker, Amy Horan, Nicole Norkevivius, Claire Houston, John Landers, Julia Solenberger, Patricia Levesh, Barbara Mason, Linda Minkoff, Susan Wenzel-Thayer, Liana Shelby, Holly Lem, Graham Garwood, Jenifer Zajic, Jacquelyn Kelley, Janet Suleski, Keith McNally, Abbigail Shirk, Sandra Boulay, Lyn Erickson. Pam Deck, Lauren Persing, and Brashimi Reese, Ellen Burlinsky, Marlene Shiner, Gayle Stone-Turesky, Katherine Young

Member Spotlight on Lesley Goldsmith, JD, JCM

By Donna Feinberg, LICSW
Chief Probation Officer

Lesley Goldsmith is the Judicial Case Manager at the Bristol Probate and Family Court. Prior to this she was an Assistant Judicial Case Manager at the Norfolk Probate and Family Court and the Suffolk Probate and Family Court. She has had 20+ years working for the Trial Court working her way up through the Probate and Family Court, starting as a law clerk. Of her new position, she stated, "it was the next natural progression in my career."

Lesley has stated that throughout her career, she has had the benefit of working with great judges, and colleagues, "many of them started as Assistant Judicial Case Managers and were able to progress in field." She has had many great people who assisted and supported her along the way to becoming Judicial Case Manager.

Things you may not know about Lesley is that for her Bucket List, she hopes to be able to go on an African Safari with daughter. She also hopes for good health in retirement. In her younger days, Lesley has traveled overland, from London to Katmandu.

When asked what she thought distinguished her from her colleagues, she felt, "I am not distinguishable from my colleagues, I am part of a team who works in and for the court. I consider myself lucky to be part of that team that makes it all work, oh and my English accent!" For those of us who know Lesley, her work ethic, patience, and dedication to her career certainly make her distinguishable. When asked what she would have done if she had not made

the Trial Court her home, she stated, “I started as a social worker in residential treatment, both in England and in the states. I would have chosen something in the helping field and probably would have continued in a career in helping families. Maybe this is not my last career.”

Lesley’s motto in life has been, “Pick yourself up, dust yourself off and go by a new pair of shoes.”

If she had superpowers, her power would be, “Stop my child from growing up so quickly!” When asked what word she would use to describe herself she stated, “Resilient.” Others would describe her as strong. I would describe her as a great mother, hard worker, thoughtful, caring and motivated. I am grateful to have her as my friend and my colleague.

Officers, Board Members, and Committee Chairs

Officers:

Patricia Brady, President

Jennifer Clapp, President-Elect

Donna Feinberg Rachwal, Immediate Past President

Kelly A. Flynn Zawistowski, Secretary

Katherine Potter, Treasurer

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Emmanuel Dockter

Lisa Gallagher

Laura E. Gibbs

Claudette-Jean Girard

Alisa Hacker

Amy Koenig

Mira Z. Levitt

Patricia Loughman-West

Tony Pelusi

Katherine Potter

Claudette B. Pierre

Vicki L. Shemin

Sylvia Sirignano

Harry Somers

Committees:

Membership – Chair: Stephen Burns ; Tony Pelusi

Legislative/Judicial - Co-Chairs: Alisa Hacker and Patricia Brady ; Emmanuel Dockter

Annual Conference – Chair: Mira Z. Levitt; Lisa Gallagher , Vicki L. Shemin , Donna Feinberg Rachwal, Alex Jones, Jessica Greenwald O'Brien, Jonathan Fields, David Medoff, Lesley Goldsmith, and Bob Zibbell

Symposium – Co-chairs: Donna Feinberg Rachwal, Alisa Hacker, Katherine Potter, Jennifer Clapp, Vicki L. Shemin

Round Table – Chair: Kelly A. Flynn Zawistowski , Claudette-Jean Girard, Amy Koenig

Newsletter – Chair: Tony Pelusi ; Vicki L. Shemin

Nominating - Chair; - [Donna Feinberg Rachwal](#) ; [Patricia Brady](#), [Jennifer Clapp](#)
Substance Abuse – [Patricia Brady](#), [Donna Feinberg Rachwal](#), [Stephanie Tabashneck](#), [Harry Somers](#)

Members, if you are interested in joining one of these committees, please contact one of the chairs to learn more and let us know. All are welcome!

