



CO-PARENTING CABLE THE NCPC NEWSLETTER

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March 2011

A Message From Debra K. Carter, Ph.D.



Welcome to the third edition of **The CO-PARENTING CABLE!** Our featured columnist this month is the Honorable Lynn Tepper of the Sixth Judicial Circuit at Dade City, Pasco County. Judge Tepper presides over Sections 6 & 29 of the Sixth Circuit which is all East Pasco Juvenile Dependency Cases.

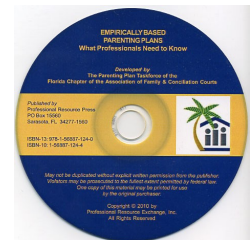
March marks the celebration of St. Patrick's Day, when everyone is Irish for a day! However

this holiday, while beloved by celebrant's worldwide, can also be a challenge to the person who suffers from a drug or alcohol addiction. The pervasive message of a universal day to party, instead of the religious celebration that it really is, can tempt an addict's sincere efforts to remain clean and sober. Not only is the addict affected, but their family suffers consequences of addiction also. In my new book, *Parenting Coordination: A Practical Guide for Family Law Professionals*, I devote a chapter to dealing with parents and families who have special needs, such as addiction. Just because a parent is an addict does not automatically mean they

can't parent effectively. However, children's safety has to be the number one priority. Judge Tepper brings us a view from the bench with her contribution to our newsletter – **Goals for Dealing with Addicted Parents & Their Children—Getting to Reunification**. Praise and consequences factor heavily into the reunification process to produce a whole family, not one torn apart by the disease of addiction.

Whether you celebrate St. Patrick's Day with Corned Beef and Cabbage, Soda Bread, or a libation, please remember that your family is counting on you to be here for many St. Patrick's Days to come!

Empirically Based Plans: What Professionals Need to Know (2009), developed by the FLAFCC Task Force, provides up-to-date research to assist the family law professional in crafting parenting plans. This compendium offers everything you need to know to create scientifically-supported parenting plan recommendations. Order directly from the publisher at www.pypress.com.



NCPC's upcoming training schedule

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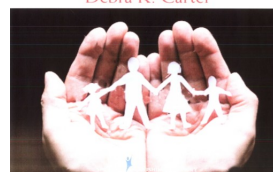
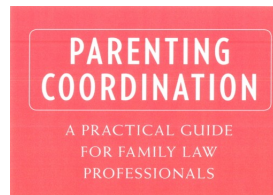
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Have a burning question that only the NCPC can answer? Your question could be featured in an upcoming issue of the Co-Parenting Cable! Due

Ask The Experts

to space restraints only one question per issue will be published and answered. **Ask us at contact@TheNCPC.com.**





Goals for Dealing with Addicted Parents and Their Children... Getting to Reunification

Lynn Tepper, Circuit Judge

6th Circuit, at Dade City, Pasco County, Florida

A method of successfully restoring families with addiction issues can be as simple as using praise and consequences. Overcoming addictions may be a lifetime struggle but regaining one's life and family may become a reality if Judges implement the goals of Drug Court into the Family division.

Those of us who have presided in Drug Court are familiar with the goals, including developing a "fully integrated, comprehensive approach to handling cases involving substance abuse." This same approach translates easily to the Unified Family Court. Each uses a non-adversarial approach. In Drug Court it is the traditional team of substance abuse treatment provider, case manager, state, defense and Judge; in Dependency Court, it is also a team: the Community-based care manager, attorneys for DCF, the parents and Guardian ad litem, GAL volunteer, the caretaker and significant others (also known as the case planning conference). In pure Family Court, as well as in Dependency, the team may simply be the parents (with or without their attorneys) and a Mediator, i.e. traditional Alternative Dispute Resolution. Both strive, for the sake of the participants, to resolve the case in a fair and timely manner. The sooner the addiction is identified, referrals and coordination of treatment begun, the sooner the addict can begin a new substance-free life reunited with children. Again, this is the traditional, successful Drug Court model but in Dependency it is known as the Case Plan and Dispositional Order. In Family Court, the Judge can structure a Final Judgment or a Supplemental Final Judgment to address the addiction, the minimum prerequisites for achieving the next level of contact with a child (such as unsupervised or overnight parenting time), and the time line during which the court will specifically retain jurisdiction to review the parent's progress without the necessity of commencing a new action.

