



 **AFCC**
**ASSOCIATION OF FAMILY
AND CONCILIATION COURTS**
Improving the lives of children and families
through the resolution of family conflict



October 2021
VOL. 16 No. 10

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President's Message

Mindy Mitnick, AFCC President

Yes! No! Yes!

I am, by nature, a joyful person. I was joyful as a toddler when my grandpa visited and pulled a shiny penny from his pocket. When I was in college and taught ballet to children in the community, I was joyful. And when I returned from my first AFCC conference in Arizona, I was joyful.

I said Yes! and could not wait for the next opportunity to have an AFCC experience.

AFCC has always represented Yes! to me. [Read more.](#)

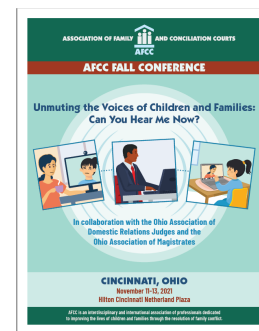
Join Us in Cincinnati Next Month for the AFCC Fall Conference!

AFCC Fall Conference

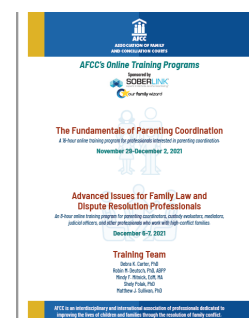
Unmuting the Voices of Children and Families: Can You Hear Me Now?

AFCC Fall Conference

*November 11-13, 2021
Cincinnati, Ohio*



AFCC Online Training Programs



The Fundamentals of Parenting Coordination
Nov. 29 - Dec. 2

Advanced Issues for Family Law and Dispute Resolutions Professionals

November 11-13, 2021
Cincinnati Netherland Plaza
Cincinnati, OH

Safety Protocols and Health Considerations

AFCC is proceeding with the Fall Conference in Cincinnati, November 11-13, 2021, as an in-person event. There are currently no state or local restrictions; however, AFCC will adhere to the health and safety protocols similar to many theater, concert, and dining venues that require **all attendees to show proof of full vaccination or a negative COVID test taken within 72 hours of the event.**

Attendees will also be required to wear masks when not eating or drinking, and hotel staff members will also be masked. Regrettably, there will be no hospitality suite.

We understand that travel and interacting with others is a personal decision and respect each person's choice. For those who are not yet ready to travel or convene, we encourage you to consider registering for any of the following programs being offered virtually this fall. Visit the [AFCC website](#) for a list of programs available online.

Visit the Conference Portal

The [conference portal](#) is your home for information about the AFCC Fall Conference.

- Read about all [conference sessions](#).
- Learn about [continuing education](#) credit applications in progress and how to obtain a certificate.
- Check [conference information](#) for hotel information, safety protocols, and more.
- Peruse the [conference brochure](#).
- View [conference sponsors and exhibitors](#) or sign up to promote your business.
- [Register](#) for the conference!

Hotel Reservations

A special rate of **\$147/night for single or double occupancy** is available exclusively to AFCC attendees. [Make your reservation online](#) or call 1-800-HILTONS (800-445-8667), ask for Hilton Cincinnati Netherland Plaza, and request the group code **AFCC**. Any unreserved rooms in the AFCC block will be released on October 21, 2021; the group rate will not be guaranteed after that date.

Exhibitors Welcome!

The Fall Conference gives exhibitors the first opportunity to interact with AFCC attendees face-to-face in over two years! [Read the prospectus](#) and contact Gina Wentling at gwentling@afccnet.org or 608-664-3750 for more information. Sign up now!

[Register now!](#)

AFCC 59th Annual Conference
Chicago, Illinois
May 11-14, 2022



Save the date!

AFCC Chapter Conferences & Webinar Series

Illinois Chapter Annual Conference
October 22, 2021
Being held virtually

Arizona Chapter Annual Conference
January 21-23, 2022
Sedona, Arizona

Colorado Chapter Annual Conference
February 4-5, 2022
Being held virtually

California Chapter Annual Conference
February 4-6, 2022
San Francisco, California

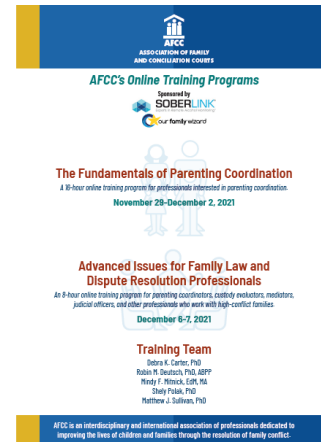
Texas Chapter Annual Conference
October 28-29, 2022
Save the date!

