

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# A call for early, effective, and scalable parent education programs for high-conflict separated/divorcing parents: A synthesized perspective from prevention science and family law

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## Funding information

National Institute of Mental Health, Grant/Award Number: K01MH120321

## Abstract

Conflict between parents is stressful for children living in the midst of parental separation or divorce. Although some level of post-separation/divorce conflict is understandable in an emotionally-charged separation/divorce, it undermines the extent to which parents can protect their children from short- and long-term problems. In this article, we weave together a synthesized perspective informed by our respective training and experience in prevention science and family law on the role of parent education programs for high-conflict separating/divorcing parents. To do so, we first describe the research on the effects of interparental conflict on children's outcomes and then discuss current approaches and challenges to reducing these negative effects by offering parent education programs for high-conflict separating/divorcing parents. Then, we propose and describe a new model for early, effective, and scalable parent education programs with the ultimate goal of protecting children after separation/divorce.

## KEYWORDS

children, divorce, family court, high conflict, parent, programs

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES



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



**Bruce R. Cohen** is the immediate past Presiding Judge of the Family Department of the Maricopa County Superior Court. He graduated from the University of Arizona in 1978 and attended law school at Arizona State University, graduating in 1981. He was in private practice as a certified specialist in Family Law for 24 years and then was appointed as a Superior Court Judge 2005 and has served as Associate Presiding Family Court Judge and Managing Judge of the Post-Conviction Relief Unit for the Criminal Department, in addition to completing assignments in the Juvenile Court and Civil Court. He has also served as a family law adjunct professor at ASU's College of Law, was a fellow in the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers and served on the Family Law Board of Legal Specialization for the State Bar of Arizona, the Arizona Supreme Court's appointed Child Support Guidelines Committee, Family Law Rules Review Committee, and Admission on Motion Task Force. He is a past president and former board member of the Arizona Association of Family and Conciliation Courts (AzAFCC). He is a past member of the City of Scottsdale's Judicial Appointments Advisory Board, a founding member of the Maricopa County Superior Court Peer Support program and a current member of the Supreme Court's Committee on the Impact of Domestic Violence and the Courts, Family Court Improvement Committee, and Commission on Access to Justice, and Maricopa County Superior Court's Judicial Executive Council. Judge Cohen has co-authored legislation and won numerous awards including from the Maricopa County Bar Association, the Arizona Family Support Council, and the Arizona Supreme Court. He was a nominee for the US Justice Department 2014 National Crime Victims' Service Award and is a 2016 recipient of a "Lifetime Achievement Award" from the State Bar of Arizona - Family Law Section and 2019 recipient of the "Judge of the Year" award from the Phoenix Chapter of the American Board of Trial Attorneys.