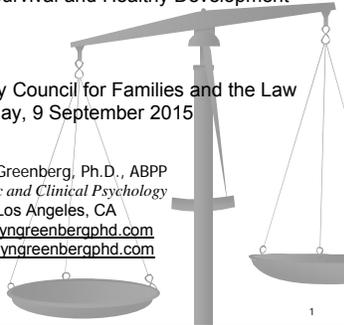


Integrated Service Planning for Children of Conflicted Families – Research and Practice Developments to Support Emotional Survival and Healthy Development

Israel Multidisciplinary Council for Families and the Law  
Wednesday, 9 September 2015

Lyn R. Greenberg, Ph.D., ABPP  
*Forensic and Clinical Psychology*  
Los Angeles, CA  
[lyn@lyngreenbergphd.com](mailto:lyn@lyngreenbergphd.com)  
[www.lyngreenbergphd.com](http://www.lyngreenbergphd.com)



---

---

---

---

---

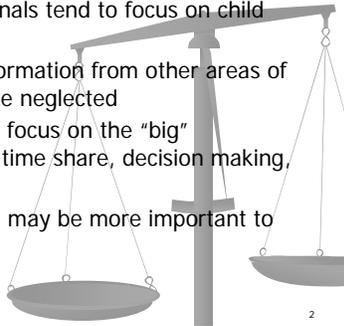
---

---

---

Which research and issues do we attend to?

- Custody professionals tend to focus on child custody research
- Much relevant information from other areas of psychology may be neglected
- Professionals may focus on the “big” issues...parenting time share, decision making, etc.
- Issues of daily life may be more important to children



---

---

---

---

---

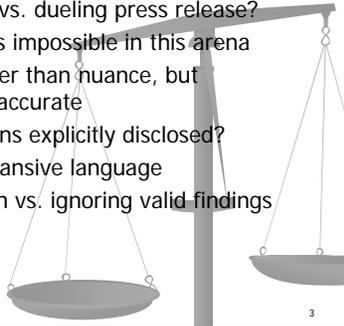
---

---

---

Critical evaluation of scientific information/claims

- Academic debate vs. dueling press release?
- Perfect research is impossible in this arena
- Epigrams are easier than nuance, but considerably less accurate
- Were the limitations explicitly disclosed?
- Cautions with expansive language
- Overgeneralization vs. ignoring valid findings



---

---

---

---

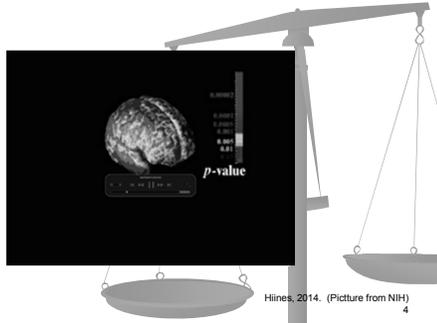
---

---

---

---

Nothing persuades like a picture of a brain..



---

---

---

---

---

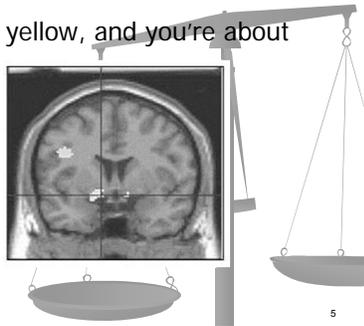
---

---

---

But is that really what they look like?

(Take away the yellow, and you're about there..)



---

---

---

---

---

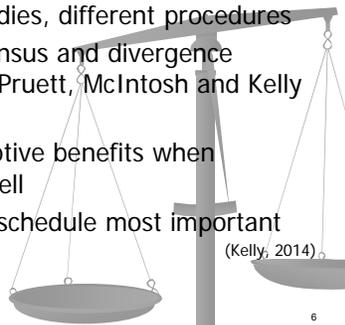
---

---

---

## Young Children and Overnights

- Contrasting studies, different procedures
- Points of consensus and divergence summarized in Pruett, McIntosh and Kelly (In Press)
- Social and adaptive benefits when implemented well
- Consistency of schedule most important



---

---

---

---

---

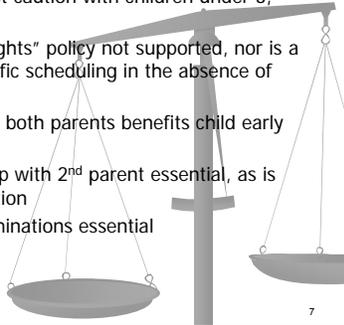
---

---

---

## Young Children and Overnights

- Some studies suggest caution with children under 3, other do not
- A blanket "no overnights" policy not supported, nor is a presumption of specific scheduling in the absence of information
- Early involvement by both parents benefits child early and into the future
- History of relationship with 2<sup>nd</sup> parent essential, as is parental communication
- Individualized determinations essential