AFCC Online Training Programs Return Next Month!

AFCC is pleased to offer a comprehensive parenting coordination (PC) training, conducted online by a team of leading international practitioners and trainers. Join us for two comprehensive training programs later this year!

The training team includes:

- Debra K. Carter, PhD
- Robin M. Deutsch, PhD, ABPP
- Mindy F. Mitnick, EdM, MA
- Shely Polak, PhD
- Matthew J. Sullivan, PhD



The Fundamentals of Parenting Coordination November 29, 2021 - December 2, 2021 [Register now!](#)

This 16-hour training program is based on the 2019 AFCC Guidelines for Parenting Coordination and the Recommendations for Comprehensive Training of Parenting Coordinators. The program will take place in two segments per day, two hours each. Recordings of all sessions will be available for registrants.

Advanced Issues for Family Law and Dispute Resolution Professionals December 6-7, 2021 [Register now!](#)

This program addresses the challenges often associated with the most intractable family disputes, including intimate partner violence, parent-child contact problems (including parental alienation), the voice of the child, and providing virtual services. The program takes place in two segments per day, two hours each. Registration includes access to recordings of all training program sessions.

[Read the brochure](#) for more information!

Ask the Experts

Ask the Expert: Tips for Professionals Helping Parents Protect Their Children from the Negative Effects of Conflict

Irwin Sandler, Karey O'Hara, Sharlene Wolchik, and David Weinstock

Interparental conflict is arguably the most impactful risk factor for poor child outcomes following divorce. It increases children's risk for a wide range of problems including mental health problems and disorders, substance use, high-risk sexual behavior, and academic problems. Helping parents reduce interparental conflict is one of the most stressful and difficult, but important, challenges for helping professionals. If you are engaged in this work, these tips are for you. [Read more.](#)

AFCC Webinar Corner

Parent-Child Contact Problems: NCJFCJ and AFCC Working Toward Common Ground

Hon. Ramona Gonzalez and Matthew Sullivan, PhD
November 17, 2021 | 1:00-2:00pm Eastern Time US/Canada
Registration closes on November 16, 2021 at 9:00am Eastern Time US/Canada.

The leadership of the NCJFCJ and the AFCC have been working for more than a year on fashioning a joint statement on children's resistance/refusal to have contact with a parent. This inter-organizational collaboration was undertaken to help address some of the controversies and conundrums in the family justice field that adversely impact our ability to intervene to protect the health and well-being of families, particularly children. The constructive conversation we hope to have in the field may lead to filling in the gaps of training and resources for court professionals. This webinar will highlight where we are in the process of this collaborative effort and highlight the salient points we are stressing in this statement to help professionals move to more common ground.

Hon. Ramona A. Gonzalez is the presiding judge in La Crosse County, Wisconsin. She was first elected as a circuit judge in 1995 and re-elected in 2001, 2007, 2013 and 2019. Born in the Dominican Republic, Judge Gonzalez is a highly sought expert on family law issues, specializing in particular on national and international matters relating to child custody, domestic violence and civil child abduction. Judge Gonzalez is the 2019-20 President of the National Council of Juvenile & Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) and a national trainer on domestic violence issues.



Matthew Sullivan, PhD, has been in private practice in Palo Alto, California, specializing in forensic and clinical work in the Family Courts, for over 30 years. He is a pioneer in the development of Parenting Coordination role internationally and trains family justice professionals about understanding and intervening in Parent-Child Contact problems in high conflict shared parenting arrangements. He was the President of AFCC, 2019-20. He is the co-founder of Overcoming Barriers, Inc., a non-profit organization that has developed a variety of innovative programs for high conflict shared custody arrangements.



Registration

Members: \$15

Non-Members: \$50

Certificate of Attendance

Members: \$15

Non-Members: \$20

Continuing education credit may be available for lawyers, judges, psychologists, social workers, counselors, and other professionals. [Learn more.](#)

[Register today!](#)

Register Now for AFCC's December webinar!

Unbundling Legal Services

Tami Moscoe, LLB, Lorna Yates, LLB

December 15, 2021 | 1:00-2:00pm Eastern Time US/Canada

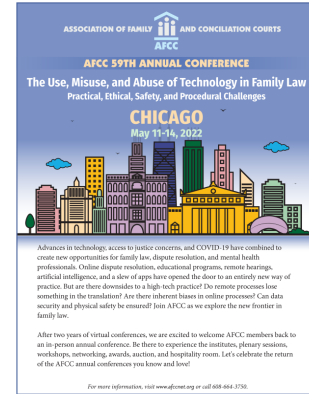
[Register now!](#)

Save the Date for the AFCC 59th Annual Conference in Chicago!