There is a fine line that must be held if the addict is to gain the perspective and tools to lead a substance-free life. In all three of these types of court, it is imperative that there be a coordinated strategy of sanctions and incentives. This requires both a frequent and monitored testing program as well as pro-active judicial monitoring. Alone they will not be effective. Dirty urines and missed substance abuse classes or new arrests must have swift, defined and just consequences. Likewise, consistent effort (which may vary based upon the individual's limitations) should be praised. Incentives must always prioritize the safety of children or others. In Drug Court, there are weekly sessions and progress ordinarily brings known incentives or rewards, such as less frequent returns to court, or a reduction in the frequency of drug screens, even rewards from the local business communities. And of course, there is always praise and encouragement. In Dependency and Family Court, it can be more frequent returns to court, so that progress can be measured, praised and modifications made in the parenting time at a far swifter pace than would ordinarily occur. Frankly, using this model, a parent could be contesting a finding of dependency but still be encouraged to take advantage of the service referrals and make vast progress towards establishing a substance-free lifestyle by the time of the scheduled contested hearing. Often a "consent" may take place at pre-trial or on the adjudicatory hearing date, followed by disposition and 72 days into a case, a parent could be well on the way to remaining substance-free.

Likewise, in what may have been an involved, contested dissolution or post-dissolution case, with a specific framework set forth in a Final Judgment, such as proof of completion of substance abuse treatment recommendations including aftercare, the parent has an outline of what it will take to return to a more desirable type of parenting time. It avoids "a do-over" which may occur if a new

Judge takes over the division as well as avoiding the other parent's temptation to change the rules.

Frequent meaningful court-monitoring is essential. Frustrations in solving transportation and funding problems are swiftly solved, reassurances by the Judge in what may be a sea of doubting friends and family may be just the encouragement needed to get through another day. A bit more time or contact with a child may be the best motivator. For the child of a substance-abusing parent, there is often a great deal of concern about that parent's well-being. That child's anxiety level can be abated by seeing the parent they love. There are mixed judicial practices about whether parenting time should be conditioned upon clean urine screens or whether it is sufficient that they appear straight and sober, not smell like drugs or alcohol and remain alert during the parenting time. I adhere to the later. For substance-abusing parents, particularly those with prescription-drug addictions, the lag time between appearing better and actually being drug-free may be too long. It reduces the parent's motivation and deeply worries the child. For babies it may forever interfere with bonding.

These guidelines fall right in line with the Florida Supreme Court's 2001 Guiding Principles for Defining and Implementing a Model Family Court:

- * Therapeutic justice should be a key part of the family court process. Therapeutic justice is a process that attempts to address the family's interrelated legal and non-legal problems to produce a result that improves the family's functioning. The process should empower families through skills development, assist them to resolve their own disputes, provide access to appropriate services, and offer a variety of dispute resolution forums where the family can resolve problems without additional emotional trauma. (continued on page 3)



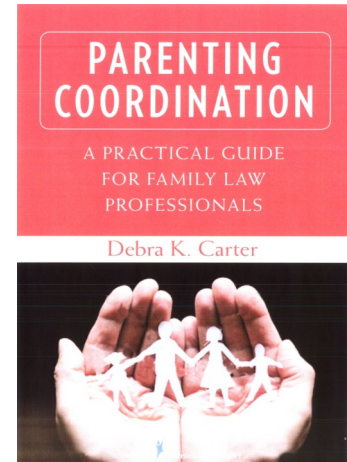
Parenting Coordination—A Practical Guide for Family Law Professionals

Parenting Coordination—A Practical Guide for Family Law Professionals describes the Integrated Model of parenting coordination, including the parenting coordinator's professional role, responsibilities, protocol for service, and ethical guidelines. The book includes up-to-date research on interventions for high conflict parents, children's adjustment post-divorce, and conflict resolution techniques. There is also a guide for developing intervention strate-

gies and building in protective factors for children in parenting plans. Filled with useful tools and resources, this book will serve as an essential reference for quality parenting coordination practice.

IT'S HERE!

The first definitive parenting coordination guidebook is available at all major online booksellers. It is also available for order at the Springer Publishing website—
<http://www.springerpub.com/product/9780826106476>



Getting to Reunification, cont.

