



Association of Family and Conciliation Courts

New Jersey Chapter

NEWSLETTER



What's inside

- 2 - New Board Members
- 3 - Thank You
- 4 - NJ-AFCC Annual Meeting
- 5 - Phil Sobel Award
- 6 - NJ's New PC Rule
- 8 - Coercive Control
- 10 - AFCC 60th Anniversary
- 12 - Benefits of Parent Coordination
- 13 - NJ-AFCC Committees
- 14 - Announcements and Board of Directors

A Message from the President

Cynthia Lischick, Ph.D.

Welcome to the latest edition of NJ-AFCC Newsletter! I can't believe nine months have passed by since I took office. The purpose of my message is to raise awareness and celebrate the work of the chapter committees while also making an appeal to you to consider joining us in our work. I am so proud of all our NJ-AFCC members and their contributions at the local, national, and international level, regularly offering cutting-edge information to our membership. I'd like to start by sending a big thank you to Lynn Norcia, Esq., and our Newsletter Committee and Administrative Assistant Nancy Andreasen for their work in producing this newsletter.

Our Membership Chair, Tamsen Thorpe, PhD., has been diligently working to increase our membership while working with Website Committee Chair, Holly Friedland, Esq. to update the website with everyone's profile. If you want to update your profile, please send the completed Profile form and your headshot to Holly at holly@jacobsberger.com. I am so proud to say that we are currently second in the nation for percentage increase in Chapter Membership! We need everyone's assistance to expand this organization, especially in terms of diversity, so if you know other professionals who could benefit from our organization, please invite them to join.

I'd like to send a big thanks to Elise Landry JD, PhD, Chair of the Program Committee, and her committee members for their diligent work. The Program Committee had one of the most successful Fall Programs on record, entitled "Coercive Control: A primer for judicial, legal, & mental health professionals" (see the article in this newsletter). The committee is already working on our Spring Program which will take place on April 10th and is also planning to add high quality webinars to our list of program offerings. If you have a topic idea for a panel presentation, please forward it to Elise Landry at drlandry@landryfamilyforensics.com.

Finally, my vision is to make our NJ-AFCC Chapter organization the most knowledgeable and respected resource for Family Court-related forensic evaluations, risk assessments, and knowledge about clinical programming. I hope to achieve this by bringing state of the art educational speakers and to facilitate interprofessional communication and collaboration in order to reveal, understand, and educate about the dynamics of relationships that comprise the legal process. The overarching goal is to promote safety for children in court and the pursuit of problem resolution as this relates to high conflict cases involving domestic violence and coercive control. As many of you know, domestic violence makes up a greater proportion of the cases in family court than any other case type. To that end, I am assembling a Taskforce on Domestic Violence and the Safety of Children. Please contact me directly if you are interested in joining us. I plan on partnering with the National Council on Juvenile and Family Court Judges to address this issue. My goal for the Taskforce is to identify effective models and best practices for working with children living through a pattern of coercive control domestic violence in their home from screening to assessment and all the way through to intervention. I look forward to seeing you at our April 10th, 2024, Spring Program, so please mark your calendars for what promises to be a very informative evening.

Very Respectfully,
Cynthia M. Lischick, PhD, LPC, DVS
President of NJ-AFCC (2023-2025)

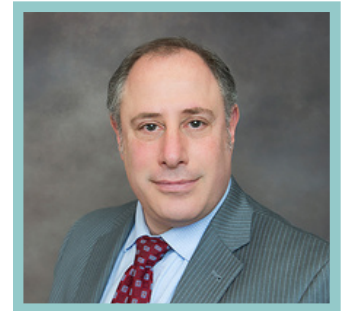
Welcome New Board Members



David S. Gomberg, Ph.D.

David S. Gomberg, Ph.D. is a clinical and forensic psychologist who has been in practice for over 20 years. In his clinical practice, he has worked with clients of all ages. In his family forensic practice, he conducts evaluations, reunification therapy, mediation, therapeutic mediation, parenting coordination, and supervised visitation. He has been accepted as an expert in ten NJ counties, and has trained both mental health and legal professionals on matters related to family forensic practice. In addition to family court work, Dr. Gomberg has conducted evaluations for the NJ Department of Corrections, including sex offender risk assessments and fitness for duty evaluations for safety officer candidates, police and corrections officers, and firefighters. Dr. Gomberg has recently joined the Board of Directors of our NJ chapter of AFCC, and he is the Chair of the Legislative Affairs Committee for our chapter. Welcome Dr. Gomberg.

Barry Katz, Ph.D. is a clinical and forensic psychologist with over 30 years of experience working with the Court, DCP&P, Office of the Law Guardian, Public Defender's Office, private attorneys, U.S. Attorney's Office, and insurance companies in the areas of child abuse and neglect, trauma, and risk assessment. He conducts evaluations within the family law realm as well as evaluations of sexual offending, violence and diminished capacity. He also conducts therapeutic services for parenting education, childhood trauma, supervised visitation, and reunification therapy. Dr. Katz is a member of Psypact for inter-jurisdictional practice, and has been qualified as an expert in both New Jersey and Federal Court. He has also supervised permit holders in Psychology in NJ. Dr. Katz has recently joined the Board of Directors of our NJ chapter of AFCC, and is a member of the Legislative Affairs Committee. Welcome Dr. Katz.