The Use, Misuse, and Abuse of Technology in Family Law: Practical, Ethical, Safety, and Procedural Challenges

Include AFCC in your plans for 2022! Set aside May 11-14, 2022 (which is not Mother's Day weekend!) to attend the AFCC 59th Annual Conference at the Chicago Marriott Downtown Magnificent Mile.

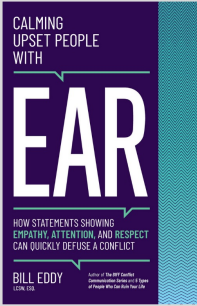
During the conference, you'll reconnect with colleagues, meet new people, earn continuing education credit, and learn from experienced, knowledgeable professionals. With meditation and yoga available, you can also work in some self-care! Do it for your professional development, your career, and yourself. We can't wait to see you there!




Member News

Bill Eddy, AFCC member from San Diego, California, has written a new book, *Calming Upset People with EAR: How Statements Showing Empathy, Attention, and Respect Can Quickly Defuse a Conflict!* Bill is the co-founder and Chief Innovation Officer of the High Conflict Institute. He pioneered the High Conflict Personality Theory (HCP) and has become an expert on managing disputes involving people with high conflict personalities. Bill is also a frequent and popular presenter at AFCC conferences. Learn more about the new book [here](#). Congratulations, Bill!

Newly Published!



Learn how statements showing **EMPATHY, ATTENTION, and RESPECT** can quickly defuse a conflict.



By Bill Eddy, LCSW, Esq.

Do you have a notable achievement to share? Email [Gina Wentling](#) with your story and a professional head shot or book image (PNG preferred), if you have one, to be featured in next month's Member News!

AFCC eNEWS

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

AFCC members are free to share eNEWS content.

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[Gina Wentling](#)





ASSOCIATION OF
FAMILY AND
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eNEWS

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President's Message

Yes! No! Yes!

Mindy F. Mitnick, AFCC President

I am, by nature, a joyful person. I was joyful as a toddler when my grandpa visited and pulled a shiny penny from his pocket. When I was in college and taught ballet to children in the community, I was joyful. And when I returned from my first AFCC conference in Arizona, I was joyful.

I said Yes! and could not wait for the next opportunity to have an AFCC experience.

AFCC has always represented Yes! to me. Yes! to wonderful locations where the conferences have been held. Yes! to amazing speakers whom I would never have heard otherwise. Yes! to meeting interesting, engaged professionals who truly exemplified our mission of helping families resolve conflict.

Yes! has meant best practice guidelines and then revised guidelines to reflect evolving practice standards. Our task force continues to work on the revision of the 2006 Model Standards for Child Custody Evaluation with a diverse group of Task Force members seeking consensus.

I hope AFCC has also been your place of Yes! Six thousand members around the world say Yes! to AFCC.

But then there was No! No meetings in person, no hugs and handshakes, no seeing friends and colleagues we've missed. No exhibit hall with booths displaying innovative programs, no breaks to catch up with old friends and make new ones, and no fun trinkets to take home.

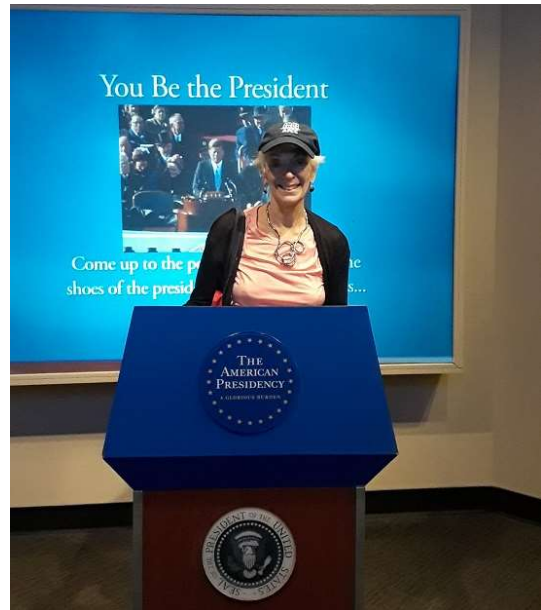
In July, Adam Grant wrote in the New York Times about a concept first coined by Emile Durkheim in 1912: "collective effervescence." Grant wrote, "Collective effervescence is the

synchrony you feel when you slide into rhythm with strangers on the dance floor, colleagues in a brainstorming session, cousins at a religious service or teammates on a soccer field. And during the pandemic it's been largely absent from our lives.”