Committee Reports

Membership

The MA chapter has been fortunate to maintain a steady membership base of almost 200 for the past few years. And now we are feeling a strong desire for growth of our chapter so we may increase the positive influence it has on family law practice in the Commonwealth. National actually has a chapter growth challenge that nets the winning chapter \$2,500.00.

So, on Tuesday, December 4, 2018 from 5:00pm – 8:00pm we are hosting a Member Mingle & Toy Drive at [Bertucci's in Waltham, MA](#). There is NO CHARGE TO ATTEND...and... price of admission is that you bring one non-member and a new, unwrapped toy (as part of our chapter donation to children in DCF custody) to the event. There will be plenty of appetizers and a cash bar. This is sure to be a casual, comfortable place for us to gather and enhance all that MA AFCC has to offer. Please mark your calendar, more details to follow. Will you join us?

Legislative/Judicial

We are pleased and honored to announce that Chief Justice John D. Casey has agreed to visit us at a chapter event this spring. Stay tuned for details.

Annual Conference

The Conference Committee is hard at work planning for our annual conference, to be next held on Friday, March 29, 2019 at Regis College in Weston. Our keynote speaker will be Michael Saini, PhD, Associate Professor of Law and Social work at University of Toronto. The focus of the conference is on the issue of removal, including topics as new case law and the role of technology in considering the impact of parent-child distance.

PLEASE MARK YOUR CALENDAR TODAY!!

Symposium

Our next Symposium is scheduled for 2:00pm on Wednesday January 16, 2019 at the College of the Holy Cross, Worcester, MA. The committee is pleased to announce that Chief Justice Paula Carey and Peggy Ward have agree to present an updated and revised version of the program that Peggy and the Chief presented at the 55th Annual AFCC Conference in DC titled: "ACE's, Trauma and Resiliency." We will be seeking accreditation for CEU's for GAL's and PC's.

PLEASE MARK YOU CALENDAR...MORE DETAILS TO FOLLOW.

Round Table

Family law litigation comes with its own set of challenges. One of those challenges is working with individuals who are not at their best. Another more complex challenge is when an individual has a diagnosed or undiagnosed mental health disorder that is treated or untreated. A Round Table is planned next spring that will examine this topic from a multi-disciplinary perspective. If you have not attended one, these Round Tables are a valuable source of information and a collaborative approach to learning. Details to follow.

Substance Abuse Guide

The committee is hard at work and just wrapping up the information gathering phase; now shifting into the development part of this project. We expect to publish a Bench Guide Book early next year.

Things you might want to know:

In August President Elect, Jenny Clapp, opened [Clapp Family Law LLC](#) in Wellesley. After 13 years of rewarding practice with Grindle Robinson, Jenny “took the leap”. We know that Jenny is a trusted advisor to her clients and will continue offering them her first rate service.

And speaking of transitions board member [Steve Burns](#) has recently ‘hung his shingle’ in Hopkinton after 5 wonderful years working with Christine Anthony. Steve brings a wealth of experience, enduring patience, and the utmost of professionalism to the matters for which he is responsible.

While we love to spread good wishes, we also have a request. Will you please send some positive vibrations along to our friend Harry Somers? Harry is an active board member, long time national and chapter member. He has and continues to be a generous contributor to so so many others. Recently, we learned that Harry was recently diagnosed with a re-occurrence of cancer. As is his way Harry is facing this challenge with positivity, strength, and tremendous grace. The current plan is for surgery in October. And while he’s going to be wrapping up his GAL practice, he is already planning more ways he can help our chapter grow. Thank you, Harry, and may you be well.

We also want to extend sincere thanks to Alisa Hacker for serving as our Treasurer until a recent professional development. It is with regret that the board accepted Alisa’s resignation. Fortunately, Alisa will remain active in our chapter as a member of several committees. And the “rest of the story” is....after 11 years at Sugarman, Rogers, Barshak & Cohen, P.C. Alisa accepted a partnership offer from [Day Pitney LLP](#) where she is transitioning her practice. Alisa, we hope the folks at Day Pitney quickly realize how fortunate they are to have someone as experienced and wise as you on their team.

And last, but certainly not least, we all owe special appreciation to Kate Potter who stepped forward to fill the void left by Alisa's departure and complete the term as our Treasurer. Thank you, Kate!