- * Children should live in safe and permanent homes.
- * The needs and best interests of children should be the primary consideration of any family court.
- * All persons, whether children or adults, should be treated with objectivity, sensitivity, dignity and respect.
- * The court's role in family restructuring is to identify services and craft solutions that are appropriate for long-term stability and that minimize the need for subsequent court action.

Children and families, regardless of whether the parent is sober or drug or alcohol addicted, need stability. The courts need to assure that when the families leave the court system, they are healthier, not worse for their journey

Don't forget about the AFCC 48th Annual Conference June 1-4, 2011 at the Hilton Bonnet Creek Resort in Orlando. This year's conference addresses ***Research, Policy and Practice in Family Courts: What's Gender got to do with it?*** Please register on line at www.afccnet.org

What's New in Parenting Coordination?

The NCPC has created a new group on LinkedIn entitled "**Cooperative Parenting**" to keep professionals up to date on the many changes taking place in Parenting Coordination in Florida and across the nation. If you are not already a LinkedIn member, you can still join the discussion.

Go To: 

Also, follow us on Twitter for the latest news and happenings!



PC Mentoring

Now Available in Individual or Group Format! Contact us for scheduling, pricing, and more information!

www.TheNCPC.com



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for the children

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**Upcoming
Trainings**

Dr. Debra K. Carter, Co-Founder is a nationally recognized expert in the area of Parenting Coordination. As an expert consultant to attorneys and courts across the United States, Dr. Carter has played an integral role in the integration of mental health and family law. A frequent lecturer and Parenting Coordination instructor, Dr. Carter has served as an adviser to legislatures, Bar Associations, local courts and Supreme Courts as various jurisdictions integrate Parenting Coordination into their laws, procedures, and standards of ethical conduct. She has played an integral role in helping to develop legislation governing the practice of parenting coordination and Ethical Guidelines for Parenting Coordinators. A nationally acclaimed speaker who has received numerous awards and honors for her work and contributions to the family law system, Dr. Carter is the Co-Founder of the National Cooperative Parenting Center (NCPC) which provides training, consultation, and supervision to Parenting Coordinators as well as forensic services to attorneys, mental health professionals, and families. Dr. Carter is a Licensed Psychologist, a Certified Family Law Mediator, an instructor, clinical researcher, as well as a practicing Parenting Coordinator. She is the author of Parenting Coordination: A Practical Guide for Parents (in press) and co-author of Empirically Based Parenting Plans: What Professionals Need to Know (2009).

Dr. Michael B. Spellman, Co-Founder is a licensed Clinical Psychologist and Parenting Coordinator, as well as a Florida Supreme Court Certified Family Law Mediator. In these capacities, he has worked extensively with children, families, and the court over the past 30 years. Dr. Spellman also serves as a consultant to clinicians and corporations that are interested in maximizing their quality of service. Dr. Spellman has served on Florida's Commission on Mental Health and Substance Abuse and was awarded "Psychologist of the Year" by his peers. On the national level, Dr. Spellman was awarded the prestigious Heiser Award by the American Psychological Association.

Parenting Coordination Basics*

May 12-14, 2011

Kissimmee, FL

Parenting Coordination is a newly emerging area of practice for Professional. A parenting coordinator typically helps high conflict parenting partners to implement their parenting plan by facilitating the resolution of disputes between parents and/or legal guardians, providing education, making recommendations to the parties, and making decisions within the scope of the court order of appointment. This seminar presents a comprehensive overview of the definition, role, responsibilities and function of the Parenting Coordinator in jurisdictions across North America. Parenting Coordination is an out-of-court intervention for high conflict parents who chose an alternative dispute resolution process to assist them in managing parenting disputes and minimizing litigation. This seminar is 3 days and focuses on practice issues such as types of orders needed, ethics, how to begin an effectively manage these difficult cases as well as professional liability issues.

Cost: \$475 **Early Registration (ends April 12)**

\$495 Registration Fee (after April 12)

\$550 at the door

\$35 extra for a hard copy manual

Your registration includes all materials on USB. Please bring your Laptop!

CE Credits: 24 Contact Hours for Psychologists; 28 CEs for LCSW, LMHC, and LMFT; General CLER Credits including 3.0 Ethics, .50 Substance Abuse and .50 Mental Illness Awareness; 8.0 hours including 4.0 hours of Domestic Violence for Family and Dependency Mediators.

*Meets the training requirements established by Florida Statute 61.125.(4)(a)(2)(c)