I had not heard this wonderfully evocative term before, but it resonated within me as what has been missing in my life and, perhaps, in yours. Covid 19 and its mutations have created distance where we need connection, fear where we need calm, and “other” where we need “us.”

It was with some trepidation that I attended the biannual joint AFCC/AAML conference in September. So it was Yes? I was reminded of what makes our conferences such important events. We had meals together sharing updates on our personal lives, our work experiences through the various phases of the pandemic, and what we have coming up that we are looking forward to. We dusted off our rusty hugging skills, commented repeatedly on how much we had missed all of this, and noted how it felt like a little slice of normal.

I spent a wonderful few hours at the Smithsonian Museum of American History where everyone wore masks and I could not resist taking this photo.



We need the spark that happens when we stand over coffee and talk about our practices and programs. We need the lightbulb moments that come sitting in those huge ballrooms listening to plenary speakers. We need the excitement of meeting someone from thousands of miles away, sharing our challenges, and seeing how similar we all are in our dedication to families.

I know that the information we receive about Covid keeps changing and that many of us are experiencing decision fatigue. It feels some days as though we are trying to see over the horizon and what we need to know is just a bit out of reach. We cannot predict the status of Covid in November, but the numbers are trending in the right direction.

AFCC is committed to supporting your health and safety at our conferences. We are keeping decisions aligned with your well-being by adhering to the health and safety protocols of many theaters, concert, and dining venues that require all attendees to show proof of full vaccination or a negative Covid test taken within 72 hours of the event.

Grant wrote, "Joy shared is joy sustained." So now it's time for Yes! again. If you are comfortable being out and about, say Yes! to the Fall conference and say Yes! to what brings you joy.

Our Fall conference

We really hope you'll be there

Cincinnati, OH



ASSOCIATION OF
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eNEWS

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Ask the Expert: Tips for Professionals Helping Parents Protect Their Children from the Negative Effects of Conflict

Irwin Sandler, PhD; Karey O'Hara, PhD; Sharlene Wolchik, PhD; and David Weinstock, PhD

Interparental conflict is arguably the most impactful risk factor for poor child outcomes following divorce. It increases children's risk for a wide range of problems including mental health problems and disorders, substance use, high-risk sexual behavior, and academic problems. Helping parents reduce interparental conflict is one of the most stressful and difficult, but important, challenges for helping professionals. If you are engaged in this work, these tips are for you.

1. **Working on reducing interparental conflict is hard work.** Remind yourself often why you do this work. We all know that continuing conflict between parents following a divorce or separation is one of the primary risk factors for children's short-term distress and long-term mental health problems. The science is really clear on this point. What people are probably less aware of is that there is also evidence that continuing conflict takes a toll on a child's relationship with both parents! Both during the process of divorce and years later, children are often angry with their parents about getting them involved in the conflict. We also know that there are lots of reasons why parents keep the conflict going, such as personality disorders and strong emotions of hurt, anger, and hate. Very powerful stuff. So, it is not easy to stop the fighting. It takes a lot of work for them and you. This isn't news to you but reminding yourself of why you do this work can help to keep you going.
2. **There are things you can do to help – teach evidence-based skills to reduce conflict to protect children.** Although you can't undo the hurt or anger there are effective strategies you can teach parents who are caught up in conflict. Over the last few years, new evidence has come from two randomized trials of programs for divorced parents indicating success in reducing interparental conflict (Dads for Life; Online New

Beginnings Program). These are the first reports from randomized trials that provide scientific evidence of such effects. Across these two studies, reduced conflict was reported by fathers, mothers, and children. Why did these programs succeed? Both programs took a similar approach. They didn't try to change parents' personalities or take away the hurt or anger. Instead, they taught skills parents could use to protect their children from witnessing conflict and to reduce the overall level of conflict. This *Ask the Expert* column describes some of the skills and strategies that are taught in these evidence-based programs.

