



Association of Family and Conciliation Courts

New Jersey Chapter NEWSLETTER



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A Message from the President

I would like to extend a warm welcome to all our members, both new and returning. As I reflect on the time that has passed since I began my presidency over a year and a half ago, I am proud of the progress we've made. From the outset, my goal was to advance the mission of our organization, enhance our operations, and address critical issues such as domestic violence and child safety. I am pleased to report that we have been successful in reaching these objectives, thanks to the hard work and dedication of our team. As a result, in the first half of the year, our chapter, along with Utah, won the "Chapter Challenge" award this past year, as the fastest growing chapter out of a total of 23 Chapters.

Staying true to my commitment to providing cutting-edge content, our Spring 2024 program on "Risk Assessment in the Context of Domestic Violence" was a resounding success, drawing record attendance and receiving exceptional feedback. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to our panel moderator, the Honorable Ellen Koblitz, PJAD (Ret.), and our distinguished co-presenters: Dr. Barry Katz, Dr. Madelyn Milchman, and Mr. Dave Torchin, Esq. I also want to acknowledge Dr. Eileen Kohutis for her invaluable role in ensuring the event ran smoothly.

In the Fall of 2024, we hosted another highly successful program, "The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly: How Technology Can Impact Custody and Domestic Violence Cases." This session explored the complex and evolving role of technology in family

law, providing valuable insights for attorneys, mental health professionals, and other family law practitioners. A special thank you to our expert panelists, Holly M. Friedland, Esq., Dr. Elise Landry, J.D., Ph.D., Hon. James A. DeMarzo, P.J.F.P., and Steve Bradley, who provided critical insights.

On the operational side, we've made significant strides, including a major update to our website, thanks to Holly M. Friedland, Esq. and Dr. Tamsen Thorpe. We've also strengthened our financial infrastructure with the establishment of a new Finance Committee and now accept credit card payments for program registrations.

I am pleased to acknowledge several of our members for their outstanding contributions to our field. Dr. Matt Hagovsky was honored with the AFCC-NJ 2024 Phil Sobel Award for his lifelong contributions. I am also delighted to congratulate Amy Wechsler, Esq. for receiving the prestigious Saul Tischler Award in recognition of her remarkable work. Additionally, we welcome our newest Board Members, Elle Barr, Esq. and Jenny Berse, Esq. and I look forward to their participation in the Board.

I also wish to express my heartfelt thanks to those transitioning out of leadership roles. A special thank you to Tam Abitante, Esq. for her years of dedicated service as Board Treasurer, and a grateful thank you to Dr. Eileen Kohutis for stepping up to fill this important role. Additionally, we are deeply grateful to the Honorable Ellen Koblitz, P.J.A.D. (Ret.) and Dr. David Gomberg for stepping into new leadership roles.

Thank you all for your ongoing support and commitment to our shared mission. I look forward to finishing out my term and preparing for President-Elect, Holly M. Friedland, Esq. to take over the leadership of our vibrant chapter in April.

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

Welcome New Board Members



Elle Barr, Esq. is an accomplished attorney and founder of the Law Office of Elle Barr, LLC, where she focuses on helping families navigate complex family law matters. Her dedication to advocating for her clients, coupled with her commitment to fairness and empathy, makes her an invaluable addition to the board. In addition to her legal practice, Elle is a passionate supporter of community outreach and education, regularly offering seminars and resources. She is particularly dedicated to presenting on improving outcomes for children and families, drawing from her extensive experience as a Court-Appointed Guardian Ad Litem. Her experience and advocacy align perfectly with NJ-AFCC's mission to provide support for families in need of financial and emotional guidance during challenging times. We are excited to have Elle's expertise, energy, and perspective on the board as we continue our work supporting families across New Jersey.



