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## FAC NEWSLETTER - SEPTEMBER 2006

### *Stress and Divorce:*

### *How Family Breakdown Influences Parenting*

Individuals face many stressors in daily life. Some of these stressors are exciting and challenging, while others tax our very resources to cope. The negative effects of stress on an individual's health and well-being have been well documented; however, how does the particular experience of divorce affect a mother or father's ability to parent effectively?

Research indicates that a prime risk factor for psychological distress following separation or divorce is parental conflict. Parents who argue or communicate disrespectfully with each other are more likely to exhibit controlling, punitive, or abusive parenting behaviours (Webster-Stratton, 1990). Such conflict increases a parent's chance of experiencing a physical or psychological disorder, which may then negatively impact his or her parenting skill. Effective co-parenting is important, therefore, to not only keep children from becoming embroiled in such conflict, but to also help parents support their own well-being.

A parent's emotional health following separation or divorce is also placed at increased risk with avoidant behaviour. While withdrawal from an unpleasant situation may temporarily relieve the stress experience, long-term avoidance limits a parent's capacity for effective coping. A divorced parent's health and well-being may be dramatically improved if he or she learns to exert some degree of control over stressful situations. Such control may be accomplished by:

- Learning to actively confront problems in daily life, rather than finding ways to avoid stressful experiences
- Examining your thoughts, feelings, and behaviours that negatively contribute to your health and well-being
- Seeking positive social supports amongst family, friends, and the community

Through such efforts, parents may transition through the divorce experience with a healthy sense of self and a positive view of the future. And it is ultimately their children who will reap the rewards.

*Vikki Small is a Registered Provisional Psychologist helping children and their families transition through the divorce experience. To obtain a complimentary copy of her handbook, "After the Rainbow: Parenting Beyond Divorce," please contact Vikki at Fong Ailon Canniff. [www.worldpsych.ca](http://www.worldpsych.ca).*



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## *Managing Perfectionism*

### *What Is Perfectionism?*

Perfectionists aspire to be top achievers and do not allow themselves to make even a single mistake. They are always on the alert for imperfections and weaknesses in themselves and others. They tend to be rigid thinkers who are on the lookout for deviations from the rules or the norm.

Perfectionism is not the same as striving for excellence.

People who pursue excellence in a healthy way take genuine pleasure in working to meet high standards. Perfectionists are motivated by self-doubt and fears of disapproval, ridicule, and rejection. The high producer *has drive*, while the perfectionist *is driven*.



### *Causes and Characteristics*

**Fear of failure and rejection.** The perfectionist believes that she will be rejected or fail if she is not always perfect, so she becomes paralyzed and unable to produce or perform at all.

**Fear of success.** The perfectionist believes that if he is successful in what he undertakes, he will have to keep it up. This becomes a heavy burden - who wants to operate at such a high level all of the time?

**Low self-esteem.** A perfectionist's needs for love and approval tend to blind her to the needs and wishes of others.

**Extreme determination.** Perfectionists are determined to overcome all obstacles to achieving success. This is also true of high achievers, but the perfectionist focuses only on the *result* of his efforts. He is unable to enjoy the *process* of producing the achievement.

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Dr. Fong recently attended and lectured on pathology and dangerousness at the Association for Family Conciliation Courts. Attending were Judges from Canada, United States and many other parts of the world. For more information on the presentation, contact Dr. Fong on how to order a copy of the CD on assessments for dangerousness. For more information see [www.afcnet.org](http://www.afcnet.org)

Dr. Fong will be presenting at the Association for Conflict Resolution on Mediation in the Workplace. As Past President he will be overseeing portions of the conference. For more information on this conference go to [www.acrnet.org](http://www.acrnet.org) It is expected well over 1000 mediators world wide will descend upon Philadelphia in October for this conference.

Dr. Fong will be presenting at the Association for Family Conciliation Courts in October in Atlanta. He will be lecturing to custody assessors on how to bring together all the data so that custody assessment reports are understandable, concise and meet the needs of the Court.



### *The Costs of Being a Perfectionist*

Perfectionism always costs more than the benefits it might provide. It can result in being paralyzed with fear and becoming so rigid that a person is difficult to relate to. It can produce contradictory styles, from being highly productive to being completely nonproductive. Some examples of these costs include the following:

**Low self-esteem.** Just as low self-esteem is a cause of perfectionist behavior, it is also a result. Because a perfectionist never feels good enough about himself or his personal performance, he usually feels like a loser or a failure.

