

Coercive Control, Child Abuse, and Parenting Time Issues:

A Child-centered approach

COURSE OVERVIEW

Child custody/parenting time in the context of spousal/partner abuse encompasses:

- The coercive control tactics and domestic abuse dynamics that impact best interests of the child in custody/parenting time cases
- Mediation requirements in divorce/custody/parenting time cases
- The multidisciplinary approach related to child custody and visitation/parenting time when domestic abuse/coercive control tactics and child abuse occur prior to separation and during visitation

This multi-disciplinary perspective of court system issues impacted by coercive control tactics and domestic abuse dynamics is designed to help court system personnel better meet the needs of children in child custody/parenting time/visitation litigation.

HOW MANY CHILDREN ARE AFFECTED BY FAMILY COURT ABUSE?

58,000 children per year are placed in the custody of their abusers

588,600 children (at any time) are in the custody of their abusers

70% of abusers who petition the court for sole or shared custody of their children are granted their request (Chesler, 2011)

10% of all divorces are considered high-conflict; Actually, Coercive Control Divorces



HIGH CONFLICT VS. COERCIVE CONTROL

- Coercive control was frequently reconstituted as mutual parental “conflict.”
- **High conflict**- characterized by mutual distrust and disagreement
 - Children from high-conflict families may experience adverse effects, but their experiences and needs are different from those living in CC environments
- **Coercive control**- the perpetrator’s intent is to wield power and control over their victim(s) via numerous tactics aimed to intimidate and incite fear (*Hart 2011, p.37; Meier 2003, p.191; Stark 2009, pp. 294–95*).
- Violence creates a distinct separation and coparenting experience for women and children because of safety concerns and threats to their physical and mental health (*Jaffe & Crooks, 2007*).

<https://www.iriss.org.uk/resources/esss-outlines/coercive-control>

ASSESSMENT OF CONFLICT: HIGH CONFLICT VS. COERCIVE CONTROL

- **Conflict** is between two people
- **Coercive control** is one partner exerting control over the other partner
- **Stop** mutualizing Coercive Control



Jaffe, P. G., & Crooks, C. V.
(2007) in Edelson & Williams

Abusers' Post-Separation Abuse



- Custody cases are their magic weapon for disarming all of a mother's legal protections. ZORZA, JOAN PPT © 2010 & MIKE BRIGNER, ESQ

While the general public often naively hopes that separating from an abusive partner ameliorates these significant concerns, IPV commonly continues after women leave either through continued physical assaults or sexual assaults. Importantly, women with children who leave abusive partners are often faced with bitter, high-conflict divorce and child custody and access disputes, (Tutty, Radtke & Nixon, 2023).

ABUSERS' POST-SEPARATION ABUSE

- Other coercive control tactics not tied to custody are:
 - Stalking
 - Emotional threats
 - Abuser's manipulation of social institutions, i.e., by bad-mouthing her to social services.
 - Personal threats during child visitation, often the only contact between the ex-partners.
 - Using the children (including threats to kidnap them)
 - Threats, excessive phone-calls, and denigrating comments
 - Using economic abuse

CHILDREN AT RISK

- Studies have evaluated the co-occurrence of domestic violence and forms of child maltreatment or abuse:



Children growing up in families in which intimate partner violence (IPV) takes place are at increased risk to become victims of child maltreatment (CM). ^{1,2,3,4,5}



Children who witnessed IPV in the past year were almost four times more likely to experience CM in the same year compared to children who did not witness IPV. ^{6,7,8}



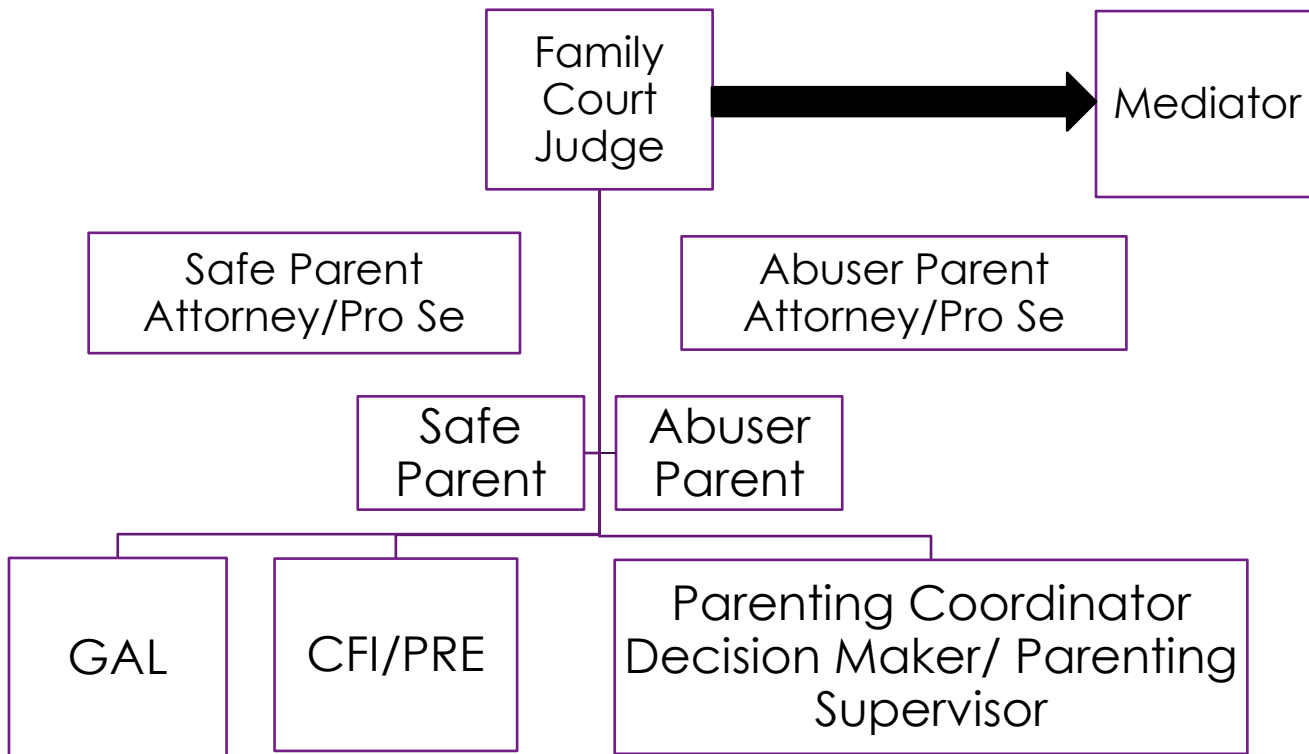
Children who live in homes with IPV are more likely to be sexually abused than children who do not live in homes with adult violence. ^{2, 6, 18, 20, 23}