Jenny Berse, Esq. is a skilled attorney and the founder of Berse Law, LLC, where she focuses on family law, particularly in divorce, custody, child support and complex equitable distribution matters. With a strong background in both mediation and litigation, Jenny is dedicated to providing compassionate and effective legal solutions to families in transition. Beyond her legal practice, Jenny is deeply committed to the community and regularly participates in initiatives to raise awareness around family law issues. Her approach is centered on helping clients make informed decisions while navigating sensitive family matters with dignity and respect. We are thrilled to have Jenny's insight, experience, and passion for advocacy as part of our board. Her dedication to supporting families aligns perfectly with the mission of NJ-AFCC, and we look forward to her contributions as we continue our work in New Jersey.

Dr. Matt Hagovsky Honored with 2024 Phil Sobel Award for Dedication to Family Law

Dr. Ron Silikovitz



Back row, the award recipient, Dr. Matt Hagovsky, flanked on either side by the co-chairs of the Phil Sobel Committee, Dr. Ron Silikovitz and Barbara Worth. In the Front row, left to right, Phil's wife, the late Esther Sobel, and his daughter Kirsten Kleinman

The New Jersey Chapter of the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts (NJ-AFCC) recently presented Dr. Matt Hagovsky with the esteemed 2024 Phil Sobel Award, recognizing his exceptional contributions to the field of family law and forensic psychology. This prestigious award, presented by the founder of the AFCC NJ chapter and one of the first recipients of the Phil Sobel award himself, Dr. Ron Silikovitz, is named after NJ-AFCC's late founding member Phil Sobel. The award celebrates those who have demonstrated an unwavering commitment to improving family law practice in New Jersey and advancing the principles of collaborative conflict resolution.

The award honors Phil Sobel's vision of helping families resolve disputes without the need for court intervention, a philosophy that continues to guide the NJ-AFCC and inspire its members.

Past recipients of the award have been: Phil Sobel (posthumously),

Ron Silikovitz, Judge Ellen Koblitiz, Sharon Ryan Montgomery, Ann Ordway, Barbara Worth, Amy Wechsler, Marcy Pasternak, Denise Wennogle, Lisa Tomasini, Frank Weiss, Cynthia Lischick and Lynn Norcia.

Phil Sobel's wife, Esther, and daughter, Kirsten, attended the ceremony, ensuring that his legacy remains central to the event.

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A Distinguished Career in Forensic Psychology in Family Law

Dr. Hagovsky's professional journey spans decades of dedicated service, making him a well-known and respected figure in New Jersey's family law community. With expertise as a forensic psychologist, Dr. Hagovsky's work has positively impacted an untold number of families navigating complex legal and emotional challenges. He has been in practice with the same two psychologists, Dr. Gloria Steiner and Dr. Michael Gerson, throughout his long forensic psychology career.

Before becoming a psychologist, Dr. Hagovsky's career took a unique path. He spent several years as a monk and educator, teaching at St. Mary's Abbey in Morristown, home to Delbarton School. His academic journey began at St. Benedictine College in Kansas, where he earned a Bachelor's degree in Philosophy in 1965. He continued his education at Seton Hall University, earning a Master's in Urban School Psychology in 1972, followed by a Ph.D. in School Psychology from Fordham University in 1977. Dr. Hagovsky became a licensed psychologist in 1979.

Though his early career focused on family and child therapy, Dr. Hagovsky transitioned to forensic psychology, establishing himself as a trusted expert in the field. Over the past four decades, he has become a go-to professional for forensic evaluations, often working alongside attorneys and judges to help resolve disputes in family law cases. His balanced approach and dedication to helping families through difficult times have earned him the respect of his colleagues and clients alike. During the presentation of the award, Dr. Silikovitz recalled a time when both psychologists were on the opposite side of a difficult custody case. The judge ordered the two professionals to work out a consensus recommendation, and to everyone's surprise the two of them succeeded. The court relied upon their recommendation in lieu of hours and hours of testimony.

A Life Built on Balance and Service

In addition to his professional accomplishments, Dr. Hagovsky's personal life reflects his commitment to balance, connection, and service. He has been married to his wife, Marion, for 55 years. Together, they have raised four children who have gone on to successful careers in education, technology, and the arts. The couple also enjoys the joy of a growing family, including seven grandchildren, ranging in age from 12 to 25, and most recently the addition of a great-grandchild!