**Gloominess.** Since a perfectionist is convinced that it will be next to impossible to achieve most goals, she can easily develop a negative attitude.

**Depression.** Perfectionists often feel discouraged and depressed because they are driven to be perfect but know that it is impossible to reach the ideal.

**Guilt.** Perfectionists never think they handle things well. They often feel a sense of shame and guilt as a result.

**Rigidity.** Since perfectionists need to have everything meet an ideal, they tend to become inflexible and lack spontaneity.

**Obsessive behavior.** When a person needs a certain order or structure in his life, he may become overly focused on details and rules.

**Compulsive behavior.** A perfectionist who feels like a failure or loser may medicate him- or herself with alcohol, drugs, food, shopping, sex, gambling, or other high-risk behaviors.

**Eating disorders.** Many studies have determined that perfectionism is a central issue for people who develop eating disorders.

### *The Perfectionist versus The High Achiever*

People produce many of their best achievements when they are striving to do their best. High achievers, like perfectionists, want to be better people and achieve great things. Unlike perfectionists, high achievers accept that making mistakes and risking failure are part of the achievement process - and part of being human.

### *Emotionally Healthy High Producers*

You can be a high achiever without being a perfectionist. People who accomplish plenty and stay emotionally healthy tend to exhibit the following behaviors:

- Set standards that are high but achievable.
- Enjoy the process, not just the outcome.
- Recover from disappointment quickly.
- View mistakes as opportunities for growth and learning.
- React positively to constructive feedback.

Once you are aware of the ways by which you expect yourself to be perfect, you can start to change your behavior. You can begin the change process by thinking about which causes apply to you and writing down examples of these perfectionist behaviors as you observe them.



## *Gala Screening Party for Kids*

2 Homes Therapy Groups for Children of Families in Transition is pleased to invite families and children who are in divorce and separation transitions to attend the **2 homes Gala Opening** at the upcoming annual Calgary International Film Festival 2006, which will be held Saturday afternoon, September 30 at Eau Claire Market. This gala opening celebrates the screenings of carefully chosen films for young viewers and their families featuring non-traditional, single parent, two-home and culturally diverse families. We will be hosting activities for children such as face painting, magician performances, clowns, 'make your own movie,' and a popcorn concession. A local artist will assist children with the 2 Homes Art Project: children are invited to colour themselves and their families into an onsite canvas featuring two nearly life-size homes and all the geography in between!

As a division of Fong Ailon Canniff, 2 Homes continues the commitment to child-centered divorce and separation by offering resilience counselling for groups of children whose families are divorcing. 2 Homes promotes recovery among children of divorce through fostering acceptance, self-development, and self-esteem and the creation of a new paradigm for the family that can be the most positive result of a divorce. Our group program implements evidence-based preventative interventions to promote resilience and healthy adjustments as well as protect children from the following potential divorce stressors:

- Alienation
- Protracted conflict
- Parental instability
- Loyalty conflict
- Blended families

For more information and tickets to the Calgary International Film Festival 2 homes Gala Opening or the 2 homes therapy groups for children of families in transition, call *Janet McMahan* or *Jocelyn Monsma* at 266-2017.

Eileen Ailon and Jocelyn Monsma attended an excellent conference ***Parenting Coordination: Helping High Conflict Parents Resolve Disputes*** put on by Dr. Joan Kelly at Lyola University in Chicago, Illinois. If anyone is interested in the content of the workshop or related articles, please contact Eileen Ailon or Jocelyn Monsma at (403)266-2017.





### *Collaborative Process Models:*

#### *A Quick Comparison Between One or Two Divorce Coach Models*

I recently attended Interdisciplinary Collaborative Law Training in Austin, Texas. Interestingly, the Texans deviate significantly from Calgary's more familiar Interdisciplinary Team Model. Let's back up. Generally, there are three primary models of collaborative process that have developed across North America and around the world. The most recent model – the Interdisciplinary Model – is divided into sub-models and deserves closer comparative analysis. For clarity, the following are brief overall descriptions of the three models.