Abusers Seek Sole Custody

- Domestic violence perpetrators are more likely to contest custody than non-abusers.
 - Abusive fathers are more than **twice** as likely to petition for sole custody than non-abusive fathers (*American Psychological Association/APA*).

ABUSIVE MEN SEEK
SOLE CUSTODY,
NOT BECAUSE
THEY WANT
THE CHILDREN,
BUT AS A MEANS
TO PUNISH
A WOMAN FOR
ESCAPING THEIR GRIP
OF CONTROL.

MULTIDISCIPLINARY APPROACH RELATED TO CHILD CUSTODY



DIFFERENCES IN COURT VALUES

Criminal
Court
Values:

Offender accountability, Victim Safety

Juvenile
Court
Values:

Child Protection

Civil Court
Values:

Victim & Child Safety

Family Court
Values:

Both parents have access

MEDIATION

Requirements of Family Courts

- Exceptions: Domestic Violence (must have proof)

Limited/ poor/no assessments for domestic violence

Lack understanding of Coercive Control Tactics

Victims/ Mothers comply due to past or current threats

Mediators subject to coercive manipulations

HISTORY OF GENDER-BIAS AGAINST MOTHERS

“Fathers who fight tend to win custody, not because mothers are unfit or because fathers have been the primary caretakers of their children, but because mothers are women and are held to a much higher standard of parenting.”

“Mothers also risk losing custody if they accuse fathers of physically or sexually abusing them or their children—even or especially if these allegations are supported by experts.”

“Female professionals were often completely taken in by charming, sociopathic men, dangerous and violent men, and men who sexually abused their children.”

“...lawyers and judges are quick to say that joint custody should not apply where there is domestic violence and incest, they are often the ones who do not believe that domestic violence and incest exist all that much.”

(Chesler, 2011)

WHAT COURTS ARE MISSING

CC and Child Abuse far more harmful than previously understood.

- Courts need education on CC, ACE Study, and neurobiological impacts on children.

Fear and stress cause most of the harm.

- Children experience CC when mothers are experiencing it. Toxic stress has life-long impacts on children.

One-quarter of US children sexually abused by age 18.

- CPS discounts or refuses to believe mothers when children report sexual abuse after parents separate.

COMMON MISTAKES FROM IGNORANCE OF ACE*

Exclusive or primary
focus on physical
abuse.

Assumption older
abuse doesn't
matter.

Approaches that
require victims to
"get over it."

High conflict vs.
Coercive Control
approaches

*ACE- Adverse Child Experiences

COMMON MISTAKES FROM IGNORANCE OF ACE



Use of co-parenting instead of parallel parenting in abuse cases.

Reliance on court professionals who are not trauma-informed.

Minimizing the significance of CC and child abuse.

Failure to recognize the significance of fear.

HARM FROM FAILURE TO INTEGRATE ACE

Failure to recognize true reports of abuse.

Fundamental mishandling of child sexual abuse cases.

Children die early from murder, suicide, substance abuse, and stress.

HARM FROM FAILURE TO INTEGRATE ACE



Children more likely to suffer cancer, heart disease, mental illness, and other health and social problems.

Children silenced, isolated, and suffering.

Children do not receive the treatment that could help them.

NEEDED REMEDIES

Use of trauma-informed professionals.

Calculating the ACE score of all children involved in abuse cases.

Focus on actions needed to save children from ACE consequences.

Treating abuse cases as a matter of life and death.

NEEDED REMEDIES

Emphasizing the importance that safe parent makes health care decisions.

Focusing on how to reduce fear and stress in children and safe parent.

Require abusers to change behavior if they want unsupervised visitation.

BREAKOUT

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Many survivors want the judge to know how they were coercively controlled.

How do you discuss this with a survivor to help her understand:

- How (and who with) she can process her emotions and work on healing
- That the court is uninterested in what happened to her because the divorce doesn't have fault in most states
- That the court is more interested in impacts on the children emotionally and physically

Causing to Stumble

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“Truly I tell you,” He said, “unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes a little child like this in My name welcomes Me.

But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. Woe to the world for the causes of sin. These stumbling blocks must come, but woe to the man through whom they come!

See that you **do not look down on any of these little ones.** For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of My Father in heaven. (Matthew 18:3-7. 10)



SAUNDERS STUDY

WHAT COURTS ARE MISSING

There is now a specialized body of coercive control knowledge.

Court professionals need training about specific CC subjects.

Most evaluators and other professionals do not have the specific CC knowledge needed.



WHAT COURTS ARE MISSING

Professionals without the necessary knowledge tend to focus on the myth that mothers frequently make false reports and unscientific alienation theories.

Professionals without the needed knowledge make recommendations that harm children.

Coercive Control advocates have the most CC information courts need.



WHAT COURTS ARE MISSING

A mother's anger or emotion is overemphasized in DV/CC cases.

Impacts on children who experience CC.

Use of psychological tests causes more harm than good.

COMMON MISTAKES FROM IGNORANCE OF SAUNDERS STUDY

Limiting experts to mental health professionals without specific training in DV/CC.