Outside of his work, Dr. Hagovsky has a wide range of interests that reflect his holistic approach to life. He is an avid guitarist, gardener, and landscaper, finding fulfillment in creating both musical and natural beauty. For over 40 years, he has served as cantor at his church, contributing to the spiritual life of his community. He is especially proud of his grandchildren, who hold a special place in his heart.

A Champion of Collaborative Conflict Resolution

As a leader, colleague, and mentor, Dr. Hagovsky has consistently demonstrated his dedication to improving family law practice in New Jersey. Through his forensic evaluations, educational initiatives, and collaborative work with legal professionals, he has made a lasting impact on the field. His work embodies the values of the Phil Sobel Award and continues to inspire those who strive to help families resolve their conflicts with compassion and care.

Congratulations, Dr. Matt Hagovsky

The NJ-AFCC is proud to recognize Dr. Matt Hagovsky with the 2024 Phil Sobel Award. His contributions to the practice of family law and his dedication to helping families navigate difficult times make him a truly deserving recipient of this honor. We congratulate Dr. Hagovsky on this well-deserved recognition and look forward to his continued influence in the field.

Legislative Update

David Gomberg, Ph.D

The New Jersey chapter of the AFCC has active members from multiple disciplines (attorneys, judges, psychologists, social workers, and other mental and health professionals) organized around the principle of helping families in crisis. In our meetings and training workshops, we have identified a host of problems facing families seeking to navigate through complicated systems (e.g. judicial, health care) and do our best to guide these families based on the current science. It has become clear to all of us that even before Covid hit in March of 2020, there was a mental health crisis impacting everyone, especially children and teens. The systems designed to cope with these problems, already taxed before Covid, have been significantly overwhelmed since the pandemic, and many families are not receiving the services they need. While there are many mental health practitioners entering the field, few are willing to become forensic practitioners. The lack of good forensic practitioners has magnified this crisis within the populations we serve because there are too few forensic practitioners and evaluators to serve this vulnerable population (e.g. families engaged in a dissolution process).

The Legislative Affairs Committee was formed, in part, to examine and address this crisis. In our meetings, as well as our informal contact with members of the national community of practitioners, it has become clear that we have difficulty recruiting trained professionals to enter the forensic field because forensic practice is risky. The truth is that forensic practice comes with the significant risk of disgruntled clients filing professional board complaints against the practitioner. These board complaints, while almost always frivolous, cause emotional and financial harm to forensic practitioners. They cause emotional harm because of the stress of having our livelihood threatened, and financial harm because of the time and expense incurred in defending ourselves against our professional boards, and then being dropped from our liability insurance carriers, requiring us to purchase more expensive coverage. Practitioners feel they are being punished and have resigned themselves to the idea that this is the "cost of doing business." However, the problem runs much deeper, and the cost, while unfair to the practitioner, is also borne by the clients and the judicial system, because there are too few forensic practitioners to serve the client populations that need these services.

We know that a central cause of this problem is the way our professional boards handle these kinds of board complaints. Our psychology board, the New Jersey Board of Psychological Examiners (NJ-BoPE) exercises their authority through the New Jersey Division of Consumer Affairs, which is tasked with protecting the consumer, and thus investigates all complaints of professional misconduct. We understand that professionals can make serious mistakes and harm their clients, and that these professionals should be investigated fairly and disciplined if their conduct is found to be harmful and a violation of standards of practice. However, forensic practitioners are almost never found to have engaged in this kind of misconduct, mostly because our work is already under strict scrutiny by clients, attorneys, and the courts, and therefore, we all follow our professional guidelines closely and do not act in a manner that will get us in trouble. This issue has been addressed by the NJPA, through the Committee of Legislative Action (COLA). However, COLA encountered a complete lack of cooperation from the NJ-BoPE, which refused to engage in any dialogue, or even answer simple questions of procedure. The NJ-BoPE has no visible standards for their investigations and no time frame for completion of their investigations (which can take years for the Board to complete), all of which leaves practitioners in limbo without a determination, sometimes for years, causing further stress and harm to practitioners. We have found that the NJ-BoPE and other professional boards consider every complaint equally with no regard to the context in which that complaint is being made. This approach has created a system in which forensic evaluators, who receive board complaints at a much higher rate than professionals in clinical and other settings, are under constant threat, making the risk for practicing much higher than in any other area of practice. There are simply not enough practitioners to carry the load, and we are not seeing additional practitioners willing to shoulder these risks. This results in clients having to wait for long periods of time, leaving children in limbo, and bogging down the court system while waiting for these evaluations to be completed.