3. **Explore the parents' intent.** This is probably the most critical step. Help parents take stock of the outcomes they want to achieve. Do they want to get back at the other parent, defend themselves, or simply let their children know the "truth" about the other parent? Their desire to do any of these things is fully understandable and may come from strong emotions that are hard to resist acting on. But parents need to know that there is a big cost to putting their children in the middle. Awareness of the cost to their children is probably the most powerful counter to motivations to continue the conflict. One of the programs that has demonstrated success describes mobilizing parents to take a "protective stand" as a way to make a commitment to protect your children from conflict. Often parent goals such as "winning an argument" are incompatible with protecting their children.
4. **Strengthen parents' awareness of their power to choose actions.** The most common reason parents give for behaviors that continue or escalate the conflict is some version of "It's not my fault? I'm not the one who starts it! He/She is the one!" Whatever version of this song that is sung, the implication is the same. "Don't look at me...there's nothing I can do." Powerlessness is used as an excuse for inaction. But – once you have helped parents commit to taking a protective stand, you can help them become aware of what they can do, what choices they have, what is within their power. You can also educate parents about behaviors that may inadvertently increase conflict or put children in the middle. Most obviously, this includes badmouthing, arguing in front of the children either in person or on the phone, or sharing "the truth." Also, a parent's reactions to the other parent who is initiating conflict can either increase or decrease their children's exposure to conflict. Educating parents about more subtle behaviors that put children in the middle is also important, such as sending messages to the other parent through the child or allowing badmouthing of the other parent by extended family or family friends.
5. **Help parents translate intent into action.** Intent is not enough. Parents can anticipate when conflict situations are likely to come up and plan ahead for how they will handle them. Although conflict interactions may seem spontaneous, they often can be anticipated, such as the exchanges from one household to the other or discussions of hot topics involving money or parenting time. Parents can reduce these "high-risk" situations

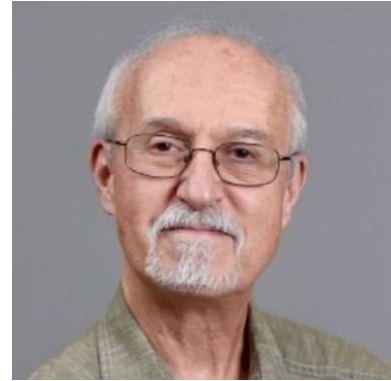
using specific tools to identify the high-risk situation and sit down in advance to make a plan on how to reduce these high-risk situations. Sometime parents can be helped to jointly create such plans. In addition, parents can plan what they are going to do individually before the situation, during the situation to avoid conflict and to congratulate themselves afterwards for helping to avoid or decrease the conflict.

6. **Help parents prepare for anticipated conflict.** One element of the plan is what parents say to themselves to prepare for how they will protect their children if the other parent instigates conflict. This includes acknowledging that this may be a situation in which conflict arises, recognizing that their children are at risk for being exposed, and repeating their commitment to take a protective stand to keep their children out of it. Just repeating to themselves that they are not going to “take the bait” of provocations that may occur can help a lot. As the situation approaches, they can remind themselves of this goal and what they plan to do to keep their children out of the middle.
7. **Help parents plan their behaviors during and after the conflict to protect their children and themselves.** If the parent’s anticipation comes to pass and an argument ensues with the children present, the second part of the parent’s plan kicks in. First, physically usher the children away from the situation if possible. Then, don’t do things that may escalate the situation, like arguing back. Instead, acknowledge the disagreement and ask the other parent to pick a time when the children will not be around to talk about the disagreement and try to reach a way forward. Then, after the situation has passed, if they have avoided having their children exposed to the conflict, the parent should give themselves a verbal “pat on the back” for taking their protective stand. They need this kind of reinforcement because what they did is not easy. If things didn’t go well – it’s not helpful for parents to beat themselves up. It is more helpful to acknowledge the problem, reaffirm their commitment to protect their children from conflict, and to revise their plan on how to do so the next time. This isn’t easy.
8. **Help parents realize that the first step to reduce conflict is not to do things that make it worse.** Conflict between divorced and separated parents can be destructive even when it occurs with no children around. It can sap a parent’s energy, lead to depression and carry over to interactions in front of the children. A critical place to start reducing the level of conflict is to inhibit doing things that turn up the heat, things that make it worse. It is understandable that a parent may want to strike back, win the argument, prove they are right, or have the last word. These inclinations may lead parents to say something sarcastic, critical, or defensive, or even physically strike out. Parents can also withdraw from the situation by simply ignoring what the other parent said or nonverbally dismissing it...”whatever.” These behaviors will definitely lead to a cycle of escalating

recrimination and conflict. Parents can catch themselves from doing things that make the conflict worse and remind themselves that they are not going to “take the bait.”