Barry Katz, Ph.D.



Save the Date

for the **NJ-AFCC Chapter's**

***"2024 Annual Meeting and
Spring Program"***

Wednesday, April 10, 2024

4:00 pm - 8:00 pm

Maggiano's Little Italy
Bridgewater, NJ

Details coming soon

afccnewjersey@gmail.com

afcc-nj.org

Thank You!

Denise Wennogle, Esq., past president

Lynn B. Norcia



At the annual meeting in May 2023, incoming President of the Board, Cynthia Lischick, presented outgoing President, Denise Wennogle, with a gift as a token of the Board's appreciation for the hard work throughout her two-year presidency which began in April 2021. As chapter president, Denise sought innovative ways to help families in conflict access services while minimizing costs. She strived to further engage the legal community in achieving the goals of the AFCC.

Under Denise's leadership our chapter presented four different educational seminars on cutting edge topics such as "When Cultures Collide," which addressed the impact of culture on parenting evaluations and divorce, and "Adolescent Development and Issues that Arise in Divorcing Families". She also established a parenting coordinator mentoring group to provide members who have PC training, guidance from experienced parenting coordinators and each other. The chapter provided support for the adoption of the new Parenting Coordination court rule (R.5:8D) under Denise's leadership. She initiated the Custody Evaluation Committee which surveyed the members regarding the feasibility of using one custody expert per family rather than two custody experts.

Denise also made special efforts to connect with the legal community by arranging for our members to present "Evaluations for Families in Conflict" to over 150 sitting judges. Further, the chapter initiated its regular participation in the annual Family Law Symposium to reach out to legal professionals. She also took on the tedious task of rescuing our website after the original webmaster became completely unavailable. On behalf of the entire board and membership, we offer our thanks to you Denise; the chapter has benefited enormously from your leadership, professionalism, and commitment to AFCC's goals.

Tam Abitante, Esq., treasurer

Lynn B. Norcia

The NJ Chapter Board of Directors would like to thank Tam Abitante for her many years of service to the Chapter as both a board member and as our skilled treasurer. Tam has decided, after nine years on the board, five years of which she has been the treasurer, that she is stepping down from the treasurer's position as of February 1st, and from the board in April 2024. Tam's skills and professionalism, as well as her great personality, will be greatly missed.



Tam is a graduate of Rutgers Law School where she was awarded the Rutgers Pro Bono Award for her work with victims of domestic violence. She is not only a divorce mediator and collaborative divorce professional, but she is also a Certified Divorce Financial Analyst and a licensed realtor! She is currently "of counsel" to Legband & D'Onofrio, LLC where she practices family law.

When asked how she was going to fill her free time, Tam informed us that she wants to spend more time with family, including her son Thomas, who recently relocated to New Jersey after earning a Joint PhD from Harvard/MIT. She also wants to participate in Ballroom Dance competitions (who knew?) and oversee the building of a house.

We wish you the best of luck in the future, Tam, and look forward to continuing to see you at NJ AFCC's seminars.

Lynn B. Norcia, Esq. is Of Counsel to Starr, Gern, Davison & Rubin, P.C. and has been a member of the Board since 2019.

Annual Meeting of the NJ-AFCC - 2023

*New Board Members Elected, the Phil Sobel Award,
Hot Topics in Parent-Child Contact Problems - Seminar*

Lynn B. Norcia

On May 9, 2023, the New Jersey Chapter held its annual meeting at Maggiano's Restaurant in Bridgewater, NJ in which approximately 60 members and guests were in attendance. It was evident that everyone was happy to be back in person enjoying each other's company as well as the good food and drink provided. Our new President Cynthia Lischick spoke about her vision of what she looks forward to accomplishing during her two-year term. She also thanked outgoing President Denise Wennogle for her leadership during the previous two years.

The chapter membership unanimously elected the Board's slate of nominees for new two-year terms. The slate included the re-election of five existing members as well as the election of two new board members. Those existing board members re-elected for new terms as officers included, Holly Friedland, who was also elected as President-Elect, and board members Elise Landry, J.D., Psy. D., Lynn Norcia, Esq. Joe Racite, Ph.D., and Tamsen Thorpe, Psy. D. Additionally, the chapter unanimously elected two new members to the board, David Gomberg, Ph. D. and Barry Katz, Ph. D. (See articles elsewhere in newsletter profiling the new board members).

In addition to the election of officers, the annual meeting included the annual presentation of the "Phil Sobel Award." The Phil Sobel Award is presented each year, in honor of Phil Sobel, a founding member of the New Jersey AFCC chapter, to someone who shares Phil's vision of helping families collaboratively resolve conflict outside of court. This year the Board selected board member and Secretary, Lynn B. Norcia, Esq., as the recipient, and Ron Silikovitz, Ph. D., made the presentation (see article elsewhere in newsletter).

