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Through the Eyes of the Child: An advanced parenting coordination intervention for high conflict post-divorce families

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Abstract

This article describes and outlines a brief intervention designed to help bring high conflict divorcing parents back together in solidarity with the express purpose of bettering the family climate for their shared child or children. “Through the Eyes of the Child”, a six-session intervention based on principles of a Focused Coparenting Consultation model, was designed to be implemented during parenting coordination work with high conflict couples, either as an enhancement of the work itself, or as an adjunct intervention that may be offered by another professional concurrently with Phase II of the parenting coordination work. Rationale for and components of the intervention are described, and commentary is offered regarding skills needed to aptly deliver the intervention.

Keywords

Coparenting, divorce, parenting coordination, focused coparenting consultation

A través de los ojos del niño: Una intervención avanzada de coordinación de parentalidad para las familias con alto conflicto posterior al divorcio

Resumen

Este artículo describe y detalla una breve intervención diseñada para ayudar a que los progenitores en un divorcio con alto grado de conflicto se unan en solidaridad con el propósito de mejorar el clima familiar para sus hijos o hijas en común. «A través de los ojos del niño» es una intervención de seis sesiones basada en los principios del modelo denominado «Focused Coparenting Consultation» (consulta centrada en la coparentalidad). Se diseñó para ser implementada

durante la coordinación de parentalidad, ya sea como un potenciador del trabajo en sí o como una intervención paralela que puede ofrecer otro profesional en la fase II de un proceso de coordinación de parentalidad. En el artículo se describen la justificación y los componentes de esta intervención y se comentan las habilidades necesarias para poder implementar esta intervención de manera adecuada.

Palabras clave

Coparentalidad, divorcio, coordinación de parentalidad, consulta centrada en la coparentalidad

INTRODUCTION

One of the most consistent and perplexing phenomena for parenting coordinators (PCs) and other professionals who work with high conflict divorcing couples is the apparent incapability of battling parents to take their children's perspectives and adapt their own stances to be better attuned to children's needs. The honest beliefs of each parent that they are taking actions in their child's best interests seem absurd given that their acrimonious conflict, failure to compromise with one another on even the most basic priorities, and inclination to triangulate their child actually destabilize their children's efforts to adapt. Yet there is also a truism in what parents say – behind their desperate actions are care and love for the child and wishes to protect them from harm. This disconnect between what parents wish and what they are doing is the focus of this article. We describe and outline a brief intervention designed to help bring high conflict divorcing parents back together in solidarity with the express purpose of bettering the family climate for their shared child or children.

OVERVIEW

Common experiences and pitfalls in the practice of parenting coordination

The thirst for such an intervention is shared by both parents and PCs who have gone through a process of parenting coordination. In its most common form of practice, parenting coordination, an alternate dispute resolution method, is provided to high conflict parents at the time of their divorce. In the United States, parenting coordination is often ordered by a judge or magistrate when the parties are unable to resolve disputes through less extraordinary means. The goals of parenting coordination include developing and implementing parenting plans; monitoring compliance with court orders; settling on-going disputes regarding their children, and reducing conflict through education on communication and effective decision-making (Beck, Putterman, Sbarra & Mehl, 2008). When necessary, PCs may also have the authority to make non-substantive decisions pertaining to the chil-

dren within the scope of the court order (The Association of Family and Conciliation Courts Task Force on Parenting Coordination, 2006, 2019; Deutsch, 2008; Hayes, 2010; Hayes, Grady & Brantley, 2012).

While there is evidence that successful parenting coordination de-escalates conflicts sufficiently to reduce parties' subsequent motions and re-appearances in court (Henry, Fieldstone & Bohac, 2009) – a satisfying outcome for judges – the evidence that parenting coordination also improves coparenting communication, coordination and cooperation between the embattled adults is scant, if not altogether non-existent (Carter & Lally, 2014; Deutsch, et al., 2018). What successful parenting coordination does seem to achieve is a mutually, if not begrudgingly, agreed-upon plan for “dividing the child” and parallel parenting (Carter, 2015). Yet the quality of adjustment within such arrangements can vary greatly, and in its more destructive forms include such processes as chronic disparagement and belittling of the other parent, encouragement of the child to keep secrets, use of the child as a go-between and messenger, and other actions known to hamper children's socioemotional adjustment.

The reasons why coparents engage in a dynamic that is often destructive for their children are varied and complex. Vallacher, Coleman, Nowak, and Bui-Wrzosinska (2010) use a dynamic systems perspective to describe how intractable conflict offers the warring sides coherence and stability and sustains a closed, self-perpetuating system. When presented with new information that is discrepant with each side's negative view of the other, each side nonetheless assimilates information in a way that maintains or even intensifies their negative views of the other. Part of the wisdom of parenting coordination interventions is to offer a means by which a third party (the PC) can assist parents whose internalized relationship schemata have served to shut the door to learning from new experience, trapping them in a repetitive, closed system of conflict.