Board Meetings and locations

Board meetings are generally scheduled for the first Tuesday of each month, except July, at 5:30PM in the offices of Gibbs & Heinle LLP, 57 River Street, Suite 204, Wellesley, MA 02481. Presently we plan to meet on: November 6, 2018; December 4, 2018 (at the Member Mingle); January 8, 2019; February 5, 2019; March 5, 2019; March 29, 2019 (MA Chapter Annual Conference); April 2, 2019; May 7, 2019; and, June 4, 2019

All members are invited to attend and participate in discussions, however, voting privileges are reserved for board members only. Non-Board members are requested to email Admin to let us know that you plan to join us at a meeting.

Meet the Chief

As you know, we were fortunate to learn that Chief Justice Paula Carey appointed Judge John Casey as Chief of the Probate and Family Court effective July, 2018. At the installation, Chief Casey's colleague Judge Susan Jacobs delivered some heartwarming comments that we felt moved to share with you. They speak loudly of the man who inhabits the role and the passion he will undoubtedly bring to this office.

Thank you both!

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It's such a pleasure to be here today and to see so many colleagues and friends. And it's truly an honor to be speaking at the swearing in ceremony of a dear friend.

I've known Chief Justice Casey for ages. He was welcoming and kind when I was a young lawyer starting out in Attleboro. He always had good advice for me. I remember one afternoon I barged into the cozy kitchen restaurant for lunch feeling totally defeated and despondent. I sat at the lunch counter next to Chief Casey (at that time just plain John) and began grumbling about all the people who done me wrong that day- judges, other lawyers, other drivers, my client, etc. Chief Justice Casey listened patiently and put some of his American Chop Suey on my plate. And then, he said kindly, "I have days like that too. They're hard. But then I say to myself, 'are all the other drivers really idiots? Is it really possible that everyone I've run into today is a jerk? Or does it maybe have something to do with me?'

So, I thought about it for a moment and realized that at least some the bad luck plaguing me that day was about me, and not all the other human beings I'd encountered. I realized that perhaps I needed to take a breath and change

my attitude. I can't tell you how many times that advice has helped me turn my day around. And it's so typical of Chief Justice Casey. Listening, acknowledging that he struggles too, and then helping the person turn things around.

I felt incredibly lucky to have Chief Justice Casey as my first, first Justice. There have been others, also beloved, but he was my first. And I give him tremendous credit for anything about my judging that is good and positive. I knew, from our long history, that he would be a valuable resource for me. Thankfully, very early on he taught me that it's a mortal sin to microwave fish in the workplace.

Many days this job is just too hard, too demanding. Knowing that you have a friend and colleague like Chief Justice Casey is a tremendous comfort. He was never too busy for me. He always had good advice for me. He was exactly as he was when we were both lawyers in Attleboro and when I appeared in front of him in Norfolk County Probate & Family Court: a thoughtful, kind, smart man, with horrible penmanship.

A number of months ago someone at the courthouse asked me who was the first Massachusetts Probate and Family Court judge. I had no idea, so I asked Professor Google. Professor Google sent me to an article written in 1895 by Henry Burt Montague of Cornell Law School titled "The Origin, History, and Jurisdiction of the Probate Courts in Massachusetts." The article starts with the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1628. As I read it, it gave me great comfort to think about our court's long history of handling so many of the same issues that we confront today; that its essentially an unbroken chain reaching back almost 400 years. Mr. Montague ends his article by noting that our Court is designed to promote "the prompt and economical disposition of matters, some of which at one time or another, concern every family and estate in the Commonwealth." He writes, "Thus the probate court, as one branch of the judiciary system, realizes in a high degree the ideal set forth in the preamble to the Massachusetts Constitution, which declares "for impartial interpretation and faithful execution of the laws, that every man may, at all times find his security in them." As I watch the chaos and violence that plagues our world, I'm heartened by the fact that people come into our court to resolve their disputes. People appear in our courts to use words, not violence, to resolve disputes. In many parts of the world, people don't have a courthouse where they can go for help. But here, rich or poor, people come into our courtrooms and by and large they live with the results of our decisions. They expect us to strive to uphold the ideal Mr. Montague wrote about, and that John Adams wrote about. I am inspired by the dedication, courage, hard word and passion my colleagues bring to fulfilling this ideal. It's because of the work that we do, the Court community and members of the bar, that our Court and its ideals endure.