The membership also voted to amend the Chapter's By-Laws based on a recommendation by the By-Laws committee. The amendment clarified language in Article IV, Section (B) of the By-Laws which appeared to grant voting rights to any member of the International AFCC Board of Directors. The misleading language was deleted by a unanimous vote of the membership.

The evening was capped off by an informative program entitled "Hot Topics in Parent- Child Contact Problems: Theoretical Viewpoints, Interventions, Treatment and Challenges for Legal and Mental Health Professionals," moderated by Jonathan Wall, Psy.D., and featuring Hon. Lisa Chrystal, P.J.F.P. (Ret.), Robert Epstein, Esq., Derek Freed, Esq., Sharon Ryan Montgomery, Psy.D., Marcy Pasternak, Ph.D. A lively discussion was held by the panelists and the attendees. The seminar was approved by NJPA for 2 continuing education credits, and by the New Jersey Supreme Court for 2.4 continuing legal education credits.

Learn more about

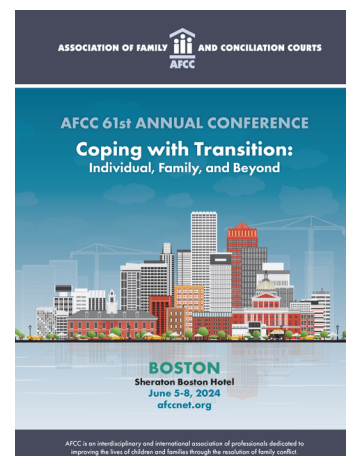
Coping with Transitions: Individual, Family and Beyond

at the

AFCC 61st Annual Conference

Register today at:

afccnet.org/61stannualconference





Phil Sobel Award Presented to Lynn Norcia

Dr. Ron Silikovitz

At the chapter's annual meeting on May 9, 2023, Lynn B. Norcia, Esq. was presented with the Chapter's respected Phil Sobel Award. This award is bestowed on those professionals practicing in New Jersey who have devoted their time and energy to the chapter and to forwarding Phil's vision.

Attorney Phil Sobel was one of the founding members of our New Jersey AFCC Chapter, in the late 1990's. One of his goals was to use court resources and experts to help parties resolve their case before becoming encumbered by the constraints of a docket number. Phil never forgot the children and their importance during and after the divorce. After Phil's untimely death in 2012, our chapter created the annual Phil Sobel award, to properly honor his vision.

Past award recipients have been Phil himself (posthumously), Ron Silikovitz, Honorable Ellen Koblitz, Sharon Ryan Montgomery, Ann Ordway, Barbara Worth, Amy Wechsler, Marcy Pasternak, Denise Wennogle, Lisa Tomasini, Frank Weiss, and Cynthia Lischick. Lynn was selected for the 2023 Phil Sobel award not only for her work with the AFCC chapter, but also because the way in which she approaches her cases embodies the spirit of Phil Sobel's vision, to make family law practice kinder, gentler, and more responsive to families.

Lynn joined the NJ-AFCC Board of Directors in 2019. She has worked tirelessly as the Chapter's Secretary and as Chairperson of our Newsletter Committee since 2021. She has been an attorney for forty years and has a history of public service with the Attorney General's office, the Office of the Law Guardian, and as a mediator and Domestic Violence Hearing Officer for the Superior Court of NJ, Essex Vicinage. Serving as a court mediator, she settled hundreds of cases involving the Division of Child Protection and Permanency, as well as private custody and adoption disputes. Her mediation skills earned her the reputation for resolving cases that "no one thought could settle." She is also a skilled appellate attorney and has appeared before the New Jersey Appellate Division and Supreme Court numerous times.

Lynn received the selective Child's Hero Award presented by Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) of Essex County in 2016 and was named "Volunteer Lawyer of the Month" by Volunteer Lawyers for Justice in January 2024.

Since leaving public service, Lynn has been "Of Counsel" to the Roseland firm of Starr, Gern, Davison & Rubin, P.C. where she exclusively practices family law. She prides herself on the individualized attention provided her clients, and for her sensitivity and compassion for those who are experiencing the stress of divorce, custody disputes, domestic violence, and co-parenting conflicts. She is frequently appointed as a Guardian ad Litem in family court matters and is also on the newly established Statewide Roster of Approved Parenting Coordinators.

Lynn earned her Bachelor's Degree in Social Relations at Ramapo College and her J.D. Degree at the Rutgers School of Law.

Lynn and her husband, Jeff Blakeslee, have been married for 30 years. They have two adult sons who are her pride and joy. Her interests include gardening, reading, outdoor activities, volunteer work through her church and hosting friends and family at her home.

Ron Silikovitz, Ph.D., is a licensed psychologist with offices in West Orange, New Jersey and Elizabeth, New Jersey. He is co-founder of the NJ-AFCC and has been a board member since 1999.

New Jersey's New Parenting Coordination Court Rule

Amy Wechsler, Esq.