The LAC has been formed to work together in a multidisciplinary format to develop a plan of action for addressing this problem. We are currently gathering data from practitioners in New Jersey and around the country, to identify the areas of practice that are most seriously impacted by these problems. We are working on a plan of action, let's call it suggestions, for changes to the NJ-BoPE procedures that would relieve forensic practitioners of this serious burden, and encourage other professionals to enter this field. We need them, the court needs them, and the clients need them.

Key Insights from the AFCC 2024 16th Symposium on Child Custody

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

Navigating Coercive Control:

The Association of Family and Conciliation Courts (AFCC) held its highly anticipated 2024 Child Custody Symposium, titled "Shaping the Future: Screening and Assessing for Safety and Wellbeing of Parent-Child Relationships" offering a deep dive into coercive control; one of the most complex and crucial topics in family law and mental health today. This thought-provoking event, which took place in Columbus, Ohio on November 14-16, 2024, provided attendees with a comprehensive understanding of coercive control and its pervasive impact on families navigating divorce, custody disputes, and domestic violence cases.

Understanding Coercive Control:

Coercive control refers to a pattern of controlling, manipulative, and often covert behaviors used by one partner to dominate and isolate the other. It extends beyond physical violence and includes psychological abuse, economic control, threats, intimidation, and emotional manipulation. Recognizing and addressing coercive control within family systems is critical to safeguarding children and vulnerable individuals who may be caught in these destructive dynamics. This year's event focused on equipping professionals with the tools to better identify and respond to coercive control in family law settings.

Keynote Presentations and Sessions:

The annual meeting featured an impressive lineup of experts, including renowned speakers who presented cutting-edge research, case studies, and practical strategies for identifying and addressing coercive control in both therapeutic and legal contexts. Plenary and keynote sessions addressed the importance of bringing children's voices into family law processes and understanding the unintended consequences of coercive control legislation being enacted in the United States and other countries.

Workshops and Breakout Sessions:

In addition to the keynote and panel discussions, the event included breakout sessions on key topics, including assessing the impact of coercive control on children, documenting coercive control in custody disputes, and collaborating with law enforcement. Other sessions addressed parenting coordination in high-conflict cases, mediation strategies for IPV dynamics, emerging practice legislation, and interventions for parent-child contact problems. Additionally, professionals explored cross-allegations of IPV and PCCP, diversity in parenting time, screening and assessment techniques for IPV and PCCP, and the importance of multidisciplinary teamwork. The conference also highlighted the role of children's voices in high-conflict custody cases.

New Jersey Professionals Making an Impact at the Conference:

The 2024 AFCC Symposium also showcased the contributions of several distinguished New Jersey professionals who played a key role in advancing the discussions around domestic violence, IPV, and child custody. Notably, the session "A View from the Trenches: Practical Strategies for IPV and PCCP" offered invaluable legal and mental health strategies for addressing these complex issues. Presenters included **Marcy Pasternak, PhD** and **Sharon Ryan Montgomery, PsyD**, who provided practical frameworks for legal and mental health professionals working with IPV and PCCP cases. Their insights helped attendees better understand how to navigate these challenging situations while ensuring the safety and well-being of families. Another session, "Conducting Risk Assessments in the Context of Domestic Violence", was equally impactful, featuring the expertise of **Cynthia M. Lischick, PhD, LPC**, who shared critical knowledge on assessing the risks posed by domestic violence and its effects on child safety.