Failing to rely on professionals with the specific DV/CC expertise or requesting their involvement as well.

Continuing to impose harmful outcome cases.

Allowing co-parenting in DV/CC cases.

Relying on professionals who don't know how to recommend safety planning.

COMMON MISTAKES FROM IGNORANCE OF SAUNDERS STUDY

Failure to use risk assessment in DV/CC cases.

Assuming the end of a relationship ends the risk.

Failure to consider the importance of fear.

Failure to focus on the impact of DV/CC on children.

Assuming children benefit from an abusive parent in their lives.

HARM FROM FAILING TO INTEGRATE SAUNDERS STUDY

True reports of abuse routinely disbelieved.

Children are placed at-risk physically and emotionally.

The risk to children is minimized or ignored.

Benefit of having both parents in children's lives exaggerated.

HARM FROM FAILING TO INTEGRATE SAUNDERS STUDY

Judges spend their entire careers receiving misinformation from a small group of unqualified professionals.

The myth that mothers frequently make false reports is promoted.

The alienation scam is perpetuated.

NEEDED REFORMS

Courts need to use a multi-disciplinary approach that includes experts in DV/CC and child sexual abuse.

Professionals without the specific knowledge recommended by Saunders are unqualified to handle potential DV/CC cases.

Courts must stop creating harmful outcome cases and existing orders vacated.

Judges must accept training from professionals who are not judges.

FREQUENT CATASTROPHIC MISTAKES

FREQUENT CATASTROPHIC MISTAKES

Over 963 children involved in contested custody murdered since 2008. (September 25, 2023)


- 493 family court-involved cases
- 469 children killed before court involvement
- 136 Family Court Failures (children killed in preventable cases)
- Most murders committed by abusive fathers.
- Courts repeatedly provide the access the killers need.
- Many murders permitted because of the myth that mothers frequently lie. <https://centerforjudicialexcellence.org>

FREQUENT CATASTROPHIC MISTAKES

Bartlow's (2016) study explains why courts fail to reform dangerous practices.

- Judges assume local tragedy was an exception.
- Courts fail to look for patterns within and between cases.
- Court professionals extremely defensive about their mistakes.
- No effective process to review tragedies or create needed reforms.

FREQUENT CATASTROPHIC MISTAKES



Mothers make deliberate false reports less than 2% of the time.

Lawyers routinely counsel mothers not to raise sexual abuse concerns.

Courts often rely on professionals without specialized knowledge of child sexual abuse.

**IN CC AND
CHILD ABUSE
CASES,
COURTS
SHOULD
HOLD EARLY
HEARING
LIMITED TO
ABUSE ISSUES.**

Lack of distractions helps courts focus on most important issues.

Cases that now take years can be resolved in a few hours.

Requirement applies to small group of the most dangerous cases

**COURT
PROFESSIONALS
NEED
TRAINING
AND
RETRAINING
ABOUT CC.**

Courts need to learn about current scientific research.

Courts need multi-disciplinary training that includes experts in DV/CC and child sexual abuse.

Professionals need to unlearn misinformation they have heard their entire careers.

**STATES MUST
PROVIDE
ADDITIONAL
FUNDING TO DV
AGENCIES SO
ADVOCATES
CAN
PARTICIPATE IN
CC CUSTODY
CASES.**

Saunders found DV/CC advocates have more of the specific DV/CC knowledge courts need than the professionals now used.

CC advocates should help train court professionals.

CC advocates should be trained to serve as expert witnesses.

JOAN MEIER STUDIES

Abusers create myths that women often make up false allegations of abuse and particularly sexual abuse to discourage courts from taking their abuse seriously. (PAS, PAD, PA, Alienation)

Abusers often use false allegations to distract attention from their own abuse.

Meier found that when women raised allegations of spousal or child abuse during custody cases, **judges believed them only 36% of the time. In cases where fathers countered by claiming alienation, judges were even less likely to credit mothers.**



This paper can be downloaded from
Network: <https://ssrn.com/abstract/3611111>

JOAN MEIER STUDIES

When fathers cross-claim alienation, courts are more than twice as likely to disbelieve mothers' claims of any type of abuse than if fathers made no alienation claim; and

When fathers cross-claim alienation, courts are almost 4 (3.9) times more likely to disbelieve mothers' claims of child abuse than if fathers made no alienation claim.



Joan S. Meier
National Family Violence Law Center
Professor of Clinical Law; Director,
National Family Violence Law Center,
George Washington University Law School

Meier Study Reviewed Published Cases Involving Claims of DV, Child Abuse, and Alienation.

- Gender bias continues to be widespread.
- Alienation theories have more influence than DV or child abuse.
- Most child sexual abuse allegations disbelieved.
- Court practices tilt abuse cases in favor of alleged abusers and against protecting children.

**MORE EVIDENCE
CUSTODY COURTS
GET HIGH
PERCENTAGE OF
ABUSE CASES
WRONG**

Meier Study Reviewed Appellate Cases Involving Claims of DV, Child Abuse, and Alienation.

- Mothers reporting abuse believed 41% of time and 23% when alienation claimed.
- For child sexual abuse cases mothers believed 15% of time but only 2% when alienation claimed.
- Mothers lose custody 26% of time when reporting abuse, 44% when alienation claimed and 73% when alienation believed.
- Other research proves mothers disbelieved and punished far more than the actual circumstances warrant.

**MORE EVIDENCE
CUSTODY COURTS
GET HIGH
PERCENTAGE OF
ABUSE CASES
WRONG**

JOAN MEIER STUDIES

The rates at which courts credited mothers' claims of fathers' abuse depended on the type of abuse alleged.

The rates at which courts credited mothers' claims of fathers' abuse varied when father claimed alienation depending on the type of abuse alleged.

Custody switches to the father varied by the type of abuse mother alleged.