Effective September 1, 2023, the New Jersey Supreme Court ("the Court") adopted R.5:8D, defining parenting coordination and the circumstances under which a judge may appoint a parenting coordinator. The rule and companion guidelines issued by the Administrative Office of the Courts ("AOC Guidelines") set forth detailed procedures for the parenting coordination role and establish a Statewide Roster of Approved Parenting Coordinators.[i][ii]

The new rule was adopted in response to long-standing criticisms of parenting coordination, which was entirely unregulated in New Jersey.[iii] The NJ Supreme Court Family Practice Committee undertook an in-depth analysis of the status of parenting coordination and raised several concerns in a Final Report for 2009-2011: 1) there were no qualifications for who could serve as a parenting coordinator by way of education, training or experience; 2) there were no limitations on the issues parenting coordinators could address; 3) parenting coordinators could unilaterally exceed the scope of their authority by way of engagement letters; 4) the process was unaffordable for many parents; and 5) there were no limits on the duration of appointments.[iv]

Responding to these concerns and seeking to clarify and codify the role of parenting coordinators in New Jersey, the Family Law Executive Committee of the New Jersey State Bar Association Family Law Section established a Parenting Coordination Task Force comprised of mental health experts and experienced family law attorneys (hereafter "PC Task Force"). In April 2021, the PC Task Force issued a comprehensive report addressing the Practice Committee's concerns and proposing a court rule to a) establish detailed guidelines for parenting coordination, b) adopt a detailed form of order of appointment, and c) establish a Statewide roster of qualified parenting coordinators.[v] In 2023, the Court adopted a parenting coordination rule, R.5:8D, which substantially mirrored the Task Force's proposal. The result is in two parts: R.5:8D and AOC Directive #16-23.

R.5:8D defines a parenting coordinator (PC) as "a neutral individual appointed by the court to assist in implementing the parties' parenting plan...by facilitating the resolution of day-to-day parenting issues in a timely manner when the parties cannot resolve issues on their own." [vi] The primary focus for the PC is to act in the children's best interests, by "reducing conflict and fostering sound decisions that will aid positive child development." The goals of parenting coordination are:

- to aid the parties in monitoring and effectuating the existing parenting plan...;
- to reduce misunderstandings and miscommunication between the parents;
- to help reduce litigation filed with the Family Part; to clarify priorities of the parents and the children; to explore possibilities for compromise; and to develop methods of communication that promote collaboration in parenting.[vii]

Although the PC's recommendations will now be binding, that is not the goal; rather, the process "should facilitate decision-making by the parties whenever practicable." [viii]

The AOC Guidelines set forth what the order of appointment must provide, define and limit the PC's authority and the issues that can be addressed in the parenting coordination process and provide procedures PCs are to follow. These procedures address communication with parties and the court, clarify that parenting coordination is not a confidential process, address compensation, fee disputes, how complaints about the PC are to be handled, and the circumstances under which the process can be terminated. The AOC Guidelines also set forth professional and training requirements to qualify for the Statewide Roster and prohibit the appointment of non-roster PCs in domestic violence matters.

continued on page 7

New Jersey's New Parenting Coordination Court Rule - continued

The following are highlights of the rule and the AOC Guidelines:

- PCs may be appointed in both dissolution and non-dissolution cases.
- Appointments are made only after entry of a custody order and parenting plan.[ix]
- On a finding of good cause, judges may appoint a PC from the Statewide Roster, but if the parties agree, a PC may be appointed from the Statewide Roster without a showing of good cause. The court may also appoint someone not on the Statewide Roster on request by one or both parties if both parties consent.[x] All PCs, whether on the Statewide Roster or not, must follow the AOC Guidelines.[xi]
- If a temporary or final domestic order is in effect, the court cannot appoint a PC who is not on the Statewide Roster. Even if someone is on the Statewide Roster, a PC can be appointed only at the election of the victim.
- Orders must indicate a term limit for the appointment, which should begin when the PC is retained, rather than when the order is entered.
- Orders must specify the scope of the PC's authority and the issues that can be addressed in the process
- PCs do not have authority to modify legal or physical custody, do not have authority to address financial issues, do not serve as custody or parenting plan evaluators,[xii] and may not serve in dual sequential roles in a matter[xiii];
- The PC's recommendations will be binding unless a party timely objects by bringing a motion or Order to Show Cause;

PCs may not communicate with the court unless both parties agree or the court orders.

The AOC Guidelines are detailed and comprehensive, and too lengthy to set forth in this article. Anyone seeking to be appointed as a PC, or to have one appointed in a case should read the rule and the AOC Guidelines, which can be found at <https://www.njcourts.gov/courts/family>.

The AOC Guidelines also include a detailed sample order. Despite the level of detail regarding how the process should be conducted, PCs should be able to adapt these orders to reflect their protocols.[xiv]

Inclusion on the Statewide Roster of Approved Parenting Coordinators.

The requirements to be included on the Statewide Roster or Approved Parenting Coordinators are an active license in your profession and 40 hours of training, which include mediation training and 16 hours of specific parenting coordination training. Applications for the Statewide Roster can be found on the judiciary website - <https://www.njcourts.gov/courts/family>[xv]

[i] N.J.Ct.R.5:8D

[ii] Administrative Office of the Courts Directive #16-23, September 1, 2023, (hereafter "AOC Directive") Your paragraph text. The AOC Directive includes PC Guidelines, a form of order of appointment, an application to be admitted to the roster, and a roster change/update form.