9. **Help parents realize that they can do things to de-escalate the situation.** Once a parent has inhibited their urge to do things that turn up the heat, they are able to engage in the hardest part of all...showing respect for their child's other parent. It is critical for parents to show respect, even if they don't actually feel respect. This may be hard to do because of the intense feelings involved, but actually, people show respect for others they don't particularly like all the time. They do it at work in interactions with customers or supervisors or co-workers that they don't actually like. They do it in the service of their larger goal – in this case, preventing the conflict from getting out of control and protecting their child's psychological health. Acknowledging the other parent's view doesn't mean agreeing with it. It is a step toward figuring out how to respond to it in a way that keeps the conflict from getting out of control. It can involve behaviors like acknowledging the disagreement and asserting a commitment to work it out. It may mean picking a time to discuss when the situation is less heated and keeping it. It may mean using tools such as digital communication that reduces the chance for escalating conflict.
10. **Help parents find support for dealing with their feelings.** The strategies we've described are not easy to do and take practice. Teaching parents to use these strategies can be helpful. But they are not designed to help parents deal with the intense feelings of hurt or anger that often drive conflict. For that, parents need another outlet. Talking with a close friend or spiritual leader who cares about them, who does not share the same level of negative emotion about the other parent, and who does shares their goal of reducing conflict can be helpful. Talking to a professional counselor might be a good option for some parents.
11. **Help yourself by finding support for what you do.** Working with parents in high-conflict divorces can take its toll. It can lead to vicarious trauma of the professional. Remember to develop ways to take care of yourself such as having colleagues you can talk with to share your high and low points as you do this work. Remember that you can't help others if you aren't helping yourself.

Irwin Sandler, PhD, has published major reviews of the literature on parent education programs in the family courts and in other settings. He has been a member of the working group of the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine that produced a landmark review of preventive interventions for children and adolescents and has been a co-author on a paper describing standards of evidence for preventive interventions. He is the co-developer and evaluator of the New Beginnings Program that has published multiple studies demonstrating long-term benefits for children following divorce.



Karey L. O'Hara, PhD, is an Assistant Research Professor of Psychology at Arizona State University. She earned her PhD in clinical psychology from the University of Arizona in 2017. She completed a clinical internship at SUNY Upstate Medical University and an NIH-funded T32 postdoctoral fellowship at Arizona State University's REACH Institute. Her research lies at the intersection of prevention science, child mental health, and family law. She conducts research on the ways that children and parents adjust after stressful events in the family, such as parental divorce, bereavement, and incarceration. Her current work focuses on designing interventions so that they are informed by science, easy to use, and effective in promoting children's mental health and well-being. Her work is currently funded by a career development award from the National Institute of Mental Health (K01MH120321).



Sharlene Wolchik, PhD, is a Professor of Psychology and Director of the Research and Education Advancing Children's Health Institute at Arizona State University. Her research has focused primarily on parents' role in promoting children's healthy adaptation to divorce. She co-developed, along with Dr. Sandler, the New Beginnings Program, a parenting-after-divorce program and evaluated it in three randomized controlled trials. The trials showed program effects in multiple domains of functioning, with program effects lasting up to 15 years after participation. She and Dr. Sandler recently evaluated a web-based version of this program and found very positive effects. She was awarded the Stanley Cohen Award for Research from the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts.

Dr. David Weinstock received his Ph.D. from the University of Arizona and his J.D. from the Boston University School of Law. He is a licensed psychologist in Arizona and a licensed and retired attorney in New York and Massachusetts. His focus is in family law, specifically family evaluations and family and individual counseling. He has conducted family law evaluations for over two decades, both privately and at the Pima County Conciliation Court. He has also provided treatment to adolescents, including experience working with the gifted population. Dr. Weinstock has experience working within the criminal justice system, which includes training at the Arizona State Hospital, conducting competency evaluations and risk assessments. Dr. Weinstock has experience with sexual offender and sex addiction evaluations and treatment. He participated with the Maricopa County Superior Court's Behavioral Health Committee. He is a board member of Arizona's Association of Family and Conciliation Courts (AzAFCC), a board member for the Arizona Psychological Foundation (AzPF), a former member of Arizona's Domestic Relations Committee, and a former co-chair of the Arizona Psychological Association's forensic committee, the former Communications Representative for the Arizona Psychological Association (AzPA), and a former governing council member of the Arizona Psychological Association (AzPA).