Unfortunately, not all professionals involved in chronic high conflict cases view their cases from such a systemic vantage, and it is hence often the PC's conclusion that the real explanation for parents' persistent undermining

behavior is character pathology. Scores of litigating parents have been branded by those closest to their cases as suffering from antisocial, narcissistic and borderline personality disorders. The seemingly endless pre-meditated strikes and counterstrikes, chronic manipulation, distorting of facts and actualities, and roping in of others to escalate or intensify the conflict and the stakes can make it seem as if the behaviors are hard-wired and intractable. When this fatalistic belief becomes the frame for the work, it can seem that simply getting parents to their separate corners and minimizing all contact is the best-case scenario for the family and child.

Undoubtedly, this frame and best-case scenario may be accurate for a significant proportion of the high conflict cases seen by professionals. And if the children in such families are reasonably well-adjusted and older, a disconnected, parallel parenting family outcome may be all that is needed to keep children on positive and healthy developmental trajectories. In other cases, however, when children are younger and/or have been struggling with their own adaptation, coparenting solidarity is crucially important. Amassing evidence has identified cooperative coparenting as an important mediator and moderator of numerous longer-term child outcomes (McHale & Lindahl, 2011). Helping parents recognize not only the detrimental impact of hostile-competitive or disconnected parenting on children's coping and adjustment, but also the protective and buffering effects of cooperative coparenting for children, certainly might seem an achievable outcome for parenting coordination processes. But as most professionals can attest, intellectual "knowing" does not translate into emotional "knowing". Most parents intuitively understand and grasp that conflict is bad for children. Yet these same individuals find it impossible to alter their own actions to better resolve and eliminate such conflict.

BREAKING THROUGH

Potential of Focused Coparenting Consultation

Focused Coparenting Consultation (McHale & Irace, 2010), a novel method of working with coparents toward changing the family's coparental dynamics, offers a fresh approach for tackling the challenge of elevating divorcing parents' "emotional awareness" of the harm their embattled conduct is instigating. Initially developed for families where the coparents were still together but experiencing difficulties with children exacerbated by their different opinions about parenting, Focused Coparenting Consultation has since been adapted successfully for families with other life circumstances, including unmarried and divorced (McHale & Carter, 2012) and multigenerational family systems. At the core of the Focused Coparenting Consultation model is a belief in parents' wisdom and goodwill, and capacity for compromise once shared goals

for the children can be articulated and agreed upon – which becomes a thrust of the work itself.

Focused Coparenting Consultation is a three-stage model.

Stage 1: Consciousness-Raising. In the first phase, the explicit aim is heightening both parents' consciousness and meta-awareness of the relevance of their coparenting for the child's emotional well-being. Such raising of consciousness has been the very factor that has eluded most professionals working with high conflict divorces, but without successful attainment of stage 1 aims the work in stages 2 (Skill-Building) and 3 (Enactments) do not succeed. The interventionist must have at her or his disposal a belief that parents can change their habitual ways of responding to dissonance, and a set of tools to help open parents eyes to how their current means of handling coparenting differences – differences which are themselves ubiquitous, existing in all families – are ignoring the sensibilities of their children.

Stage 2: Skill-Building. In stage 2, parents receive explicit instruction on such proven communication skills as reflective listening and use of "I" statements. In-session exercises introduce the topics and give parents opportunity to initially practice the new skills in relatively non-threatening realms such as similarities and differences in ideas about parenting. Homework assignments are also completed between sessions.

Stage 3: Conflict Discussion Enactments. With consciousness raised so that there is a mutual commitment to coparenting more effectively for the child, and requisite skills built, stage 3 directs parents to engage in conversations, using the new skills, about areas of greater contentiousness for them. The interventionist introduces ground rules, creates a safe environment, reminds parents of their agreement to work together for their child, and coaches at the level needed by parents. This can range from being an active interloper and "traffic cop", stopping the parents when they lose perspective or stray from the task at hand, to a relatively quiet and benign presence if parents appear to be handling the discussions respectfully. The opportunity to practice "live" with an interventionist at hand to interrupt if conversations go awry emboldens parents to try out the new ways of communicating about the child.