[iii] Final Report for 2009–2011, the NJ Supreme Court Family Law Practice Committee ("Practice Committee")

[iv] Family Practice Committee 2009–2011 Final Report, January 10, 2011.

[v] Task Force on Parenting Coordination Report to the Family Law Executive Committee of the New Jersey State Bar Association Family Law Section, April 2021.

[vi] R.5:8D.2.b

[vii] R.5:8D(b)

[viii] Id.

[ix] R.5:8D(a)(1) and (2). The rule allows appointments of PCs pendente lite when a temporary custody/parenting plan is in place, which creates challenges. Litigation polarizes parents and fosters conflict, while parenting coordination is intended to improve parents' communication and help them be better co-parents. These competing interests can frustrate the PC's effectiveness.

[x] AOC Directive, Guideline 4.

[xi] Id.

[xii] AOC Directive, Guidelines I and 2.B.2.

[xiii] AOC Directive, Guideline 6.i.

[xiv] For example, the AOC Guidelines state that parties have the right to initiate ex parte communication with the PC if the other party is notified simultaneously or as soon thereafter as possible. In practice, this is a bad idea. High conflict parents who do not respect boundaries may inundate a PC with calls and emails. Separate conversations with one parent, without prior notice to the other parent, result in suspicion and engender mistrust. The PC must be able to determine and manage communication with the parents, and this should be stated in the order of appointment.

[xv] There is no 16-hour parenting coordination training available yet in New Jersey. One is being developed to be offered in 2024. Meanwhile, AFCC offers a training program that meets the Statewide Roster requirements.

Amy Wechsler is a Certified Matrimonial Attorney, Mediator, Parenting Coordinator, Arbitrator and Collaborative Practitioner at Lawrence Law. She has served on the Board of NJ-AFCC since 2003 and is a Past President.

Coercive Control: A Primer for Judicial, Legal, & Mental Health Professionals

NJ-AFCC Fall Seminar

Elise Landry, J.D., Ph.D.,

On October 10, 2023, the New Jersey Chapter of AFCC held its fall conference in-person at Brookdale Community College in Lincroft, New Jersey. The conference had strong attendance and helped increase our Chapter membership, while also introducing co-sponsorships with Soberlink and Our Family Wizard.

The conference featured an exciting program entitled "Coercive Control: A Primer for Judicial, Legal, & Mental Health Professionals." The program was timely and relevant as New Jersey lawmakers move towards requiring courts to consider evidence of coercive control in domestic violence proceedings. Over a four-hour period, the panel of qualified and animated presenters educated the audience of legal and mental health professionals to understand the insidious form of interpersonal violence called coercive control, as well as the impact of coercive control on victims, children, and the family court process.

The program started with a two-hour educational primer on coercive control presented by Dr. Lisa Aronson Fontes, PhD, author of *Invisible Chains: Overcoming Coercive Control in Your Intimate Relationship*. Dr. Fontes held the audience's attention as she illustrated how coercive control is used as a strategy for dominating intimate partners. She used numerous case examples to help describe the use of techniques such as degradation, isolation, micromanaging, manipulation, threats, punishments, and various other forms of coercion. Dr. Fontes helped the audience understand this particularly damaging form of intimate partner violence, as well as highlighting the importance of understanding cultural factors that influence responses to coercive control and the relevance of bias when working with these cases.

Gary Blaustein, Esq., an attorney in Basking Ridge, shared his experiences of working with divorce and child custody cases involving coercive control. Using case examples, Mr. Blaustein addressed how he gathers and

organizes evidence of coercive control tactics to present to the Court. Specifically, Mr. Blaustein's presentation highlighted his use of Factimize PatternViewer, a program developed by Craig Kobayashi of EVDense Holding Company, Inc. Explaining that he has no financial stake in Factimize, Mr. Blaustein shared his use of Factimize to organize and graphically present patterns of coercive controlling behaviors to courts. Factimize works by sorting and organizing communications into chronological and event-based groups, tagging each file for behaviors to identify clusters of files representing specific activities or behaviors, essentially creating an infographic to describe patterns of behaviors.



Lisa Aronson Fontes, PhD

While the audience was intrigued by the program and the concept, a lively discussion and debate ensued regarding the reliability, validity, and admissibility of this program and its product. Mr. Blaustein concluded with the message that the reactions and discussion were extremely important because it meant people were thinking about the complexities of effectively educating courts on coercive control and the impacts of this insidious abuse on victims and children.

The Honorable Marc R. Brown, J.S.C. of the Union County Superior Court Family Division finished up the evening with numerous illuminating case examples he has struggled with as a judicial officer.

continued on page 9

Coercive Control - continued



Judge Marc R. Brown, J.S.C & Gary Blaustein Esq.

Judge Brown's thoughtful perspective on the importance of maintaining focus on the children, in combination with his honesty regarding the difficulty of balancing the evidentiary rules with the realities of these extremely difficult cases made for a very thought provoking and interactive conclusion to the evening.