---

---

---

---

---

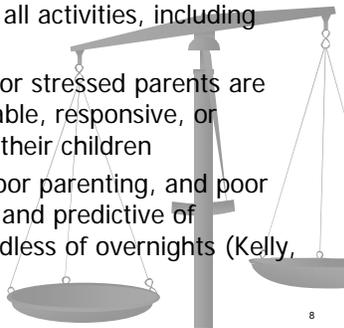
---

---

---

## We also know...

- Fatigue impairs all activities, including parenting
- Exhausted and/or stressed parents are often less available, responsive, or consistent with their children
- High conflict, poor parenting, and poor communication are predictive of outcomes regardless of overnights (Kelly, 2014)



---

---

---

---

---

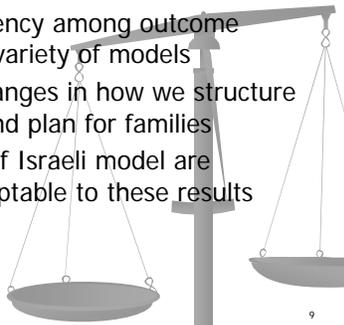
---

---

---

## Converging results on critical issues

- Marked consistency among outcome studies from a variety of models
- May require changes in how we structure interventions and plan for families
- Some aspects of Israeli model are particularly adaptable to these results



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### The "small stuff" to adults may be hugely important for children

- Daily skills, routines, developmental tasks, age appropriate activities are critical
- Legal system often neglects these, or inquiry is not sufficiently detailed
- Information on these issues is often lost when we don't involve children in interventions (parents' perceptions often not reliable)
- Outcome studies (and clinical data from children) suggest that these are the most important issues to them and their development

Johnston, Roseby and Kuehne (2010); Dunn (2001); Reed et al (2013); Sandler et al (2010), Pedro-Carrol (2005), etc.

10

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Children's Outcome is Related To

- Coping *Effectiveness* (healthy coping skills)
- Coping *Efficacy* (belief that what one says or does will work)
- Access to healthy relationships
- Stability
- Authoritative parenting

11

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Factors We Can Impact, That Are Related to Outcome (Adapted from Pedro-Carroll, 2005)

#### Individual Factors

- Active coping style
- Accurate Attributions
- Hope for the Future,
- Realistic appraisal of control
- Effective coping skills

12

---

---

---

---

---

---

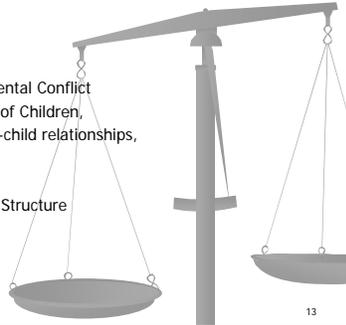
---

---

### Factors We Can Impact, That Are Related to Outcome (Adapted from Pedro-Carroll, 2005)

#### Family Factors:

- Protection from Interparental Conflict
- Psychological well-being of Children,
- Solid, supportive parent-child relationships,
- Economic Stability,
- Authoritative Parenting
- Household Stability and Structure



---

---

---

---

---

---

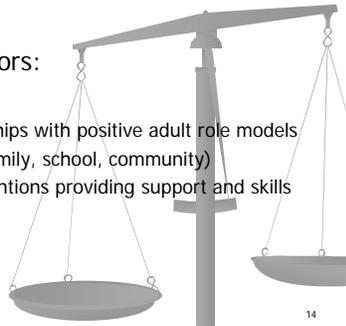
---

---

### Factors We Can Impact, That Are Related to Outcome (Adapted from Pedro-Carroll, 2005)

#### Extrafamilial Factors:

- Supportive relationships with positive adult role models
- Support network (family, school, community)
- Preventative Interventions providing support and skills training
- Effective Therapy



---

---

---

---

---

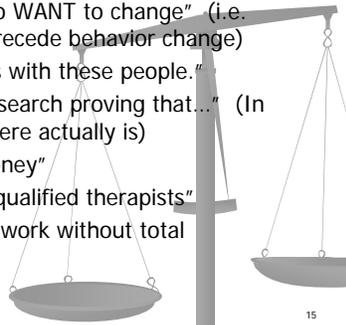
---

---

---

### Truisms and Self-fulfilling prophecies

- "People have to WANT to change" (i.e. Insight must precede behavior change)
- "Nothing works with these people."
- "There is no research proving that..." (In many cases, there actually is)
- "There's no money"
- "There are no qualified therapists"
- "Therapy can't work without total confidentiality"