Networking and Professional Development:

As always, the Annual Meeting also offered valuable opportunities for networking. Attendees had the chance to connect with colleagues, share insights from their own practices, and build stronger professional relationships across disciplines. The contributions of New Jersey's professionals highlighted our state's significant role in shaping the conversation on domestic violence, child custody, and the intersection of law and mental health in these critical areas.

Coping with Transition

Key Takeaways from AFCC 61st Annual Conference

Amy Wechsler, Esq.

The 61st Annual Conference of the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts (AFCC), held in Boston in June 2024, brought together family law professionals worldwide to discuss pressing issues affecting families in transition. With the theme "Coping with Transition: Individual, Family, and Beyond," the event provided insights, innovative tools, and opportunities for collaboration to help navigate complex family dynamics.

Conference Highlights

The 61st Annual AFCC Conference offered a rich program filled with 86 individual seminars covering a wide array of issues. As in previous years, the event was designed to appeal to a broad range of professionals involved in family law, including judges, mediators, therapists, attorneys, and child specialists. With expert-led workshops, the conference focused on critical issues related to family conflict, domestic violence, child custody, and more.

The conference kicked off on June 5, 2024, with a series of pre-conference institutes that provided in-depth discussions on the most pressing issues facing families today. These pre-conferences were tailored to help professionals enhance their practice with emerging research and real-world solutions. Among the institutes were sessions on: Cyber Issues in Family Law, Supporting Transgender Youth, Domestic Violence and Parental Alienation.

From June 6-8, the conference featured 90-minute workshops led by a distinguished faculty of professionals from around the world. Workshops covered a variety of topics, including: Expert Reports in Family Court, Parental Alienation and Contact Problems, The Voice of the Child, Collaborative, and Family Law, and Cultural Competency.

NJ-AFCC Members Leading the Charge

New Jersey's own chapter, NJ-AFCC, was well-represented at last year's conference, with several members leading high-impact workshops that received rave reviews. Their contributions highlighted New Jersey's commitment to advancing best practices in family law:

- **Madelyn Milchman, Ph.D.**, presented on Kayden's Law, a crucial piece of legislation designed to improve the safety and well-being of children involved in family law cases. This law emphasizes the importance of ensuring children's voices are considered, particularly in cases of abuse, neglect, or family violence.
- **Marcy Pasternak, Ph.D., Sharon Ryan Montgomery, Psy.D., and Tamsen Thorpe, Ph.D.** offered an insightful workshop titled "Step-Parenting, Restructured Families, and Parent-Child Contact Problems." This session explored the unique challenges faced by stepfamilies, providing tools for family law professionals to better support these families as they navigate complex emotional and relational dynamics.
- **Lynn B. Norcia, Esq., and Mark Singer, Ed.D.**, led a thought-provoking session on "We Hear, But Do We Listen? Point C and the Child's Voice." This workshop focused on the often-overlooked role of the child's voice in family law proceedings and how professionals can create a more inclusive process to ensure children's views are heard and respected.

Networking, Wellness, and Social Activities

The conference also featured excellent networking opportunities, wellness activities like morning yoga and meditation, and a relaxed Hospitality Suite for informal discussions. Attendees celebrated the event's success at a formal banquet dinner, embracing the vibrant atmosphere of Boston.

Looking Ahead

The AFCC 61st Annual Conference not only provided critical insights and practical tools for family law professionals, but also fostered a sense of community and shared purpose among those dedicated to improving the lives of families in transition. The event reinforced AFCC's mission to be a catalyst for positive change in family law and to equip practitioners with the skills and knowledge they need to support families in times of crisis.

The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly: How Technology Can Impact Custody and Domestic Violence Cases

Recap of NJ-AFCC October 2024 Meeting

Holly M. Friedland, Esq.