Custody switches to the father when the courts credited fathers' abuse varied by the type of abuse alleged.

Categories of types of abuse alleged:

- DV
- Child physical Abuse (CPA)
- Child sexual abuse (CSA)
- Mixed DV with CPA or CSA
- Mixed CPA and CSA, or any abuse.

*Check webpage for document of Meier's statistics

JOAN MEIER STUDIES

Mothers' custody losses when father claims alienation varied by the type of abuse alleged.

Mothers' custody losses when court credited fathers' alienation claims varied by the type of abuse alleged.

Mothers' custody losses when mother is found to be alienating and father is found to be an abuser varied by the type of abuse alleged.

Categories of types of abuse alleged:

- DV
- Child physical Abuse (CPA)
- Child sexual abuse (CSA)
- Mixed DV with CPA or CSA
- Mixed CPA and CSA, or any abuse.

*Check webpage for document of Meier's statistics

BREAKOUT

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How do you educate survivors on all these different pieces of research that show how fathers get custody and what mothers can do to maintain the maximum amount of parenting time or custody?

The Little Children and Jesus

Jesus said, “Leave the children alone, and don’t try to keep them from coming to me, because the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”
(Matthew 19:14)



COERCIVE CONTROL TACTICS IN FAMILY COURT

Litigation Abuse

Using Court-appointed Professionals

Using Family Court Judges

SOME LEGAL TACTICS ABUSERS USE



Judges need to be aware of these abuser tactics and prevent them from working

- Abusers seek custody as a way to maintain control over their victim.
- Abusers use visitation exchanges to continue their abuse.
- They seek mutual orders of protection to nullify an order obtained by a woman.

SOME LEGAL TACTICS ABUSERS USE



Financial Abuse examples:

- They seek joint custody to maintain control or trade for financial considerations.
- They hide income and assets to maintain control and punish women for leaving.
- They use their superior resources to hire better, more aggressive attorneys to help win court cases.

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT ABUSERS – LITIGATION ABUSE

Protracted
divorce litigation

Repeated
continuances,
delays

Unsupportable
custody demands

Burdensome
discovery, esp.
depositions

Trading children
for money

Repeated
motions for
custody/
evaluations

Repeated
motions to
increase visitation

Repeated
motions to reduce
support

Repeated
motions for
visitation
contempt

Litigation Abuse Coercive Control

1 __never, 2 __hardly ever, 3 __sometimes, 4 __often, 5 __quite often, 6 __not applicable, 7 __prefer not to answer

After you separated/divorced	Litigation Abuse
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1. Your attorney did not bring out in court evidence you provided to prove domestic violence/abuse or child abuse occurred during your relationship. ⁵
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	2. Your attorney told you not to bring up the domestic violence that happened during your relationship because you did not report it to police and no arrest or court records of the abuse exist. ⁵
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	3. Your attorney told you not to bring up how your ex abused the children or continues to abuse them because Child Protective Services refused to investigate or came back with an unfounded or unsubstantiated determination. ⁵
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	4. Your ex or your ex's attorney responded to your one-page motion with huge amounts of court-related paperwork. ^{5,45}
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	5. Your career was ruined because you missed appointments and deadlines to attend court hearings. ⁶
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	6. After the separation, your ex's attorney contacted your children's therapist to have the two of you meet together with the therapist to discuss your children. ⁵
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	7. Your court orders were prepared by your ex's attorney and contained many untrue statements. ⁵
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	8. After your ex was court-ordered to pay you a substantial sum of money, he refused to pay anything. Your ex told the judge he would rather go to jail. ⁶
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	9. Your ex used your request to increase child support as an opportunity to investigate your life, build a good enough case, refused to return the children after their summer visits, and used his substantial and respectable professional practice to gain permanent custody. ⁶
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	10. Your ex got a restraining order prohibiting you from leaving the state with the children. ⁶
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	11. Your ex married his girlfriend just before the court hearing, then talked in court about how the stepmother would be a stable influence on the children. ⁶
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	12. Your ex arranged for his mother or new wife to care for your children even when you were available to do so. He used this arrangement in court to gain primary parenting time or sole custody (physical and legal). ⁵
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	13. Your Attorney quit or withdrew from your case the day before or the day of the court hearing leaving you to represent yourself (Pro Se). ⁵
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	14. Immediately after you separated and took the children with you, your husband/partner filed for emergency custody of the children claiming you were emotionally/mentally unstable. ⁵

ASSESSMENT OF CC: USING LITIGATION ABUSE

*For the complete "Litigation Abuse" checklist, see Dr. Debra's book *Eyes Wide Open: Help! with Control Freak Co-parents* or visit

https://www.houseofpeacepubs.com/ipv_assess.htm

ASSESSMENT OF CC: USING COURT-APPOINTED PROFESSIONALS

When you told the mediator, custody evaluator, or GAL there was a history of CC tactics, abuse, or violence during the relationship directed at you or the children, they would dismiss abuse reports without evidence or would say it no longer mattered since you were not in the relationship anymore. This was especially true for non-physical abuse toward you. ¹⁶

Court-appointed professionals denied reports of CC tactics, abuse, or violence during custody evaluations, mediation, or GAL meetings even when documentation was provided to the professional. ^{6, 16}

The mediator, custody evaluator, or GAL criticized or punished you for attempting to protect your children in ways the mediator, custody evaluator, or GAL did not understand. ¹⁶

The GAL was “charmed” by your abusive ex and he was given custody/unsupervised access to your children.⁵

Using Court-Appointed Professionals

1 __never, 2 __hardly ever, 3 __sometimes, 4 __often, 5 __quite often, 6 __not applicable, 7 __prefer not to answer