Judge Brown highlighted the importance of attorneys and mental health providers educating the court on coercive control and the nexus between parent behaviors and the impacts on their children. Judge Brown also raised evidentiary concerns surrounding efforts to illustrate patterns of coercive control during litigation, emphasizing the need to continue to work together across

professions to identify and develop more effective means of addressing this challenging issue for the families we work with.

The presentations of these three speakers and the lively discussions that occurred throughout the evening provided attendees a better understanding of what coercive control looks like; how to identify it in family court cases; the impacts on the children at the center of these cases; and started a conversation about how judges, attorneys, and mental health professionals need to work together to develop effective ways to intervene with families impacted by coercive control. Psychologists received four continuing education credit hours to satisfy their domestic violence CEU requirement, while attorneys received 4.5 continuing legal education credits. "Coercive Control: A Primer for Judicial, Legal, & Mental Health Professionals" received consistently positive feedback from attendees, with numerous attendees new to our programming requesting to remain on mailing lists for future presentations. Overall, the NJ-AFCC Fall Conference was an informative and timely event as New Jersey embarks on officially recognizing coercive control as a form of interpersonal violence that must be recognized and addressed for the harm it causes to victims and children.



Elise Landry, J.D., Ph.D., is a practicing psychologist in Red Bank, NJ and has been on the Board of NJ-AFCC since 2021 and currently serves as Chair of the Program Committee.

**For more information about the
New Jersey Chapter of AFCC go to:**

afcc-nj.org

Or send us an email!

afccnewjersey@gmail.com

Newsletter Committee:

Lynn B. Norcia, Esq. Chairperson

Holly M. Friedland, Esq.

Eileen Kohutis, Ph.D.

Marcy Pasternak, Ph.D.

Amy Wechsler, Esq.

Nancy Andreasen, Administrative Assistant



AFCC 60th Anniversary Conference
60 Years of Asking the Difficult Questions

Rejecting Binary Resist-Refuse Dynamics Models in Favor of an Evaluative Rubric

Presented by: Benjamin D. Garber, PhD and Allen L. Levy, LPA

June 1 - 4, 2023 - Los Angeles, CA.

A review by Tamsen Thorpe, PhD

The speakers presented a six-step evaluative rubric for evaluating parent-child contact problems (PCCP). They reminded us to always start by asking the right question, which is, "What combination of factors is causing a child to align with one parent and resist the other parent?" Further, they pointed out that normal parents disappoint, frustrate and even scare kids at times. The model that they presented was in contrast to that of Bennett and Greenhill's, 2022, resist-refuse 5 factor model, which answers the question of whether alienation is present or not. The worry is that a binary model such as this, while it may be appealing, commonly does more harm and does not capture the complexity of human relationships. The 6 domains suggested by Garber & Levy to aid in the understanding and remediation of factors contributing to the child aligning with one parent, while resisting the other, are as follows:

PCCP Multi factored recipe with 6 domains:

1. Incidental sensory, temporal, and proximal factors: Perhaps the child is resisting because of subjective incidental variables like he doesn't like the sheets at dads. As part of the evaluation ask questions like; Are transitions stressful and why? Is the resistance recent, abrupt? What is the trigger?
2. Child: temperament, personality etc. Are they cautious, change aversive, have separation anxiety. Do they resist other things, have a history of trauma, are they autistic?
3. Parent-preferred, dyadic variables with child: This refers to the relationship, not the parents' symptoms. ex: affinity due to shared interest which could be part of healthy development. Could the child be doing what they think the parent wants to prevent provoking their anger and losing love, which has been termed being a chameleon child in other literature.
4. Parent-out, dyadic variables with child: What characteristics of the non-preferred, parent-child relationship contribute to the child's resistance/refusal. Is the parent insensitive or unresponsive in caregiving.
5. Systemic: what characteristics of the relationship among parent A, parent B, and the children, contribute to the resistance. Is the child avoiding stricter rules, do they have culture shock at one home due to a different environment, how has the parent scripted separation.
6. Extra systemic factors: How do people and pressures outside of the family influence the child's family relationships. The siloed child-therapist dynamic is an example of something that needs to be addressed.

In summary, ask what combination of factors are contributing to the child aligning with one parent, while resisting the other.

Dr. Tamsen Thorpe is a Licensed Psychologist and is in private practice located in Morristown, NJ. She serves on the Board of Directors and is the Membership Chair for NJ's Chapter of the AFCC.



AFCC 60th Anniversary Conference
60 Years of Asking the Difficult Questions

Too Much Conflict and Not Enough Trust

Presented by: Marsha Kline-Pruett and Michael Siani

June 1 - 4, 2023 - Los Angeles, CA.

A review by Eileen A. Kohutis, PhD

The 60th Anniversary Conference of AFCC was held in Los Angeles, May 31 to June 3, 2023. I attended the presentation by Marsha Kline-Pruett & Michael Siani Too much conflict not enough trust and respect. This presentation was well-attended but, unfortunately, left something to be desired. This was unfortunate because these two presenters are typically thorough and comprehensive with some time for questions from the audience.