On October 29th, NJ-AFCC hosted a thought-provoking CLE program titled "The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly: How Technology Can Impact Custody and Domestic Violence Cases," at the Wilentz Firm in Woodbridge, NJ. The session, presented by an esteemed panel of experts delved into the increasingly complex intersection of technology and family law cases. The event provided valuable insights for attorneys, mental health professionals, and family law practitioners seeking to stay ahead of the curve in a rapidly changing landscape.

Holly M. Friedland, Esq., of Morristown, started off the evening with a discussion of "the good", reviewing various tools available to assist parents in co-parenting and facilitating parenting time. Those who attended were able to hear the pros and cons of various online communication platforms, the use of shared calendars, and the viability of "virtual parenting time" and how Ms. Friedland has implemented the use of the various programs in her role as a parenting coordinator, mediator, and attorney.

Dr. Elise Landry, J.D., PhD, of Red Bank, also addressed some of the pros and cons of various co-parenting platforms which she has recommended in connection with her role as a forensic evaluator and how she uses the information available through these platforms when performing an evaluation. Dr. Landry spoke on some of the pitfalls evaluators frequently run into in today's technology fueled society; having to assess whether information being provided is genuine or fabricated, ensuring that any information provided is shared with both parents, and simply dealing with the sheer volume of material experts are expected to review in our world of text communications and social media commentary.

Unfortunately, as indicated in the title of the program, technology is not always used for good. Frequently, it can generate both "the Bad" and "the Ugly." The Hon. James A. DeMarzo, P.J.F.P of Morris County spoke of his observations from the bench overseeing both the matrimonial and domestic violence calendar. He spoke on the change in the face of domestic violence from face to face to online, including the implementation of the Victim's Assistance and Survivor Protection Act (VASPA) and the increase in the number of cyber harassment and stalking allegations. Judge DeMarzo also commented on his belief that the use of technology has contributed to an increase in animosity in what is already an emotionally charged docket. "People used to want to do what was fair. They might disagree on what 'fair' was, but they still wanted to be fair. Now more people are coming in wanting to destroy the other party." He attributed part of this change to the emotional distance generated from online communication and virtual appearances rather than before when people had to physically be in a room together and see each other face to face.

Finally, Steve Bradley, an expert in cyber security, guided attendees through the various ways that modern technology impacts legal proceedings. Mr. Bradley showcasing how tools like cell phone records, GPS tracking, and social media posts can provide critical evidence in custody disputes and domestic violence cases. These technological tools, when used properly, can help establish timelines, provide evidence of behavior, and ensure greater transparency in legal proceedings. However, Bradley also explored the "Bad" and "Ugly" aspects, focusing on how technology can be misused, leading to privacy violations, harassment, or the manipulation of evidence. The potential for technology to be used inappropriately in the context of domestic violence—whether through surveillance or cyberstalking—was a central topic of discussion. Attendees were given practical strategies for navigating the challenges posed by technology, including tips on how handle privacy concerns and the latest tools available in custody and domestic violence cases.

Ultimately, all those on the panel agreed that as technology continues to play a larger role in our personal and professional lives, understanding how to navigate its impact in family law cases has never been more critical.

Counterbalancing Trauma: The Role of Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs)

Elle Barr, Esq.

Divorce is undoubtedly a challenging experience for children, but it doesn't have to define their future. While Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) can have long-lasting effects, Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs) offer a crucial counterbalance, fostering resilience and improving health outcomes even for children with high ACE scores. This insight is empowering not just for parents, but also for attorneys and mental health professionals working in family law and child welfare.

Here's how PCEs can be leveraged to support children:

PCE #1: Open Communication

Children often express a deep need to be heard by their parents, especially during emotionally challenging times like divorce. Dr. Christine A. Profito, licensed psychologist and parenting coordinator, emphasizes that dedicating just five minutes of focused attention each day can significantly impact a child's sense of emotional security. Parents should prioritize listening to their children, even amid their own emotional stress.