---

---

---

---

---

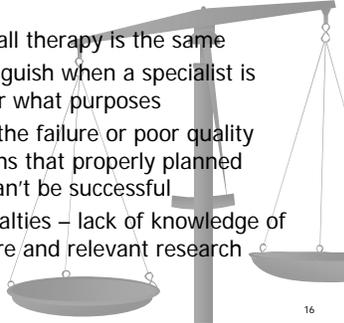
---

---

---

### Common errors in intervention planning

- Assuming that all therapy is the same
- Failure to distinguish when a specialist is needed, and for what purposes
- Assuming that the failure or poor quality treatment means that properly planned interventions can't be successful
- Diverging specialties – lack of knowledge of current literature and relevant research



---

---

---

---

---

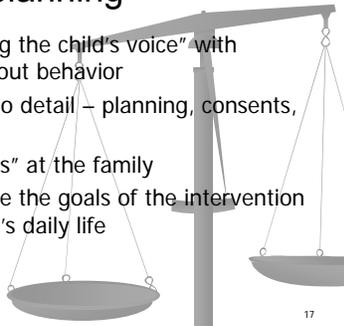
---

---

---

### More errors in intervention planning

- Confusing “hearing the child's voice” with rewarding acting-out behavior
- Failure to attend to detail – planning, consents, orders
- “Throwing services” at the family
- Failure to integrate the goals of the intervention plan into the child's daily life



---

---

---

---

---

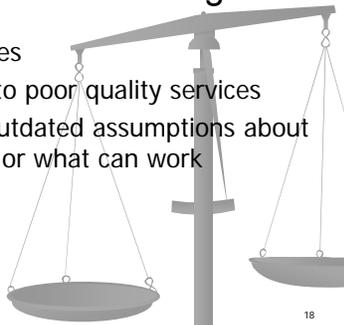
---

---

---

### Other Obstacles to Effective Intervention Planning

- Limited resources
- Prior exposure to poor quality services
- Inaccurate or outdated assumptions about what is known, or what can work
- Tunnel vision



---

---

---

---

---

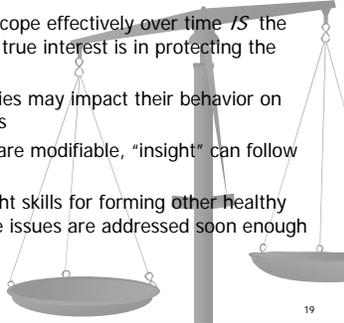
---

---

---

## Changing our Thinking in Light of the Research

- The Child's ability to cope effectively over time *IS* the ultimate issue, if our true interest is in protecting the child
- Parents' coping abilities may impact their behavior on divorce-related issues
- Skills and strategies are modifiable, "insight" can follow behavior change
- Children can be taught skills for forming other healthy relationships, if these issues are addressed soon enough



---

---

---

---

---

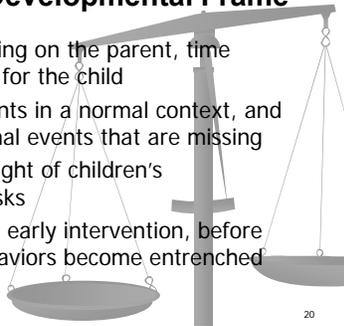
---

---

---

## The Child's Context: Keeping the Developmental Frame

- While we're focusing on the parent, time continues to pass for the child
- Put abnormal events in a normal context, and consider the normal events that are missing
- Consider data in light of children's developmental tasks
- More options with early intervention, before dysfunctional behaviors become entrenched



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Avoiding Tunnel Vision...

Consider:

- Behavior outside divorce-related issues
- General coping abilities
- Rules/expectations in various settings
- Reactions of significant adults to child's behavior and statements
- Child's coping and behavior over time



---

---

---

---

---

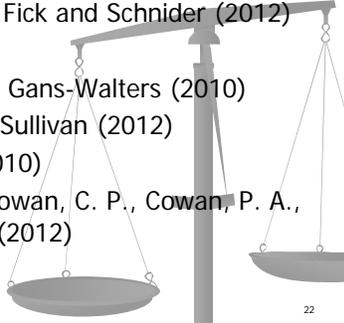
---

---

---

## Adapting and Integrating Models..

- Greenberg, Doi Fick and Schnider (2012)
- Lebow (2003)
- Friedlander and Gans-Walters (2010)
- Greenberg and Sullivan (2012)
- Sexton et al (2010)
- Pruet, M. K., Cowan, C. P., Cowan, P. A., Diamond, J. S. (2012)