***Lawyer Only Model:*** only family lawyers and their clients involved with no outside professional assistance other than standard asset appraisers.

***Lawyer Referral Model:*** lawyers handle the case and hire outside professionals on an "as needed basis" to assist with specific issues as they arise.

***Interdisciplinary Model:***

Collaborative Divorce Model: Originated in California, this "Two coach model" involves two lawyers, two coaches with mental health backgrounds (one for each client), and one neutral Financial Professional (and if children are involved, a child specialist). Coaches provide each client with needed emotional validation and support through extremely difficult transitions.

Collaborative Team Model: originating in Texas, this "One Coach Model" is similar to the 'Collaborative Divorce Model' but uses only one mental health practitioner as the "neutral voice", "communication specialist" for the majority of the 5-way team meetings.

The primary difference between the two sub-models of the Interdisciplinary Model is whether or not legal counsel prefers two divorce coaches to assist with the psychological estate or one divorce coach per team who does this by acting as the "neutral voice" in the room. Locally, this latter model looks like a heavily populated mediation process (with the only difference being the cornerstone agreement at the outset of lawyers to not participate in court proceedings). However, the interesting feedback from collaborative Texan attorneys, who are already using the Collaborative Team Model, was that even though attorneys are still required to set the agendas for the meetings and direct the overall process, having a neutral communication expert in the room frees them to focus on their areas of expertise. Of special note was an abiding appreciation for the arms' length distance from the emotional intensity provided by the neutral coach. Lastly, they felt that this reduced the perception of building up adversarial 'sides.'

It is important for psychologists to be aware of the different roles these two sub-models offer and require of divorce coaches. Not only is role clarity crucial for efficient and client-centered team practice, it is crucial for maintaining strong ethical boundaries as a mental health practitioner. For more information on divorce coaching contact Janet McMahan at 266-2017 or share your comments at [jmcmahen@worldpsych.ca](mailto:jmcmahen@worldpsych.ca).

*Janet McMahan, M.A., R. Psych*



### *Families in Transition*

In response to the increase in families undergoing transition our firm is offering a number of innovative services to assist parents and children.

We have come to view the therapeutic needs of families in transition as being on a continuum. We are now expanding our interventions to meet the needs of those children and parents who are on the higher end of the conflict and disrupted relationship spectrum.

We have attended conferences in Florida, Chicago and Colorado to gain more information and to exchange ideas with colleagues in the legal and psychological communities on services such as Parenting Coordination, High Conflict Parenting Counselling, Group Therapy for children caught in “the conflict”, groups for children who are alienated or estranged from a parent, and groups for children going through other transitions in their family.

For more information contact our office at (403)266-2017.

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### *Dr. Fong's recommendations for reading:*

1. Snakes in Suits (2006); Babiak & Hare. From the research on psychopaths comes the first book on psychopathy in business. Taking into the difficulties with major executives in corporations like Enron, this book is a sure winner to hit a best seller list. For example, a head of Enron was accused of taking 30 million dollars in kickbacks from the company while its shareholders lost 70 billion dollars. Another executive of WorldCom arranged for his firm to lend him \$408 million dollars as the company went into bankruptcy. Psychopaths are described as those who may have the following characteristics: Insincere, arrogant, insensitive, remorseless, shallow, impatient, erratic, unreliable, unfocussed, parasitic, dramatic, unethical and bullying.
2. Rethinking Domestic Violence (2006); Dutton. The newest book on rethinking domestic violence. This book is one of the few that explains the current research to date, and reviews past research. It does not use research techniques that are survey oriented, but reviews the literature and research current today. A controversial book that will make you think more about the problem of violence. Look for his newest book (2007) on the Abusive Personality, an updated version of his book in 2002. The book is third in a series looking at IPV or intimate partner violence. See the research on IPV and how personality disorders, in either gender account for new ways of thinking about domestic violence. Information is provided on IPV in gay or lesbian couples and the incident rate of IPV in the male and female population.

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### *SUGGESTIONS/COMMENTS?*

*Do you have any suggestions for future articles*, or just a comment regarding this newsletter? We welcome your feedback. Please contact Wanda Mueller at 266-2017 or [wmueller@worldpsych.ca](mailto:wmueller@worldpsych.ca).