After you separated/divorced	Using Court-appointed Professionals
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1. Your court appointed custody evaluator, mediator, or guardian-ad-Litem (GAL) misinterpreted information collected in their interviews. ^{5,6}
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	2. The mediator assigned to your case did not allow you to meet in a separate room from your ex after you reported domestic violence or abuse of you or your children during the relationship. ^{5, 16}
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	3. Court-appointed professionals denied reports of coercive control tactics, abuse, or violence during custody evaluations, mediation, or GAL meetings even when documentation was provided to the professional. ^{6, 16}
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	4. Your ex alleged parental alienation against you when he was the one brainwashing the children against you. ^{5,6,11}
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	5. There was more than one Child Family Investigator, or custody evaluator appointed to your case. ⁵
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	6. Mediators, custody evaluators, or GALs recommended or encouraged joint custody (50/50 split) even when presented with evidence of coercive control tactics, abuse, or violence. ¹⁶
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	7. You were asked directly by the mediator, custody evaluator, or GAL if there was a history of coercive control tactics, abuse, or violence during the relationship directed at you and/or your children. ¹⁶
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	8. When you insisted on divorce, your ex had you examined by multiple psychiatrists or psychologists. ⁶
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	9. During mediation, custody evaluations, or meetings with the GAL, your experiences of coercive control tactics, abuse, or violence were not considered a safety factor for your children even if your ex showed signs of "physical abuse" toward the children before the meetings. ¹⁶
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	10. Psychiatrists said your self-esteem was too low for you to be a good parent. ⁶
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	11. During mediation, custody evaluations, or meetings with the GAL, your experiences of coercive control tactics, abuse, or violence were not considered a safety factor for your children even if your ex showed signs of "emotional abuse" toward the children before the meetings. ¹⁶
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	12. The Psychiatrist/psychologist said your career was bad for your children. ^{5, 6}
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	13. When you were not asked, you directly, you told the mediator, custody evaluator, or GAL there was a history of coercive control tactics, abuse, or violence during the relationship directed at you and/or the children. ¹⁶
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	14. You were afraid to tell the mediator, custody evaluator, or GAL there was a history of coercive control tactics, abuse, or violence during the relationship directed at you or the children. ¹⁶
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	15. When you told the mediator, custody evaluator, or GAL there was a history of coercive control tactics, abuse, or violence during the relationship directed at you and/or the children, they would ask the father to respond to the allegations and ask for admissible evidence. ¹⁶
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	16. The GAL was "charmed" by your abusive ex and he was given custody/unsupervised access to your children. ⁵

ASSESSMENT OF CC: USING COURT-APPOINTED PROFESSIONALS

*For the complete "Using Court-appointed Professionals" checklist, see Dr. Debra's book *Eyes Wide Open: Help! with Control Freak Co-parents* or visit https://www.houseofpeacepubs.com/ip_v_assess.htm

KEY QUESTIONS FOR COURT-APPOINTED PROFESSIONALS WHEN CC USED IN RELATIONSHIPS

Refer to Family Court course for questions.

What is your understanding of the use of children as leverage by an abusive parent in high conflict/contested custody cases?

Watch out for use of terms like: “parental alienation,” “parental alienation syndrome,” or similar terms. These are “**red flags**” that this person does not understand Coercive Control tactics.

QUESTIONS FOR THERAPISTS

What is your approach to working with children's emotional, social, and cognitive development in shared parenting situations where prior Domestic Abuse or Coercive Control is experienced by a child?

Look out for therapists who are more interested in **reunification** of a child who does not want contact with the abuser parent instead of meeting the **emotional needs** of the child.

How willing is the therapist to **explore, work with, and understand** why a child does not want contact with one parent?

How do you tell if the child is reluctant/refusing contact **with one parent because the other is coaching them** to not want to be with that parent?

QUESTIONS FOR THERAPISTS

How do you help children view their world on a reality basis when one parent uses manipulations to gain power and control over the child?

How do you handle children's communication with you when parents ask you to tell them everything the child shared in therapy?

Do you work strictly with the child in therapy or do you bring the parent in for part of the session?

What role do you ask the parent to take on in therapy?