Preliminary studies of Focused Coparenting Consultation

The initial empirical evidence for the effectiveness of the Focused Coparenting Consultation approach came from a field study of an intervention called "Figuring It Out for the Child" (McHale, Gaskin-Butler, McKay & Gallardo, 2013) with unmarried, largely non-co-residential parents expecting a first child together. The six-session "Figuring

It Out for the Child” intervention drew from the Focused Coparenting Consultation frame in developing certain of its consciousness-raising exercises (such as helping parents recognize their own overlapping – and divergent – ideas about parenting) and augmented these with other exercises designed to help parents appreciate how coparental solidarity (or absence of solidarity) affected children’s feelings and sense of self. An important element of this work involved helping parents connect the dots between their own lived experiences as children and the sentiments being voiced (on a trigger video parents watched together with interventionists) by children talking openly about what it would have meant to them to have had more engaged fathers. The video exercise and discussion “surprised the unconscious” by rekindling the parents’ own dormant feelings about having been coparented, while simultaneously helping them recognize that they could write a different script for their own shared child. Despite the unexpected intergenerational and family-of-origin emphases of early sessions, parents uniformly rated the “Figuring It Out for the Child” experience as acceptable (Salman-Engin, Little, Gaskin-Butler & McHale, 2016) and showed statistically-significant shifts in their own capacity to discuss areas of coparenting difference that endured for three months after the “Figuring It Out for the Child” intervention was completed (McHale, Salman & Coovert, 2015). The “Figuring It Out for the Child” intervention is now being tested systematically in a large-scale controlled clinical trial.

Work with unmarried parents differs in many important respects from work with divorced parents. While unmarried parents may have never formulated a coparenting relationship in the first place, divorced parents did, and in most cases that coparenting relationship failed badly and was marred by many destructive processes. The approaches and tactics taken with divorced parents hence need to be informed by this reality, but the Focused Coparenting Consultation framework need not differ. In both unmarried and divorced families, the child is part of an eternal triangle between mother, father, and child (McHale & Irace, 2011). The existence of the triangle is a truism and cannot be called into question; the quality of functioning within the triangle is what matters. Interventions with both unmarried and divorced families are faced with the challenge of successfully reaching across a divide to “connect” parents around the shared child or children.

An application to separating and divorcing families: “Through the Eyes of the Child”

With this challenge in mind, the authors developed a brief, six-session intervention derived from Focused Coparenting Consultation and informed by the heartening results of the “Figuring It Out for the Child” intervention. As is true in all instantiations of Focused Coparenting Consultation, this new intervention, which we manualized into a curriculum called “Through the Eyes of the

Child”, contracts with parents in very specific, no-nonsense terms. The understanding that the interventionist has with the parents is that the consultation is about improving the quality of coparenting and family life for their shared child, with all focus on the child and her root sense of family-level security. The parties all agree that any turns away from the child-focus toward other topics – finances, new romantic partners, details of parenting plans, and the like – will be called out immediately and nipped in the bud. The shared agreement is that they are there for the child and if the parents cannot honor this commitment, there is no point continuing in the intervention. Absent this frame and diligent adherence to it by the interventionist, “Through the Eyes of the Child” cannot succeed.

While “surprising the unconscious” with attention to intergenerational legacies is an important element of “Through the Eyes of the Child”, just as in “Figuring It Out for the Child”, the opening of family-of-origin issues with parents whose habitual impulses may be to use any vulnerabilities revealed by the other to taunt them or point out a sign of weakness might seem a misguided idea. “Through the Eyes of the Child” considers parents’ absence of trust in one another regarding empathy for their origin family experiences. It addresses these legitimate concerns by offering a very structured curriculum that moves parents through numerous exercises each session, each exercise building on the ones before them. Parent reflections about how they were coparented and regrets about their own never-spoken desires to have communicated effectively with one’s own parents about family-level issues and coparenting needs are not avoided. Rather, they are explicitly invited but approached gingerly, respectfully, and in a manner that does not require the parents to disclose their memories to one another. Parents are, however, expected to make use of their recollections as they strive to better understand their own children’s current sensibilities.

From the outset, the work provides regular opportunities for each parent to weigh in on what they see as important, and to be validated for those sentiments. Parents each bring their favorite photographs of each child, which stay with the interventionist and are displayed during all sessions to keep the children in the room. Parents share what the photos exemplify for them about the child’s essence, and both parents benefit from hearing one another talk about their children’s assets rather than their struggles. Later, in a session explicitly focused on children’s reactions to family dissolution, parents learn of expectable responses by children of different ages and are asked to reflect on which among these their own children have been exhibiting. This session also includes a dramatic short video of a child torn between two parents, which also opens invitations for parents to reflect on what it is that children see and experience that may go unnoticed by parents. In these exercises, the focus is not on the parents’ own child’s adjustment, but rather on what might

be expected of children undergoing the stresses their children are experiencing.

The focus of the work then turns to the core of the intervention, which is helping parents understand every child's most basic need: experiencing a sense of family-level security. This focus in the consciousness-raising phase is crucial; the interventionist uses several metaphors centering on bridges, in particular, the sturdiness of the bridge between their home and that of the other parent. By visualizing a child crossing over a precipice on a thin tightrope and another crossing a divide on a firm and sturdy bridge, parents are helped to come to terms with the path the child must walk between their two homes. Understanding that the aim and their joint task is to help create a sturdier bridge for their child to promote safety and security, parents are then drawn into the second stage of the work, skill-building, during which they will be working both within and outside the session on new means of communicating about, and with the child.

