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whitewash thirty yards of fence instead of going swimming with his friends. When they walk by and make fun of him having to work, Tom says that it is not necessarily work and that he rather likes it: "Does a boy get a chance to whitewash a fence every day?" Soon, all of his friends want the opportunity to paint.

As an example from a mediation context, a mother may complain about the father always being late for pick ups or canceling at the last minute. One reframe would be to say that the mother wants the father to be involved in a way that is consistent and predictable. The impact of such a reframe is designed to move the experience for both the mother and the father to one in which the mother wants the father to have a relationship with the child, and also wants to create a workable solution involving consistency and predictability.

In mediation and psychotherapy, we strive to help people make changes in behavior as well as changes in the way they think. Similarly, courts and attorneys can assist parents make changes by writing orders with language that emphasizes common goals.

**Family Counseling.** Let's consider the unintended effects of an order for **reunification counseling**. This word is used frequently in family court and is often requested by attorneys, and ordered by family law judges, when a child is reluctant to visit a parent and/or when there are signs of alienation in the child. The phrase originates from child welfare to refer to a situation in which a parent has had very limited contact with a child, such as in cases of the parent having been in prison.

The order is often made that the rejected parent and child should be in reunification counseling together. At first glance, this is an obvious and simple solution. But, unfortunately, in my experience, that solution will usually fail

if it doesn't involve the other parent. Further, the framing of the issue as a problem between two people from the get-go, is likely to engender resistance in the child, especially if that child is an adolescent. Instead, in my opinion, the order should be for **family counseling** giving the mental health professional the discretion to involve both parents and have sessions with dad and child, mom and child, and mom and dad, as needed. The issue is a systems problem and the solution requires change and accommodation in all parts of the family system. The order for family counseling reframes the problem and has the potential to lead to change instead of resistance.

Take the example of a child who is showing rejecting behavior and attitudes and is reluctant to visit a parent. Further, let us assume that the rejected parent is harsh and authoritarian and that the loved parent is understandably protective. In this case, therapy will need to focus on improving the rejected parent's parenting skills, while simultaneously re-assuring the loved parent that changes have been made and the child will be safe.

Or consider the complementary example in which the rejected parent is a benign parent and the conflict in the child is being driven by the alienating behavior of the loved parent. In this scenario, the therapist will have to move carefully to provide positive interactional experiences between the child and the rejected parent, while simultaneously interrupting negative communication between the child and the loved parent.

In either scenario, both parents need to be involved if the treatment is to be successful. Thus, the order needs to be that all family members will be involved in family counseling at the discretion of the family therapist.

**Relocations.** Another word that has crept into our language is "**move-away**."

This refers to a case in which one parent is requesting a move to another location and taking the child with him or her. This is a local slang usage, mainly used in California, the law refers to "relocation."

The problem is that the word move-away has a negative connotation, implying that to move is bad. Now, I am not naïve, I know, as a custody evaluator, that there is a body of research suggesting that geographical relocation is a stressor to families and children, and that the loss of a parent has a negative impact. But, there may also be good reasons for relocation, such as the economic and psychological benefit to the parent who moves (as has been fully explored in such California cases as *Burgess* and *La Musga*). In my opinion, we should be using the word **relocation** which does not have the negative connotations of the phrase move-away.

**Updating Custody Evaluation Reports.** Finally, to my new pet peeve (at least when I am in the role of a custody evaluator) -the notion of a **stale** custody evaluation report. This is the idea that the data and analysis in a custody evaluation report are no longer useful or relevant because time has gone by (often because of foot-dragging by one parent or his or her counsel who do not like the conclusions of a report).

And what a magnificently damning word: stale! Used with bread, it conjures up images of a nasty taste in the mouth, the smell and sight of mold, and the potential for an unpredictable and unpleasant gastro-intestinal event.

But a report does not go off. It has valuable information from a neutral source – the court's expert – it was valid on the date it was written and still is valid to that point. Often, nothing much has changed in the family since then. If it has, evidence can be introduced to add to the report. The report will still have useful information and analysis for

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the court to use. Of course, if there has been a really significant delay, or if there is important new data to consider, the court can always consider asking their expert for a brief update. But, it does not mean that the report is now useless and that all that effort and money was wasted.

The words we use matter. Let's be circumspect and choose wisely. ♦♦

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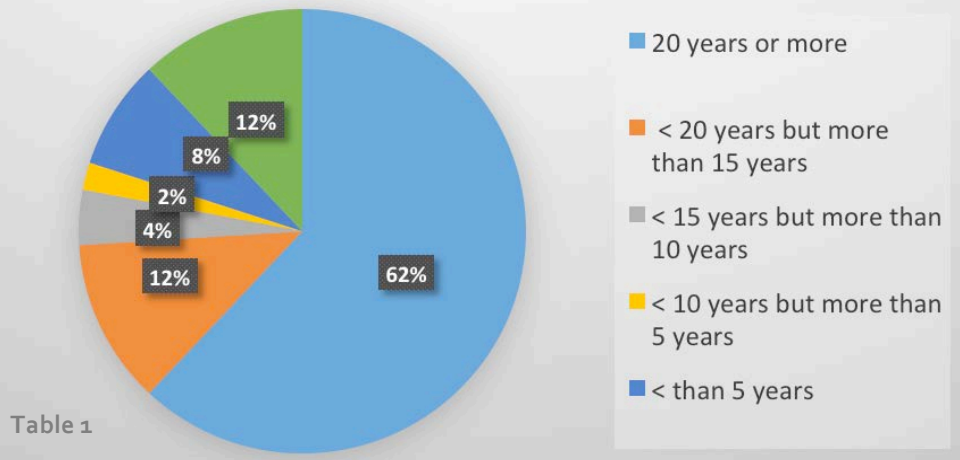
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**Breakdown of AFCC-CA Mentorship Survey Respondents' Years of Experience**



**The Need for Formal Mentorship in Child Custody Evaluation Training**

Robert Kaufman, Ph.D. and Frank Davis, Ph.D.

In California, there are many obstacles facing mental health professionals aspiring to become child custody evaluators. Specifically, many child custody evaluators (CCEs)-in-training find it difficult to locate and obtain the "hands on" experience and supervision needed to meet the minimum qualifications listed in California Rules of Court 5.225(d). Additionally, many less experienced CCEs find it challenging to secure on-going consultation needed to develop and sustain competency in the field even after they have met the Court's requirements. Aware of these obstacles, the AFCC-CA Board of Directors has been very interested in developing an action plan.

At the February 2015 AFCC-CA conference in Costa Mesa, many members expressed an interest in supporting early career professionals in their efforts to provide high quality child custody evaluations. Following up on that fruitful conversation, the Board of Directors of AFCC-CA has established a mentoring program to be fostered by a committee comprised of board and non-board members. After the

establishment of the mentoring program, the Mentorship Committee developed a survey to help identify those experienced ("senior") evaluators who would be willing to provide mentoring, supervision, and/or consultation, as well as those who are earlier in their careers who are interested in providing court-ordered services and expanding their custody evaluation skills.

**Senior CCEs Willing to Provide Mentorship, Consultation or Supervision to CCEs-in-training and/or Less Experienced CCEs**