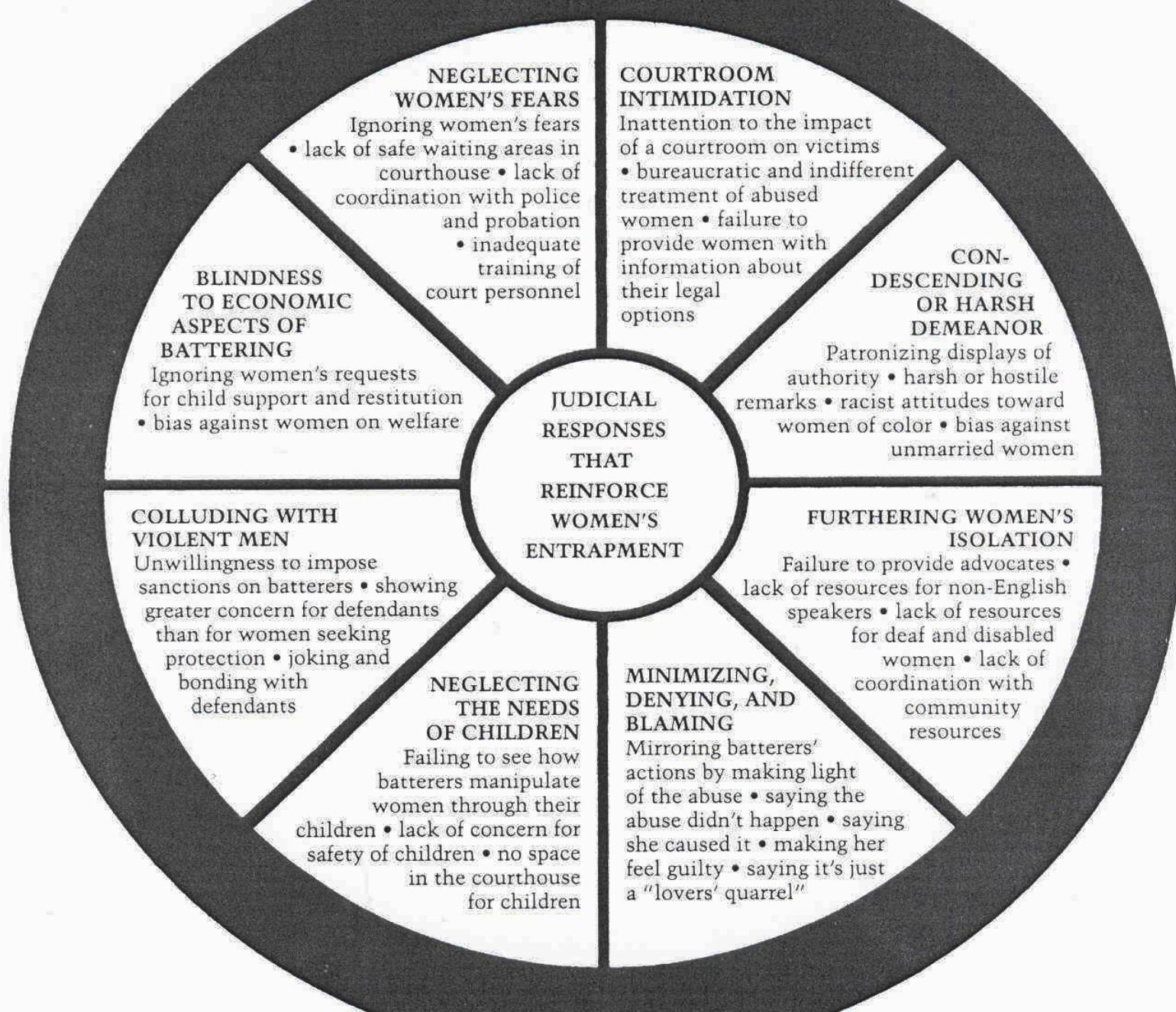
QUESTIONS FOR THERAPISTS

When parents are no longer living together, how do you work with both parents around issues concerning their children?

How do you handle reports of child abuse/neglect/sexual abuse grooming/sexual abuse by the child?

How do you approach financial abuse of one parent by the other parent in therapy when the child is the client/patient?

Is the parent who brings the child to therapy responsible for paying for part or all of the therapy? Are both parents equally responsible for payment for therapy?



JUDICIAL RESPONSES REINFORCE WOMEN'S ENTRAPMENT

ASSESSMENT OF CC: USING FAMILY COURT JUDGES

The judge ordered mother into “alienation therapy” to learn how to stop “alienating” children from father.⁵

The judge kept you from moving away from abuser and kept you from family and resources by threatening loss of custody if you relocate.¹²

The judge refused to consider psychological damage to children as “abuse,” and would not include children in protective orders.⁵

The judge viewed your unwillingness to consider joint custody with an ex-partner who had never been *formally* charged with abuse or domestic violence as unreasonable.⁵



The judge didn't know enough about domestic abuse victims, and misread how you looked or acted in court.

Viewed your passive behavior and well-groomed appearance as evidence that the domestic violence did not really harm you.²⁰

Viewed your emotional behavior and exhausted appearance as evidence that you were "too emotional," mentally ill, perhaps lied about the abuse, or were abusive yourself.²⁰

Didn't understand that your avoidance, emotional numbing, and distraction are the result of being an abused spouse.

Didn't understand that your thinking and memory problems or anxiety and nervousness in court may be the result of being an abused spouse.

**ASSESSMENT
OF CC:
USING
FAMILY
COURT
JUDGES**

The judge issued restraining orders to both the abusive partner and to you, indicating that the abuse was partially your fault.^{5, 35}

The judge down-played the domestic violence in the relationship, or refused to consider the pattern of abuse over time.^{5, 20}

The judge treated domestic violence charges against your abusive ex-partner and against you as equally real, even though your ex filed charges against you as an intimidation strategy after you separated.

ASSESSMENT OF CC: USING FAMILY COURT JUDGES

The judge viewed counseling received by the abuser as a “cure,” and with no recent domestic violence incidents, treated the abusive partner as a responsible and caring parent.⁵

The judge held you, the **mother**, to a **higher level of care for children than the father.**³⁵

The judge cut off your testimony before you have placed all facts in evidence, but allows the father to complete his testimony uninterrupted.⁵

ASSESSMENT OF COERCIVE CONTROL— USING FAMILY COURT JUDGES

Gag orders were placed on you by the judge to keep you from raising allegations of abuse/neglect or judicial misconduct.³⁵

The judge refused to grant or enforce restraining orders against the abusive partner.

The judge down-played the domestic violence in the relationship, or refused to consider the pattern of abuse over time.^{5, 20}

The judge counted only documented incidents of DV; some require several incidents, count only recent incidents, or require a higher standard of proof.³⁵

ASSESSMENT OF CC: USING FAMILY COURT JUDGES

Using Family Court Judges

1 __never, 2 __hardly ever, 3 __sometimes, 4 __often, 5 __quite often, 6 __not applicable, 7 __prefer not to answer