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

I don't feel like going to math tutoring today, so I think I'll just "pop over" to Dad's house



---

---

---

---

---

---

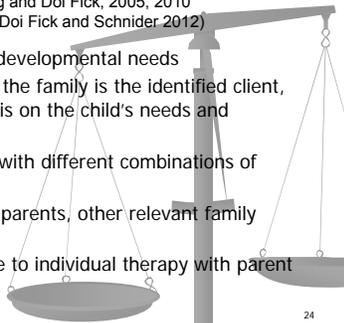
---

---

## Child-Centered Conjoint Therapy

(Greenberg and Doi Fick, 2005, 2010  
Greenberg, Doi Fick and Schnider 2012)

- Focus on the child's developmental needs
- Whether the child or the family is the identified client, the therapist's focus is on the child's needs and development
- Therapist may meet with different combinations of family members
- Involvement of both parents, other relevant family members
- Models are applicable to individual therapy with parent involvement



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Balancing Accountability, Privacy and Effectiveness

- There are many kinds of safety
- Keeping the expectations clear
- Addressing specific issues to reduce children's exposure to conflict
- Criteria for reporting treatment information, cooperation and progress
- What's necessary to create and support healthy behavior?
- Coping *Efficacy* is related to child outcome, may require sharing of information



---

---

---

---

---

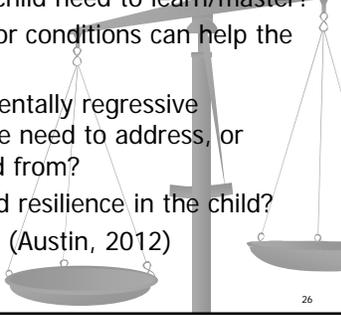
---

---

---

## Systemic Intervention Planning

- What does the child need to learn/master?
- What activities or conditions can help the child get there?
- What developmentally regressive influences do we need to address, or protect the child from?
- How do we build resilience in the child?
- Activity analysis (Austin, 2012)



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Broad view of therapeutic services

- May not be limited to face-to-face sessions
- Interim support
  - Phone calls, conference calls, email "boosters"
  - Review/assistance with parental communication
- Auxiliary communications, record review
- Services in the event of relitigation
- Much depends on therapist's role, terms of order
- Realistic goals may include resolving issues even if contact with parent is limited



---

---

---

---

---

---

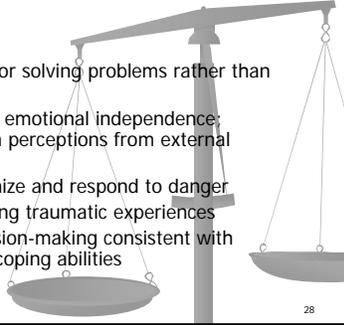
---

---

## Progress Occurs in a Developmental Frame

Children need:

- Active coping skills for solving problems rather than avoiding them
- Gradually increasing emotional independence; separating their own perceptions from external narratives
- The ability to recognize and respond to danger
- Support in overcoming traumatic experiences
- Participation in decision-making consistent with developmental and coping abilities



---

---

---

---

---

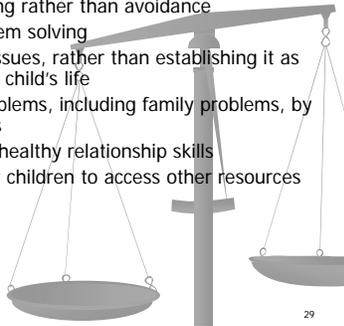
---

---

---

## Effective Children's Treatment

- Supports active coping rather than avoidance
- Enables verbal problem solving
- Resolves traumatic issues, rather than establishing it as a central issue in the child's life
- Supports solving problems, including family problems, by engaging with others
- Supports or teaches healthy relationship skills
- Creates a context for children to access other resources



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



## The undermining therapist...

"I'm the advocate for the child, and my client doesn't want to see her Dad..."