Many things about being a judge have surprised me. One of the things that surprised me is the depth of the love that members of our Court community have for our Court. When Judge Smola and I met with Chief Justice Carey after our nomination, and also when we met with Judge Ordonez at the courthouse in Canton, I was struck by how much they loved our Court. Working with Chief Justice Casey, I see the love and passion he has for our Court and the way the welfare of our Court and its judges motivates him. He is the next in a long and distinguished line of Chief Justices and he will lead us into the future, guided by his love for our Court and the work that we do. I am so proud of him and wish him well.

Judge Susan Jacobs

News from the Probate and Family Court Greetings from Chief Justice D. Casey

On July 16th, I was honored to become the Chief Justice of the Probate and Family Court, succeeding the Hon. Angela M. Ordoñez. I know Chief Justice Ordoñez strongly supported the work of the Massachusetts chapter of the AFCC, and was very appreciative of the many ways your members contribute to the Probate and Family Court. I hope to continue that strong working relationship.

We are entering an exciting phase for the administration of the Probate and Family Court. We are beginning to implement a new initiative, based on a report from the 2025 Transition Leadership Team, of which I was a member. This initiative includes changes to the management structure of the divisions of the Probate and Family Court, and also recommendations for changes to case management. The changes to the management structure are designed to facilitate a more collaborative approach to court management. The changes to case management are designed to encourage early intervention and triage for the domestic relations cases in the Probate and Family Court.

At the same time as we embark on those changes we continue to work on other major projects:

- Planning for the new Lowell courthouse, which will be a second location for the Middlesex Probate and Family Court
- Expansion of the Fiduciary Litigation Session to a second location
- Electronic interface with the Department of Revenue for all child support cases
- Remote access to case information and in some instances case images, for attorneys through the Attorney Portal
- Making Probation an integral part of our early case screening/management efforts.
- Encouraging the use of ADR at all phases of the proceedings but with an emphasis on early intervention.

Thank you for your continued support of the work of the Probate and Family Court.

John Casey
Chief Justice
Probate and Family Court Department

Mentor Opportunities

If you are new to the practice, and/or our association and would like a mentor or if you are more experienced and would like to share your wisdom let us know. We welcome the opportunity to play matchmaker! Please let [Tony Pelusi](#) know of your interest.

Parenting Coordination Update

As part of the 2017 MA AFCC Winter Symposium the committee (Kelly Flynn Zawistkowski, Vicki Shemin, and Tony Pelusi) collaborated with Denise Fitzgerald of the Chief's Office to draft a "Bench Card" for use by judges, practitioners, and members of the public. It provides a step by step guide to the appointment process established by Standing Order 1 – 17. It was distributed as one of the handouts at the winter symposium and we are pleased to note that *every judge on the Probate and Family Court* has now received a copy. Now, all members of the public and anyone who was unable to attend the conference can get a copy. Just visit [MA AFCC](#) where a copy can be downloaded for your use and distribution.

Parenting Coordination Recertification

Here is the most up to date information from the court:

If you are currently on the Category V list and would like to remain on the list for 2019 you must participate in yearly mandatory CLE as set forth by the Administrative Office of the Probate and Family Court.

In order to remain on the Category V list, you must complete a minimum of six (6) hours of training relevant to acting as a Parenting Coordinator in the Probate and Family Court Department annually.

ANY relevant training attended since January 1, 2018 is acceptable.

Documents to be submitted to the Probate and Family Court Administrative Office by December 15, 2018:

If you attend a program, you must obtain and forward a Certificate of Attendance, as well as provide a brief description of the training.

If you view a recorded webcast, you probably have not received a Certificate of Attendance. Instead, we ask that you send us a description of the program and proof of purchase, as well as an affidavit stating that in addition to purchasing the webcast, you also viewed the webcast.

The completed Certificate of Attendance or proof of purchase and affidavit must be submitted to the Administrative Office **by December 15, 2018** or your name will no longer appear on the court-generated Category V list.

All documentation of compliance with this Continuing Legal Education requirement may be sent by facsimile (617-788-8995), by US mail to the Probate and Family Court Administrative Office at the above address, or by *e-mail* to jocelynne.welsh@jud.state.ma.us.