Kline-Pruett and Siani began their presentation stating that learning how to coparent is a difficult task for many people because they are typically still engaging in old conflicts. We may ask: what purpose do these old conflicts serve? What does the couple gain by having these conflicts? How do these conflicts affect the child?

Kline-Pruett and Siani cited previous research on interparental conflict which showed that: 1) the parental conflict that exists cannot be hidden, 2) children do not become accustomed to the conflict that exists between their parents, 3) conflict affects children at all stages of development, and 4) the issue is not that parents argue but how they argue. Interparental conflict may harm a child's well-being. To do this, trust and respect between the parents needs to be built.

To effectively coparent, parents need to be supportive, warm, responsive, maintain clear boundaries, and support the other parent's involvement, and this results in reduced externalizing behavior and internalizing behavior and family stability. To illustrate how ongoing conflict affects the child, they showed a five-minute video, Point C, created by Judge Lawrence Jones (Ret.) This video is a cartoon with a catchy little ditty highlighting some of the conflicts between the two parents and its impact on a child.

Because the current measures of co-parenting do not accurately reflect the diversity and complexity of today's families, they developed the Coparenting Across Family Structures (COPAFS), a scale measuring coparenting in different family structures. This scale consists of five factors: animosity, coparenting, trust, respect, and communication.

Several examples of how the factors of COPAFS were presented. For instance, each time the child returns on time. following similar routines, and being flexible build trust for the other parent. When trust gets repaired with regular contact with the other parent, conflict ends. Exactly, how these examples relate to the COPAFS or what to do with the score on the test were not explained because the presenters ran out of time. For that information, anyone interested in administering the measure will need to read the article in the journal.

Eileen A. Kohutis, Ph. D. is a practicing psychologist in Livingston, New Jersey. She has been a member of NJ-AFCC since 2008 and is currently the Treasurer and a member of the Program Committee and Newsletter Committee.

The Many Benefits of Parent Coordination In Family Law Practice

Thomas J. DeCataldo, Esq.

It is probably safe to assume that somewhere between 95-99% of New Jersey custody disputes result in joint legal custody. This outcome provides both parents equal rights and decision-making authority when it comes to major decisions impacting the best interests of a child. However, this was not always the case in New Jersey.

Prior to 1981, joint custody, as we know it today, was not an option available to Courts when rendering custody decisions. The Supreme Court of New Jersey created "joint custody" as an alternative to sole custody in the landmark decision of *Beck v. Beck*, 86 N.J. 480, (1981). Interestingly, the Court held that joint custody would only "prove acceptable in a limited number of cases," and that the Court, before ordering joint custody, would have to determine that the parents are able to "isolate their personal conflicts from their roles as parents and that the children be spared whatever resentments and rancor the parents may harbor."

Over the course of the last 42 years, the jurisprudence of our state has evolved such that joint legal custody is now an overwhelming norm, if not an outright expectation of all parents. Anecdotally, it is not uncommon for a person seeking "sole" custody to be vilified or viewed as unreasonable unless there are really compelling reasons for doing so. However, our custody statute still requires the Court to evaluate the factors outlined in N.J.S.A. 9:2-4, and the first factor included is the parents' ability to agree, communicate and cooperate in matters relating to the child, so parents' ability to work together remains at the forefront of this analysis. For anyone well-versed in custody litigation, it is certainly a common thread that communication problems may exist, or that parents collectively struggle to set aside their rancor or animus to work together for the best interest of the child. How then can these problems be mitigated by the use of a skilled Parenting Coordinator?

There are both practical and substantive benefits to working with a Parenting Coordinator. From a practical perspective, our Court system often struggles

to keep up with the day-to-day challenges co-parenting can present. For example, most Courts require formal motion practice to receive relief or a determination on an issue. Presenting issues to a Court in this way is often a static snapshot in time, as pleadings must be filed in accordance with strict deadlines, and there is minimal opportunity to amend or update the pleadings if the situation develops or evolves while the application is pending. Motions in most counties are also backlogged, so it may take 3-6 months to get a resolution, when the problem at hand has now become obsolete, or the facts may have changed. In addition, motion practice is extremely expensive and sometimes even cost prohibitive.

A skilled parenting coordinator can help parties navigate these issues more efficiently and more flexibly, usually producing a faster and more efficient recommendation. Their services are ordinarily far cheaper than resorting to litigation, and they also give the parties the added benefit of selecting the professional they wish to use instead of being assigned a judge. As an added benefit, parties often feel they have a better opportunity to be "heard" as they get to speak to the Parenting Coordinator directly and share their frustration or views. In Court, typically only the attorneys argue, while litigants watch their fates play out with minimal involvement.

Equally as important is bearing in mind what Parenting Coordinators may not do. First, they are not twenty-four hour concierge services to fuel conflict. They exist to implement Court Orders and agreements and help facilitate improved communication; they are not an outlet to have daily conflict. They also do not have the authority to alter custody as their role to assist with the implementation of what has been ordered or agreed.

Overall, for parties seeking to enlist help in resolving co-parenting disputes in good faith, when used properly, a Parenting Coordinator can be a valuable tool and important alternative to avoiding litigation.