---

---

---

---

---

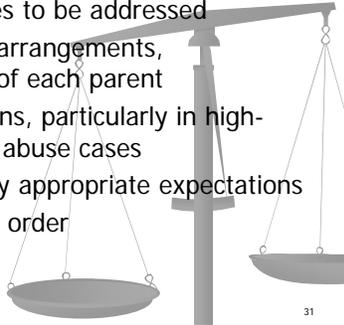
---

---

---

**Structural issues for Therapy**  
(Greenberg and Doi Fick, 2005)

- Specifying issues to be addressed
- Transportation arrangements, responsibilities of each parent
- Rules for sessions, particularly in high-conflict or child abuse cases
- Developmentally appropriate expectations
- Clear treatment order



---

---

---

---

---

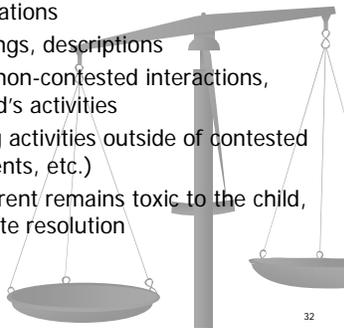
---

---

---

**Progression in treatment content..**

- Behavioral expectations
- Language of feelings, descriptions
- Initial practice in non-contested interactions, knowledge of child's activities
- Support parenting activities outside of contested issues (school events, etc.)
- If contact with parent remains toxic to the child, support appropriate resolution



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Dealing with Children's Dialogue**

- What should we look for and listen to?
- Everything has developmental consequences
- Incorporating psychological knowledge into how we interact with children



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



---

---

---

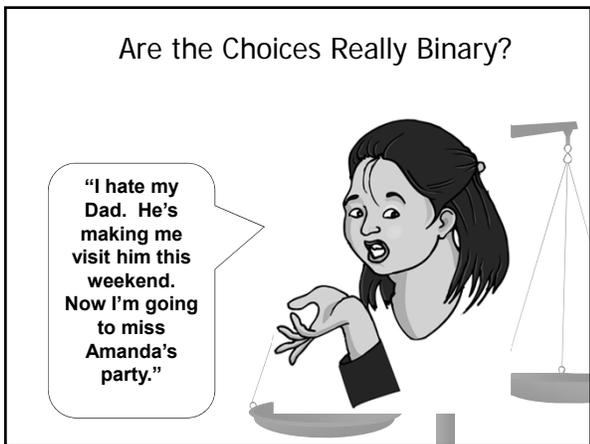
---

---

---

---

---



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Are the Choices Really Binary?

"No, I haven't asked my Dad if he'd take me."



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

"Mom and Dad are arguing about what camp I should go to again"



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

"Why should I bother telling them how I feel? No one listens to me anyway"



---

---

---

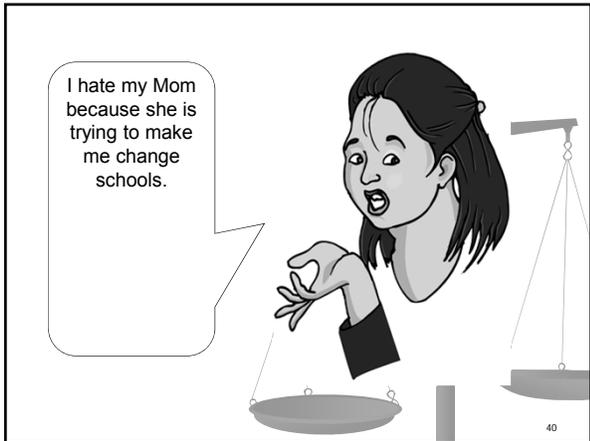
---

---

---

---

---



---

---

---

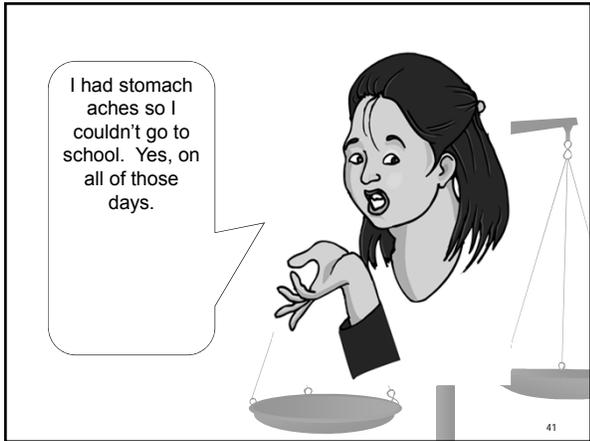
---

---

---

---

---



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



---

---

---

---

---

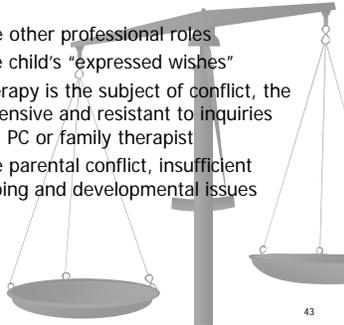
---

---

---

## Common Therapist Mistakes

- Bias
- Failure to respect the other professional roles
- Overemphasis on the child's "expressed wishes"
- Particularly when therapy is the subject of conflict, the therapist may be defensive and resistant to inquiries from minors counsel, PC or family therapist
- Overemphasis on the parental conflict, insufficient attention to daily coping and developmental issues