PCE #2: Unwavering Parental Support

Children need to feel supported by their parents, regardless of the circumstances. Dr. April Harris-Britt, a child custody evaluator and psychologist, highlights the importance of minimizing logistical stress for children, such as ensuring they have clean clothes at both homes or assisting with packing. These small acts of support can make a big difference in a child's emotional well-being.

PCE #3: Engagement with the Broader Community

When the family unit is disrupted, it's critical for children to feel a sense of connection to other communities. Attending community events, volunteering, or joining local groups can help restore stability and provide opportunities for children to build social networks and form lasting bonds outside of their immediate family.

PCE #4: School Engagement

A sense of belonging in high school is essential for children's emotional stability. Support for milestones like prom, pep rallies, and extracurricular activities provides both structure and positive peer interactions. Dr. Harris-Britt also notes that children with personal interests, whether in sports or the arts, benefit from consistent opportunities to pursue them.

PCE #5: Supportive Friendships

Maintaining friendships is a critical aspect of childhood development, especially during times of family disruption. Parents should encourage their children to stay connected with friends and model healthy relationship-building behaviors. Despite the challenges of single parenting, facilitating social opportunities for children strengthens their emotional resilience.

PCE #6: Adult Mentors

Children who have non-parental adults invested in their lives—such as teachers, coaches, or extended family—tend to have higher social competence and self-esteem. Dr. Harris-Britt underscores the value of strong intergenerational relationships, noting that grandparents, in particular, play a significant role in a child's sense of identity and stability.

PCE #7: A Safe, Supportive Home Environment

Having at least one consistent, supportive adult in a child's life can greatly mitigate the emotional impact of divorce. Safety, both physical and psychological, is paramount. Dr. Profito stresses the importance of creating a space where children feel free to express themselves without fear of being judged or silenced. Co-parenting tools like apps can also shield children from conflict by streamlining communication between parents.

Building Resilience through PCEs

Even if a child experiences trauma through divorce, consistent PCEs can create a protective framework that supports their emotional health and resilience. For attorneys and mental health professionals, understanding and advocating for the inclusion of these positive experiences in family law cases can be pivotal in supporting the long-term well-being of children. By focusing on the child's best interests, including fostering PCEs, professionals can help guide families toward healthier, more resilient futures.

Book Review

The Thriving Lawyer: A Multidimensional Model of Well-being for a Sustainable Legal Profession.

Book Review by Eileen Kohutis, Ph.D.

Review originally published in the Independent Practitioner, vol 44, issue 1, pp 21-22.

Cipriano, Traci. (2024). *The Thriving Lawyer: A Multidimensional Model of Well-being for a Sustainable Legal Profession*. Informa Law from Routledge. 207 pages.

Traci Cipriano, psychologist, and former practicing attorney, combines her insight and knowledge of psychology and law to present a multidimensional model about how attorneys can sustain their well-being. Although her model is focused on attorneys, there are numerous insights and suggestions for psychologists as well. In her model, she explains how the individual attorney and legal community have each played a role in creating the quandary that the legal profession faces today and what each can do to remediate the situation. That is, how to create a healthy work-life balance?

As a former lawyer herself, Cipriano has intimate knowledge about the way that law firms function and about the legal culture itself. Acknowledging the legal culture maintains circumstances that foster competitiveness and meticulous accuracy, it also needs to address its role in needing to create a healthy work environment. Here, too, she offers recommendations on what firms can do to foster such an environment.

The legal profession has little room for error; competition and perfectionism coexist with anxiety, depression, substance abuse, and burnout. While this field attracts people who tend to be competitive and perfectionistic, these traits also are honed in law school. And it is here where people learn to suppress showing emotions because emotions are viewed as a sign of weakness. Yet, it is this suppression of emotions that causes many lawyers to utilize unhealthy ways of living which, in turn, take their toll on the individual and the field itself.