Thomas J. DeCataldo, Jr. is a partner of Manzi, Epstein, Lomurro & DeCataldo, LLC with offices in Montclair and Hoboken, NJ where he dedicates his practice exclusively to family law. He is a past officer of the New Jersey Chapter of AFCC.

NJ-AFCC Committees 2024

As a member of the New Jersey Chapter of AFCC, all are encouraged to participate in attending our very educational meetings held twice per year, writing an article for our Newsletter, or joining a committee or peer group. If you are interested, please contact the Committee Chair or Cynthia Lischick, chapter president. For contact information, go to www.AFCC-NJ.org or email us at afccnewjersey@gmail.com

Seeking New Members

Legislative Advisory Committee

Chair: David Gomberg

The LAC is focused on how the chapter can address legislative issues to advance the goals of our members. The committee is currently focused on addressing the operations of the New Jersey Board of Psychological Examiners. If you would like to join this committee, especially if you are a lawyer, please contact David Gomberg.

Membership Committee

Chair: Tamsen Thorpe

Tamsen reports on membership at each board meeting and has been actively updating information on the website to accurately reflect our members and their professional services. Tamsen is also leading the drive to attract new members to the Chapter. If you would like to help with this effort, please contact Tamsen.

Newsletter Committee

Chair: Lynn Norcia

The NJ-AFCC Newsletter committee's goal is to publish issues two times each year and include articles of interest to our membership. Articles on relevant topics are always welcome. Contact Lynn if you are interested in serving on the committee or in submitting articles for future editions.

Parenting Coordination Committee

Co-Chairs: Amy Wechsler and Linda Schofel

This committee is focused on providing mentoring support to members of our chapter who have completed formal Parenting Coordination training. Regular monthly zoom meetings are held. Contact Amy or Linda if you are interested in joining this group.

Website Committee

Chair: Holly M. Friedland

This committee is working with a new firm to make improvements to the website and keep the website up to date with membership listings and chapter news. Please contact Holly if you would like to join this committee.

Established Committees

Bylaws Committee

Chair: Ellen L. Koblitz, P.J.A.D. (Ret.)

This committee reviews our Bylaws annually and makes suggestions for changes, if appropriate.

Nominating Committee

Chair: Denise Wennogle

This committee is chaired by the Immediate Past President with three additional members appointed by the President, including at least one board member. Each year this committee solicits nominations for new board members and presents recommendations for a board vote for the upcoming year. If you would like to nominate a current chapter member for the Board, please contact Denise Wennogle.

Phil Sobel Award Committee

Co-chairs: Ron Silikovitz and Barbara Worth

Each year this committee solicits nominations for the honorable award named after one of our beloved Co-founders, Phil Sobel, who along with Ron Silikovitz, founded our Chapter. To nominate someone for this award who exemplifies the values for which Phil Sobel stood, please contact Ron Silikovitz by February 29, 2023.

Program Committee

Chair: Elise Landry

This committee is responsible for recommending and selecting topics for programs and selecting speakers. If you have an idea for a program, please reach out to Elise Landry for consideration.

All Committee Chairs can be contacted via email to:

afccnewjersey@gmail.com

Announcements

Chapter Events

Save the Date

for the NJ-AFCC Chapter's

"2024 Annual Meeting and Spring Program"

Wednesday, April 10, 2024

4:00 pm - 8:00 pm

Maggiano's Little Italy
Bridgewater, NJ

Details coming soon

afccnewjersey@gmail.com

afcc-nj.org

National Events

AFCC 61st Annual Conference

"Coping with Transition: Individual, Family and Beyond"

June 5 - 8, 2024

Sheraton Boston Hotel
Los Angeles, California

Registration is Open

afccnet.org/61stannualconference

NJ-AFCC

2023-24 Executive Board OF Directors

Officers

Cynthia M. Lischick, Ph.D., President
Holly Friedland, Esq., President-Elect
Ellen L. Koblitz, P.J.A.D. (Ret.), Vice President
Lynn B. Norcia, Esq., Secretary
Tam M. Abitante, Esq., CDFA, Treasurer
Eileen Kohutis, Ph.D., Treasurer (as of February 1, 2024)
Denise A. Wennogle, Esq., Immediate Past President

Directors

David Gomberg, Ph.D.
Barry Katz, Ph.D.
Elise Landry, JD, Ph.D.
Joseph Racite, Ph.D.
Linda Schofel, Esq.
Tamsen Thorpe, Ph.D.

Past Presidents

Ron G. Silikovitz, Ph.D. (1999 - 2002)
Co-founder of Chapter
Philip N. Sobel, Esq. (2002 - 2007)
Co-founder of Chapter
Sharon Ryan Montgomery, Psy.D. (2007 - 2009)
Frank Weiss, Ph.D. (2009 - 2010)
Barbara Worth, Esq., Ph.D. (2010 - 2013)
Ann Scucci Ordway, Esq., Ph.D. (2013 - 2015)
Gregg Benson, MA, LCADC (2015 - 2017)
Amy Wechsler, Esq., MSW, APM (2017 - 2019)
Marcy A. Pasternak, Ph.D., (2019 - 2021)
Denise A. Wennogle, Esq., (2021 - 2023)