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Maximizing Resources for Children

- A single specialist in a neutral role (i.e. child-centered conjoint therapist or ideally a PC) can coordinate (and teach) less experienced professionals
- When intervention is early enough, nonprofessional resources can aid treatment
- Compare the costs of treatment and litigation
- Poor quality treatment ultimately costs more than engaging qualified professionals
- Judicial officer setting priorities



---

---

---

---

---

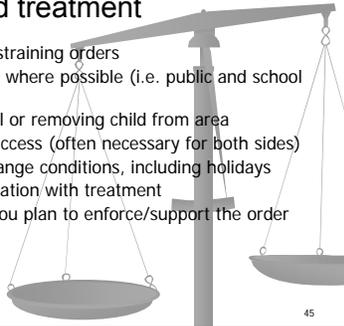
---

---

---

## "The judge decided, I'm here to help you make it work..." Underlying orders aid treatment

- Details and limits in restraining orders
- Maintain parental roles where possible (i.e. public and school events if safe)
- Orders regarding travel or removing child from area
- Structured telephone access (often necessary for both sides)
- Detailed order re exchange conditions, including holidays
- Expectations re cooperation with treatment
- Parents should know you plan to enforce/support the order



---

---

---

---

---

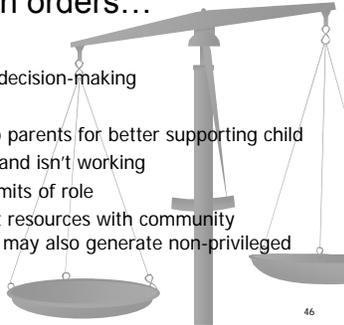
---

---

---

### Therapist can (and should) assist with specific behaviors to comply with orders...

- Specific dialogue
- Structured routines, decision-making
- Rules and contracts
- Recommendations to parents for better supporting child
- Feedback re what is and isn't working
- Ability to articulate limits of role
- Combining treatment resources with community involvement – which may also generate non-privileged data



---

---

---

---

---

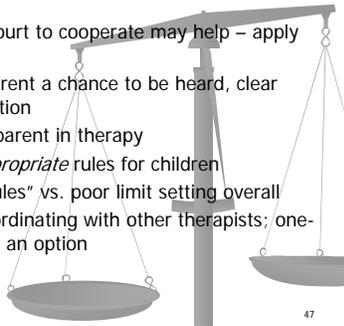
---

---

---

### When there is high conflict or an alleged traumatic history....

- Direction from the Court to cooperate may help – apply to both parents
- Give the reluctant parent a chance to be heard, clear direction for cooperation
- Clear rules for each parent in therapy
- *Developmentally appropriate* rules for children
- Assess for “special rules” vs. poor limit setting overall
- Central specialist coordinating with other therapists; one-way releases may be an option



---

---

---

---

---

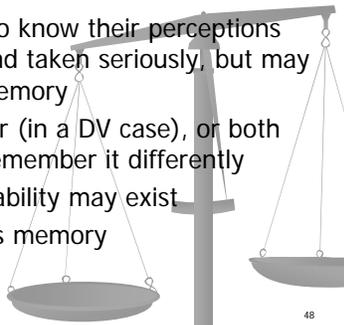
---

---

---

### How does a parent accept responsibility?

- Children need to know their perceptions are accepted and taken seriously, but may not be literal memory
- Alleged offender (in a DV case), or both parents, may remember it differently
- Criminal vulnerability may exist
- Trauma impacts memory



---

---

---

---

---

---

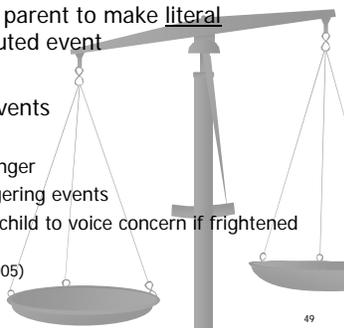
---

---

## How does a parent accept responsibility? (cont.)

- Not necessary for parent to make literal admission of disputed event
- Future focus
- Rules for future events
  - Safety
  - Management of anger
  - Avoidance of triggering events
  - Empowerment of child to voice concern if frightened or distressed

