



Center for Navigating Family Change Offers Conflict Assessment for Embattled Co-Parents

Diane C. Dierks, LMFT
Executive Director, Center for Navigating Family Change

Attorneys, guardians ad litem and therapists have very different jobs when it comes to helping high-conflict co-parents, and can send mixed messages to clients if they don't develop good relationships with one another and learn each other's lingo. One of the problems I have discovered in working in this field for nearly twenty years, is that attorneys and guardians are somewhat desperate for mental health involvement in their cases, but struggle with understanding how to engage their services (much like I am at a loss as to how to advise my clients about the legal system). Consequently, I receive numerous court orders each year naming me as a helping professional that are too vague, or sometimes in error, regarding appropriate mental health interventions for this unique population. Clients are the ones who are truly in the dark, as they are trusting the professionals completely to guide them regarding both legal and mental health issues. Oftentimes after I receive a court order, I have to spend valuable time talking to the attorneys, and sometimes even the judge, to understand what is needed and have the court order rewritten in terms that are best for the client and the professional. This wastes client resources and erodes their confidence in the system.

To streamline this complicated process, I am proud to announce that the Center for Navigating Family Change will be accepting court-ordered clients for co-parenting services beginning January, 2017. As executive director of the non-profit, I will be supervising three other therapists, who have been trained in *co-parent counseling* and *parenting coordination*, assisting them with case management and professional oversight. We are excited about this new development since many therapists are reticent to get involved in court cases because they don't have the experience or the desire to risk being sued. Yet there is a growing need for specialized services to help co-parents learn conflict resolution and communication skills rather than turning to the court to solve their problems at every turn.

To address the issue of appropriate court order language, we recommend attorneys initially engage CNFC by having an *Order for Conflict Assessment and Recommendation* signed that allows us to meet with each parent and understand their history and needs. Then we will provide a written recommendation to the court and attorneys of what we believe will be most helpful to the clients (typically either co-parent counseling or parenting coordination) and

provide a list of items to include in a court order that provides appropriate details so the order does not have to be re-written. This streamlining is respectful to all involved, as it is more efficient and clear for clients and their attorneys, and protects the mental health professional from being ordered to do something that may not be in the best interests of the clients or their professional ethics.

To view a sample copy of the *Order for Conflict Assessment*, go to www.cnfc.org/information-for-professionals and click on the “View It” icon. For additional information about CNFC and its expansion of co-parent services, call 404-592-1257 or email info@cnfc.org.

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