Here is a link to the most up to date list of approved courses:

<https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2018/09/19/Category%20V%20Program%20Chart%20September%202018%2C%202019.pdf>

GAL Recertification

And this is the latest from the court on Category E & F:

If you are currently on the Category E and/or F list and would like to remain on the list for 2019, you must participate in yearly mandatory CLE as set forth by the Administrative Office of the Probate and Family Court.

To remain on the Category E and/or F list, you must complete (or have completed) a minimum of three and a half (3.5) hours of training relevant to guardian ad litem practice and procedure.

ANY relevant training attended since January 1, 2018 is acceptable.

Documents to submit to the Probate and Family Court Administrative Office by December 15, 2018:

If you attend a program, you must obtain and forward a Certificate of Attendance, as well as provide a brief description of the training.

If you view a recorded webcast, you probably have not received a Certificate of Attendance. Instead, we ask that you send a description of the program and proof of purchase, as well as an affidavit stating that in addition to purchasing the webcast, you also viewed the webcast.

The completed Certificate of Attendance or proof of purchase and affidavit must be submitted to the Administrative Office by December 15, 2018 or your name will no longer appear on the court-generated Category E and/or F list.

PLEASE NOTE that attendance at the Intimate Partner Abuse and Family Violence Dynamics training is REQUIRED of all Category E and/or Category F list members.

If you have NOT yet completed BOTH the on-line segment and the in-person segment of this training (at ANY time), please contact Attorney Jocelynne Deborah Welsh ([iocelvnne.welsh\(5\),jud.state.ma.us](mailto:iocelvnne.welsh(5),jud.state.ma.us)) immediately to sign up.

Completion of this Domestic Violence course in 2018 will meet the mandatory requirement referenced above, IF you have NOT done so previously in conjunction with the training each current list member attended. This course has not changed and must be attended only once until further notice.

Each list member must also complete and submit the attached form indicating acceptance of an appointment to a state-pay case.

The Probate and Family Court is seeking experienced Category E and Category F GALs to serve as mentors for new Category E and Category F GALs, to assist them relative to their first court appointment.

No fee may be charged for mentoring a new list member for his or her first appointment.

Each list member interested in assisting should complete and submit the form indicating availability to serve as a mentor for the first appointment of a new list member. If you are interested, please complete the attached form and return it to Jocelyne D. Welsh, Administrative Attorney, Probate and Family Court Department, John Adams Courthouse, One Pemberton Square, Mezzanine, Boston 02108 or by e-mail: iocelyime.welsh@iud.state.ma.us by October 31, 2018.

Please send this form even if you have done so in the past so we can update our list.

All documentation (Continuing Legal Education compliance, acceptance of a state-pay case, and interest in serving as a mentor) may be sent by facsimile (617-788-8995), by US mail to the Probate and Family Court Administrative Office at the above address, or by e-mail to jocelynne.welsh@jud.state.ma.us.

Please remember that the Continuing Legal Education Requirement for Category E and Category F list members is separate and distinct from the continuing education requirements for any other fee generating appointment category.

List Serve

Got one of those nettlesome questions that you'd like a quick answer to? Need a case reference or a pointer to the most recent research? Want a template for a motion or pleading?

There is no need for anyone in our community to recreate the wheel or struggle alone. When you join MA AFCC you become a member of an association of like-minded skilled professionals who value sharing with and supporting others. Our list serve is a great place to connect with and draw upon the collective wisdom of our members.

So, check out our list serve. [MA AFCC YAHOO GROUP](#)

All you need is a Yahoo! Account to join. Please do.

And once you are on the list you can participate in a discussion, with all members of the group, by simply sending one email to maafcc@yahoogroups.com.

To join, email if maafcc-subscribe@yahoogroups.com and if you ever want to leave the group, just send an email to maafcc-unsubscribe@yahoogroups.com

Online Membership Directory

Did you even know that we have an online member directory that serves as a resource to the public?