(Doi Fick and Greenberg, 2005)



49

---

---

---

---

---

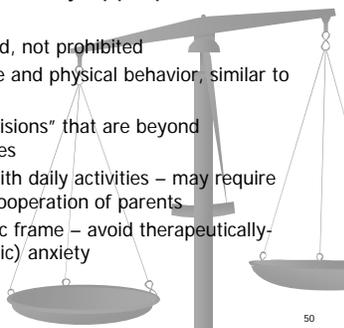
---

---

---

## Rules/progress for children must be developmentally appropriate

- Touch – child initiated, not prohibited
- Appropriate language and physical behavior, similar to all other adults
- Avoid expecting “decisions” that are beyond developmental abilities
- Integrate progress with daily activities – may require judicial support for cooperation of parents
- Place tasks in realistic frame – avoid therapeutically-heightened (iatrogenic) anxiety



50

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



## The “I didn’t want it to work anyway” model

- Sealed treatment in a high conflict case may produce:
  - No treatment at all
  - An accountability-free acting-out zone
  - Unprotected children
  - Simple transfer of chaos from courtroom to therapist’s office
- Presence of minor’s counsel or parent coordinator may mitigate many of these issues
- Criteria for “safe haven” treatment
- Conditional orders – confidential unless .....
- Consider involving the therapist in crafting a stipulation that will allow effective treatment



51

---

---

---

---

---

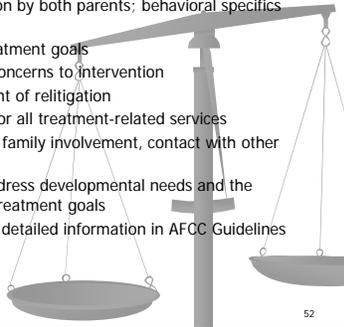
---

---

---

## Treatment orders should include:

- Expectation of cooperation by both parents; behavioral specifics helpful
- Court's concerns and treatment goals
- Clear path from court's concerns to intervention
- Contingencies in the event of relitigation
- Payment arrangements for all treatment-related services
- Parameters for extended family involvement, contact with other professions, etc.
- Sufficient flexibility to address developmental needs and the therapist's ability to set treatment goals
- Sample orders and more detailed information in AFCC Guidelines



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## The Skilled Therapist Needs Flexibility

- Getting info from parents and therapists
- Setting expectations for parent cooperation
- Structuring sessions and outside-session interventions
- Referring parents for other services, consulting other professionals



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Someone May be Trying to Sabotage Treatment when they...

- Push for a therapist with insufficient skills
- Bind and gag the therapist
- Demand to know every detail of children's statements
- Write vague, unenforceable treatment orders
- Resist requests for specific parent responsibility or behavior change
- Bypass initial procedures



---

---

---

---

---

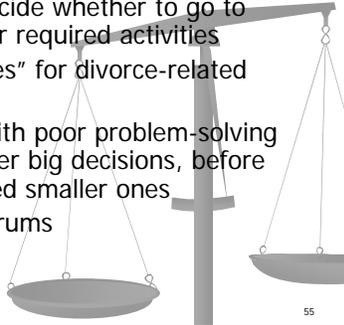
---

---

---

## More Tips for Sabotaging Progress

- Let the child decide whether to go to therapy or other required activities
- Set "special rules" for divorce-related issues
- Give children with poor problem-solving skills control over big decisions, before they've mastered smaller ones
- Rewarding tantrums



---

---

---

---

---

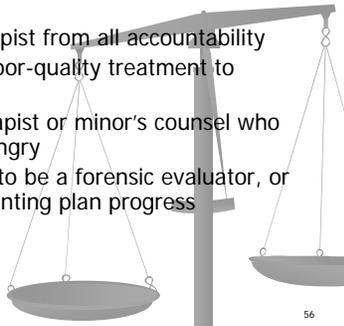
---

---

---

## Still More Tips for Sabotaging Progress

- Insulate the therapist from all accountability
- Allow biased or poor-quality treatment to continue
- Remove any therapist or minor's counsel who makes a parent angry
- Ask the therapist to be a forensic evaluator, or to determine parenting plan progress