After you separated/divorced	Using Family Court Judges
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1. The judge ordered you to have visitation only at the father's discretion. ⁶
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	2. The judge threatened dire consequences if you do not obey. ¹²
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	3. The judge treated you with a father-like attitude, denial of protection, and treated your claims as lies. ¹²
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	4. The judge kept you from moving away from the abuser and kept you from family and resources by threatening loss of custody if you relocate. ¹²
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	5. The judge allowed himself or herself to be fooled by your abusive partner's charm. ⁵
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	6. The judge charged you with contempt and jailed you for not providing a cell phone for your child, even though the child has access to other phones or communication methods to use to communicate with the other parent. ⁵
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	7. The judge put you in jail for protecting your children from an abusive (sexually, physically, emotionally) father. ⁵
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	8. The judge used the abuser's previous threats to take your children away from you, making this nightmare come true. ¹²
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	9. The judge ordered you into "alienation therapy" to learn how to stop "alienating" the children from their father. ⁵
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	10. You wanted to move away and were prevented from moving away with your children even if this would allow them to survive economically and psychologically. ^{5,6}
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	11. The judge refused to issue or enforce adequate child support, spousal maintenance, or alimony orders, and can reinforce this control. ¹²
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	12. Your ex kidnapped your child and then became assaultive to others after you found him. Multiple people pressed charges, and your ex was arrested. He was released without bail, once the judge understood it was a "domestic matter." ⁶
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	13. The judge viewed your unwillingness to consider joint custody with an ex-partner who had never been <i>formally</i> charged with abuse or domestic violence as unreasonable. ⁵
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	14. The judge didn't know enough about domestic violence victims, and misread how you looked or acted in court. For example, the judge viewed your passive behavior and well-groomed appearance as evidence that the domestic violence did not really harm you; the judge viewed your emotional behavior and exhausted appearance as evidence that you were "too emotional," mentally ill, perhaps lied about the abuse, or were abusive yourself. ²⁰
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	15. The judge refused to grant or enforce restraining orders against your abusive partner. ⁵
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	16. The judge was inclined to favor the calm, cooperative, controlled (and controlling) father over you, the distressed, anxious, and difficult mother. ⁵
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	17. The judge refused to consider psychological damage to your children as "abuse" and failed to include the children in protective orders. ⁵

ASSESSMENT OF CC: USING FAMILY COURT JUDGES

*For the complete "Using Family Court Judges" checklist, see Dr. Debra's book *Eyes Wide Open: Help! with Control Freak Co-parents* or visit

https://www.houseofpeacepubs.com/ip_v_assess.htm

BREAKOUT

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How would you educate a survivor about avoiding court professionals as much as possible, and how they can prepare to work with court professionals when they do have to work with them?

Instructions for Fathers

Fathers, don't stir up anger in your children, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:4)

Fathers, do not antagonize your children, so that they will not become discouraged. (Colossians 3:21 NASB).



BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD STANDARD

- Example:
 - Colorado Revised Statutes: Title 14. Domestic Matters > Title 14. Dissolution of Marriage - Parental Responsibilities > Article 10. Uniform Dissolution of Marriage Act



BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD STANDARD

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§ 14-10-124. Best interests of child

(1) Legislative declaration.

While co-parenting is not appropriate in all circumstances...., in most circumstances, it is in the best interest of all parties to encourage frequent and continuing contact between each parent and the minor children of the marriage after the parents have separated or dissolved their marriage.

In order to effectuate this goal when appropriate, the general assembly urges parents to share the rights and responsibilities of child-rearing and to encourage the love, affection, and contact between the children and the parents.

BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD STANDARD

§ 14-10-124. Best interests of child

(1.3) Definitions. For purposes of this section and section 14-10-129(2)(c), unless the context otherwise requires:

- **(a) “Domestic violence”** means an **act of violence or a threatened act of violence** upon a person with whom the actor is or has been involved in an intimate relationship, and may include **any act or threatened act** against a person or against property, **including an animal**, when used as a **method of coercion, control, punishment, intimidation, or revenge** directed against a person with whom the actor is or has been involved in an intimate relationship.
- **(b) “Intimate relationship”**
- **(c) “Sexual assault”** has the same meaning as set forth in section 19-1-103.

BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD STANDARD

§ 14-10-124. Best interests of child

(1.5) Allocation of parental responsibilities. The court shall determine the allocation of parental responsibilities, including parenting time and decision-making responsibilities, in accordance with the best interests of the child giving paramount consideration to the child's safety and the physical, mental, and emotional conditions and needs of the child as follows:

- **(a) Determination of parenting time.** The court, upon the motion of either party or upon its own motion, may make provisions for parenting time that the court finds are in the best interests of the child, with the **child's safety always paramount**, unless the court finds, after a hearing, that parenting time by the party would **endanger the child's physical health or significantly impair the child's emotional development**. In addition to a finding that parenting time would endanger the child's physical health or significantly impair the child's emotional development, in any order imposing or continuing a parenting time restriction, the court shall **enumerate the specific factual findings supporting the restriction, including findings related to domestic violence, child abuse, and child sexual abuse**, and may enumerate the **conditions that the restricted party could fulfill in order to seek modification in the parenting plan**. When a claim of child abuse or neglect, domestic violence, or sexual assault where there is also a claim that the child was conceived as a result of the **sexual assault has been made to the court, or the court has reason to believe that a party has committed child abuse or neglect, domestic violence, or sexual assault where there is also a claim that the child was conceived as a result of the sexual assault**, prior to determining parenting time, the court shall follow the provisions of subsection (4) of this section.

BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD STANDARD

§ 14-10-124. Best interests of child

In determining the best interests of the child for purposes of parenting time, the court shall consider all relevant factors, including:

- **(III.5)** Any report related to **domestic violence** that is submitted to the court by a **child and family investigator**, if one is appointed pursuant to section 14-10-116.5; a **professional parental responsibilities evaluator**, if one is appointed pursuant to section 14-10-127; or a **legal representative of the child**, if one is appointed pursuant to section 14-10-116. The court may consider **other testimony regarding domestic violence from the parties, experts, therapists for any parent or child, the department of human services, parenting time supervisors, school personnel, or other lay witnesses.**
- **(VI)** The ability of the **parties to encourage the sharing of love, affection, and contact between the child and the other party**; except that, **if the court determines that a party is acting to protect the child from witnessing domestic violence or from being a victim of child abuse or neglect or domestic violence, the party's protective actions shall not be considered with respect to this factor;**

BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD STANDARD

§ 14-10-124. Best interests of child

(b) Allocation of decision-making responsibility. The court, upon the motion of either party or its own motion, shall allocate the decision-making responsibilities between the parties based upon the best interests of the child. In determining **decision-making responsibility**, the court may allocate the decision-making responsibility with respect to each issue affecting the child mutually between both parties or individually to one or the other party or any combination thereof. When a **claim of child abuse or neglect or domestic violence** has been made to the court, or the court has **reason to believe** that a party has committed **child abuse or neglect, domestic violence, or sexual assault** where there is also a claim that the child in question was **conceived as a result of the sexual assault**, prior to allocating decision-making responsibility, the court shall follow the provisions of subsection (4) of this section. In determining the best interests of the child for purposes of allocating decision-making responsibilities, the court shall consider, in addition to the factors set forth in paragraph (a) of this subsection (1.5), all relevant factors including:

BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD STANDARD

§ 14-10-124. Best interests of child

(f) When the court finds by a preponderance of the evidence that one of the parties has **committed domestic violence**, the court may order the party to submit to a **domestic violence evaluation**. If the court determines, **based upon the results of the evaluation, that treatment is appropriate, the court may order the party to participate in domestic violence treatment**. At any time, the court **may require a subsequent evaluation** to determine whether additional treatment is necessary. If the court awards parenting time to a party who has been ordered to participate in domestic violence treatment, the court may order the party to obtain a report from the treatment provider concerning the party's progress in treatment and addressing any ongoing safety concerns regarding the party's parenting time. **The court may order the party who has committed domestic violence to pay the costs of the domestic violence evaluations and treatment.**

SAFE CHILD ACT IS SOLUTION TO URGENT PROBLEM

Health and Safety of Children-
should be the first priority in all custody and visitation decisions.

Courts routinely focus on less important issues.

Courts are not trauma-informed.

Courts frequently fail to recognize health and safety issues.



Courts must integrate current scientific research (like ACE, Saunders, and Meier's studies).

Courts have failed to create reforms based on scientific research.

Courts have failed to abandon outdated and discredited practices.

Failure to use current scientific research leads directly to avoidable tragedies.

Courts must use a multi-disciplinary approach.

- Mental health professionals rarely have the necessary DV expertise.
- There is a specialized body of DV knowledge that can be used to recognize and respond to DV and child abuse.
- When professionals fail to recognize abuse, they focus on less important issues.
- Use of the same small group of professionals has created an insular atmosphere where new ideas and research are discouraged.

WHY IS CUSTODY LITIGATION SO SUCCESSFUL FOR ABUSERS?

Child Custody Expert:

“The most important thing to remember about many abusive fathers seeking child custody is that this is a NO-LOSE GAME for him, because...

He doesn't really want the kids anyway!”



Zorza, Joan PPT © 2010 & Mike Brigner, Esq.

Reality

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Zorza, Joan PPT © 2010 & Mike Brigner, Esq.



"I got custody of the kids. Do you want one?"

BREAKOUT

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How would you educate a survivor about using the “timeline outline” tool and how it can be used to address:

- “best interest” factors and
- impacts on her children?

Use of Courts

The Lord detests dishonest scales, but accurate weights find favor with him. (Proverbs 11:1)

'You shall not do injustice in judgment; you shall not show partiality to the poor nor give preference to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly. You shall not go about as a slanderer among your people; and you are not to jeopardize the life of your neighbor. I am the Lord. You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may certainly rebuke your neighbor, but you are not to incur sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance, nor hold any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord. (Leviticus 19:15-18)

Woe to those who enact unjust statutes. And to those who constantly record harmful decisions. (Isaiah 10:1)



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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE/ COERCIVE CONTROL AND CHILD ABUSE CASES

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- <http://www.savingdamon.com/>
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AXWP0OpQtxw> - Stacy Lynne (son stolen by family court)
- <http://educate-yourself.org/cn/stacylynnestory28sep12.shtml> - Stacy Lynne back story
- <https://www.westword.com/news/catherine-keske-csu-prof-ordered-back-to-jail-in-parenting-dispute-over-e-mail-5876653> - Catherine Keske story

*Many more stories found in resource links

RESOURCES- LIMITED LIST

- <http://nowayoutbutone.com/> - Holly Collins' story
- <http://www.thelizlibrary.org/>
- <http://centerforjudicialexcellence.org/>
- <http://www.civicresearchinstitute.com/dvr.html>
- <http://www.barrygoldstein.net/>
- <https://ducotelaw.com/legislation/> - Protective Parent Reform Act
- <http://www.safekidsinternational.org/>
- <http://leadershipcouncil.org/index.html>
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=IR4pMTwTXg0 - Breaking the Silence: Children's Stories
- <https://youtu.be/wjJSbBOwtJg> - Geerte Frenken interview with Dr. Debra on Family Court

MEDIATION RESOURCES

- Mosaic Method
 - https://www.mosaicmethod.com/documents/DOJ_Study.pdf
- Beck (2011)- Intimate Partner Abuse in Divorce Mediation
 - <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/236868.pdf>
- Beck & Raghavan (2010)- Intimate partner abuse screening in custody mediation: The importance of assessing coercive control
 - <https://www.houseofpeacepubs.com/documents/BeckandRaghavanFCR2010-mediationscreen.pdf>
- Cleak, Schofield & Bickerdike (2014)- Efficacy of family mediation and the role of family violence: Study protocol
 - <https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1471-2458-14-57>
- NCJFCJ webinar- Custody Mediation and Domestic Violence: What Advocates Should Know
 - <https://www.ncjfcj.org/webcasts/custody-mediation-and-domestic-violence-what-advocates-should-know/>

FAMILY COURT RELATED POWER & CONTROL WHEELS

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<https://www.houseofpeacepubs.com/documents/Ptacek-Judicial-responses-that-entrap.pdf>

<https://www.houseofpeacepubs.com/documents/Ptacek-Judicial-responsesempowerwomencourts.pdf>

<https://speakoutloud.net/institutional-abuse/power-and-control-lawyer-client-relationship>

<https://www.theduluthmodel.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Abuse-of-Children-2.pdf>

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