Cipriano's model encompasses the interplay among work-life balance, physical and mental health, the work environment, personal relationships, and financial resources. Discussing the complex ways that each of these factors affect the individual and the legal community at large, she employs numerous studies, scenarios, and examples that make the reading come alive. She explains psychological concepts and provides their application with straightforward suggestions and tips for implementation to deal with some of the stressors. For example, she discusses how stress affects a person and then provides the reader with self-care tips, such as practicing yoga and doing guided imagery. She then states that overwhelming stress may lead to depression, anxiety, cardiovascular issues, sleep disorders, and substance abuse.

Cipriano is practical. She states that just as individual well-being does not just happen overnight, neither will well-being in the legal community happen overnight. To this end, she offers suggestions for both the individual and for the legal community. She maintains that learning to take care of oneself is a process and that individuals need to take time to make this a priority. Her no-nonsense approach is to begin with small, achievable goals that can be built upon. She maintains that while an individual may be able to take control of his or her own behavior, the law firm needs to also make changes in its approach to employees.

Rather than give long recitations or detailed information from various studies, Dr. Cipriano introduces terms and concepts that are very familiar to psychologists. Yet she presents the information in a clear, informative and conversational tone. This is not to minimize what she says, but rather to highlight the relevance of the material and her masterful command of the topic.

The structure of the book is appealing as well. Throughout the book are vignettes that clearly illustrate Cipriano's points and each subject flows logically to the next one. Each chapter has a sizable reference list. The Appendix, like the rest of the book, has resources for the individual lawyer and the legal community.

In case you were wondering why the Independent Practitioner would publish a review about self-care for lawyers, self-care is not an alien concept to psychologists. Indeed, it is a concept relevant for all of us—especially in these times (and in keeping with the rest of the articles in this issue). While, as psychologists, we may not face the same pressures that attorneys do, we experience our own unique work-related pressures, and need to engage in self-care for ourselves. When we engage in our own self-care, we demonstrate that practice and priority to our patients as well.

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

Ad Hoc Committees

Legislative Affairs 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

Co-Chairs: Lynn Norcia and Elle Barr

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 Elle if you are interested in serving on the committee or in submitting articles for future editions.

Parenting Coordinator Peer Group

Co-Chairs: Amy Wechsler and Linda Schofel

This peer group is focused on providing mentoring support to members of our chapter who have completed formal Parenting Coordinator 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 listing 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: David Gomberg

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 David Gomberg.

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.

Program Committee

Co-Chairs: Holly M. Friedland and 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 Holly for consideration.

**All Committee Chairs can be
contacted via email to:**

afccnewjersey@gmail.com

Announcements

Chapter Events

2025 Annual Meeting

April 2nd, 2025
Maggiano's

Screening of SPLIT

This documentary and training will provide insight into divorce from a child's perspective, along with strategies to understand and address the complexities of divorce.

25th Anniversary Chapter Celebration and Symposium

Fall of 2025
More details coming soon

National Events

AFCC 62nd Annual Conference

**Bridging Perspectives: Pioneering
Solutions in Family Law**

May 28-31, 2025

New Orleans Marriott
New Orleans, Louisiana

Registration is Open
www.afccnet.org

NJ-AFCC 2024-2025 Executive Board of Directors

Officers

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

Directors

Elle Barr, Esq.
Jenny Berse, Esq.
David Gomberg, Ph.D.
Barry Katz, Ph.D.
Elise Landry, Ph.D.
Tamsen Thorpe, Ph.D.

Past Presidents

Ron G. Silikovitz, Ph.D. (1999-2002)
Philip N. Sobel, Esq. (2002-2007)
Sharon Ryan Montgomery, Ph.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. (2017-2019)
Marcy Pasternak, Ph.D. (2019-2021)
Denise Wennogle, Esq. (2021-2023)

Bridging Perspectives: Pioneering Solutions in Family Law

New Orleans Louisiana

New Orleans Marriott
May 28-31, 2025
afccnet.org

AFCC is an interdisciplinary and international association of professionals dedicated to improving the lives of children and families through the resolution of family conflict.