---

---

---

---

---

---

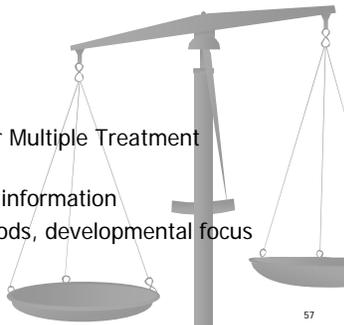
---

---

## Assessing the Quality of Treatment

### *Look For:*

- Professionalism
- Role Boundaries
- Ability to Consider Multiple Treatment Hypotheses
- Openness to new information
- Appropriate methods, developmental focus



---

---

---

---

---

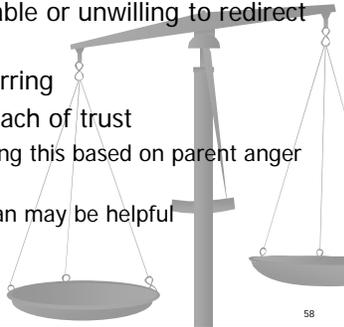
---

---

---

## When is a change necessary?

- Therapist is unable or unwilling to redirect treatment
- Splitting is occurring
- Irresolvable breach of trust
  - Cautions re doing this based on parent anger alone
  - Coordinated plan may be helpful
  - Procedures



---

---

---

---

---

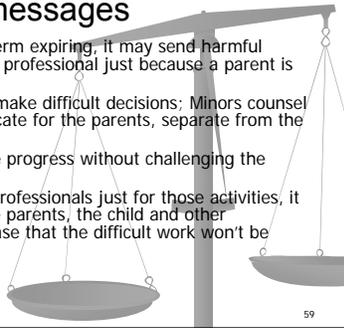
---

---

---

## Avoiding decisions for the wrong reasons, cautions regarding the messages

- Absent the person's term expiring, it may send harmful messages to remove a professional just because a parent is unhappy
- PC's are appointed to make difficult decisions; Minors counsel are appointed to advocate for the parents, separate from the child
- Therapists don't create progress without challenging the parents or child
- If the Court removes professionals just for those activities, it sends messages to the parents, the child and other professionals on the case that the difficult work won't be supported



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Children at the center of conflict have often lost many relationships...

- May include friends, coaches, extended family
- May have occurred in the context of a parent's anger, or accusations that are not consistent with the child's own experience
- Removing an appropriate therapist in that context sends messages that
  - The child's feelings are unimportant
  - Relationships cannot be trusted
  - The parent's anger is more powerful than anything else
  - Undermine children's development of healthy coping skills



---

---

---

---

---

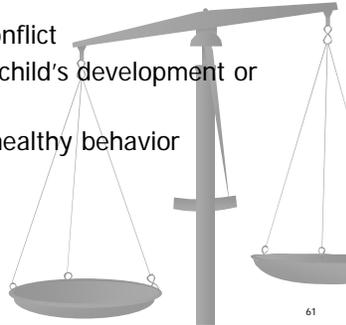
---

---

---

Conversely, continuing an inappropriate intervention can cause harm

- Escalation of conflict
- Undermining a child's development or independence
- Reinforcing unhealthy behavior



---

---

---

---

---

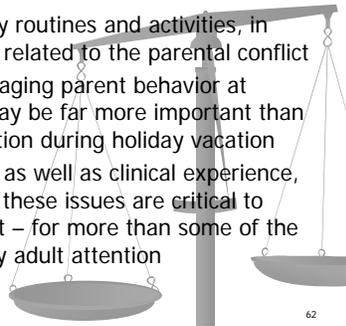
---

---

---

The Child's Tapestry is Smaller, and Larger, Than Ours

- Comprised of daily routines and activities, in addition to issues related to the parental conflict
- To the child, managing parent behavior at soccer practice may be far more important than the time of transition during holiday vacation
- Outcome studies, as well as clinical experience, demonstrate that these issues are critical to child development – for more than some of the issues that occupy adult attention



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Additional Handouts/Resources

- Association of Family and Conciliation Courts Guidelines [www.afccnet.org](http://www.afccnet.org)
- Additional articles available at:
  - <http://lyngreenbergphd.com/publications-and-presentations/>
  - <http://lyngreenbergphd.com/resources-for-professionals/>
  - <http://lyngreenbergphd.com/resources-for-parents/>
- Additional Handouts
- Or email [admin@lyngreenbergphd.com](mailto:admin@lyngreenbergphd.com), with "handout request" in subject line



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Contact Information

Lyn R. Greenberg, Ph.D., ABPP  
11340 Olympic Blvd., Suite 265  
Los Angeles, CA 90064  
(310) 399-3684  
Fax (310) 988-2706  
[lyn@lyngreenbergphd.com](mailto:lyn@lyngreenbergphd.com)  
<http://lyngreenbergphd.com/>



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---