MA AFCC members can log in and set up their own profile. This is a great way for you to establish yourself as a competent professional in the eyes of your peers and the public (you can even add a link to your own website!) It is also an effective and efficient way to find and connect with subject matter experts across the state. Check it out today:

<http://directory.maafcc.org/join>

News from the National

An added benefit to all MA AFCC members is membership in our national organization (Actually, it is the other way around, and this just sounds better). If you have not yet visited the website, you are missing a TON of opportunity and information. Check it out right now at: [AFCC](#)

In addition to the Annual and Regional Conferences, AFCC now offers monthly webinars on a wide variety of topics relevant to our practices. You can explore upcoming offerings and register, click here: [Webinar Registration](#). And listen to recording of previous webinars visit: [Webinar Archives](#)

And remember, the [13th Symposium on Child Custody](#) will be held on Denver, CO, November 8 – 10, 2018. We have applied for CEU certification for MA PC's, our application is pending. If any courses are approved we will notify members via the list serve, so stay tuned!

Guest Columns/Member Spotlight

On behalf of the Board please allow me to extend an open and ongoing invitation to each and every one of our member to contribute to this newsletter as a “guest” author. In each issue, we hope to provide the opportunity to spotlight one or more of our members who choose to share their insight, knowledge, and experience on a variety of topics that we hope are relevant and of interest to our members. Please contact [Tony Pelusi](#) if you are interested in submitting a contribution, or know someone who might be interested if they received a gentle prompt.

Guest Contributor

3 PRINCIPLES TO HEALTHY AND POSITIVE COPARENTING

By Jeremy Clyman, PsyD

Clinical and Forensic Psychologist based in Cambridge and Arlington, MA

As judges, attorneys, probation officers, psychologists, and others involved in matters of probate and family court, we must contend with a rampant mental health problem in the form of high-conflict coparenting.

This term refers to the subgroup of parents that divorce or romantically sever ties, and unwittingly co-construct a new coparent relationship of entrenched dysfunction, marked by high anxiety and avoidance, mistrust and misbehavior, to say nothing of poor communication, coordination, and problem-solving of childcare matters.

The Child and Family Evaluation Service (CAFES), housed within William James College in Newton, MA, runs High Conflict Parent Education Classes aimed at stabilizing and improving these highly distressed and litigious dynamics. A coparent mantra of the program is, “You’re going to be grandparents together!” a sentiment of radical acceptance to help the coparent pair shift from aggrieved and embittered romantic partners to re-committed and professional business partners of their child(ren)’s care and wellbeing. And while this CAFES mantra poignantly highlights a healthy, long-term aspiration, there are more urgent needs inherent in the children’s best interests and healthy development.

Thus, Healthy Coparent Practice Principle #1 is:

Coparents should almost always keep an open line of communication with each other, a bare-minimum degree of basic respect, communication, and cooperation needed to successfully navigate the daily demands of childcare. All too often coparents willfully decide to completely avoid each other, often for extended periods of time, because coparent high-conflict can be an incredibly painful and complex process layered with long-term pain (e.g. unrepaired romantic and interpersonal wounds) and short-term problems (e.g. imbalanced and unfair parenting plans).

Thus, Healthy Coparent Practice Principle #2 is:

Learn to compartmentalize the legitimate (and misperceived or unjustified) negative and unresolved emotions associated with the coparent relationship. This means intentionally deciding to channel the negative energy into healthier forms of expression (e.g. openly seeking support from a therapist, or family/friends) and outlets (e.g. exercise and sports).

To advance further toward healing, resolution, and coparent reasonableness, there must be simultaneous forgiveness of past mistreatment, and flexibility of perspectives on future childcare dilemmas.

Thus, Healthy Coparent Practice Principle #3 is:

Seek help in the form of expert, third-party support.

Coparents can fall into a pattern of failed attempts to informally resolve childcare and custody disputes, ranging from nuanced philosophical differences about parenting (e.g. sports or no sports?) to crisis-oriented litigiousness (e.g. allegations of parental abuse and mistreatment); a vicious cycle that only creates further hurt and hardship.

The options for professional help are (in order of treatment-based to evaluation-based):

Family reunification therapist or coparent counselor or coach, parent coordinator, mediator, or GAL custody evaluator.

Newsletter

This is YOUR organization. Have you written something that might be of interest to our members? Will you be speaking on a panel that other members might benefit from attending? Is there a “burning issue” that ignites your passion that you want to share about? Want to share your learning or a

perspective you picked up at a training? All of these and more present great opportunities for you to consider submitting something for publication in our newsletter. If you have an idea or just want to talk about the possibility call 781.944.9449 or [email](#) Tony Pelusi.