Children are remarkably perceptive and attuned to parents' communications with and about the other parent. An important aim of stage 2 is in changing the tenor of the communications the child overhears and receives directly. Before beginning this work, however, parents practice and develop capacity in using some common couple communication skills (reflective listening, use of "I" statements) to discuss their differences of opinion about parenting. A structured exercise that has some "game-like" qualities is used to structure this conversation, with parents guessing which "ideas about parenting" they had endorsed (in a session 1 survey, which they were told they would come back to) most similarly and which most differently. Guided discussion between parents helps parents identify and discuss where their parenting styles come from and how parents' actions are consciously/unconsciously motivated by good intentions and a wish to spare the child negative

experiences the parent is familiar with. The objectives in this work are to foster heightened recognition that the wishes of both parents are to build a strong and healthy child, and to promote inter-adult agreement on common wishes for protecting the child and helping the child adjust successfully. The focus is on the desired endpoints, not on the tactics used to achieve them. This consensus-building work is important.

Afterward, parents receive direction on ways of talking to their children about the other parent during the coming week. Such guidance is often sorely needed. In a recent study of perceptions of parents and PCs, the authors (Carter & McHale, 2017) completed an extensive interview with over 30 parents (who had completed parenting coordination) about their experiences with the process, and about two-thirds of the way through the interview asked the parent (unexpectedly) to share his or her sense of what their child would say they liked best about their coparent's parenting. Responses were striking; fewer than one out of every four parents could unequivocally name a single thing that their child most liked about the other parent. Proportions of respondents who answered the question in different ways are summarized in [Tables 1 and 2](#).

Clearly, the attunement of parents to their children's sensibilities is clouded when the context for seeing and understanding the child is their relationship with the other parent. A key focus in the "Through the Eyes of the Child" homework exercises in this phase of the work is on helping the parent tune into the child's responses after receiving a positive communication about the other parent. This exercise has proven effective in pilot field testing of the intervention by the National Cooperative Parenting Center (Carter & McHale, 2017); by way of illustration, one mother interviewed about her experiences with the intervention afterward reported that when she compli-

Table 1: Responses from mothers who had participated in and completed parenting coordination when asked to name what their child liked most about their ex's parenting

Response Category	Example Response	Percentage of Responses
Unequivocally and readily identifies positive coparent attribute	"That he loves her unconditionally – she knows that. She enjoys going over there and spending time. He's remarried, so I know that's a big plus for her, and... everyone just being positive" (Mother, Family 8).	14%
Identifies positive coparent attribute but with difficulty or with mixed or mildly ambivalent qualifier	"She would say that her dad loves her, that he's supportive of her. I think sometimes her frustration is that 'Dad never answers her phone'" (Mother, Family 11).	57%
Unable to identify positive coparent attribute or disqualifies attribute by adding clearly negative qualifier	"I would say that one of the things he probably likes is his dad lets him do things that I don't let [him] do" (Mother, Family 3).	29%

Table 2: Responses from fathers who had participated in and completed parenting coordination when asked to name what their child liked most about their ex's parenting

Response Category	Example Response	Percentage of Responses
Unequivocally and readily identifies positive coparent attribute	"He thinks we're awesome. He loves his dad and he loves his mom" (Father, Family 3), (Infant Child).	25%
Identifies positive coparent attribute but with difficulty or with mixed or mildly ambivalent qualifier	"She loves her mom. Maybe she would say, 'I wish my mom would spend more time with me'. I don't know" (Father, Family 5).	50%
Unable to identify positive coparent attribute or disqualifies attribute by adding clearly negative qualifier	"I couldn't tell you" (Father, Family 9).	25%



mented the children's father in front of them as part of one of the homework assignments, "... the six-year-old said, 'Why did you say that? You don't even like each other.' It was sad. I didn't realize that even the six-year-old sees us as very polarized". The recognition by parents that they can immediately change their behavior in small ways but in a manner that has an immediate impact on children is important, for it helps build parents' willingness to try out subsequent "homework" exercises assigned.

The most challenging facet of the "Through the Eyes of the Child" work, helping parents learn to communicate civilly about "hot-button" parenting differences, begins in stage 3 of the Focused Coparenting Consultation model: Conflict Discussion Enactments. With consciousness raised, resolve built, skills learned, and evidence obtained from home that communicating in a different way with children about their coparent has observable impact, parents are asked to choose current "hot button" issues that have stultified them to date. The aim of discussing the contentious differences is not to come to an artificial resolution within the context of a single session, for that is not possible. Rather, the aim is to continue cultivating considerate conversational skills so that each parent can at least know that the other has heard and understood their basic position, even though they may disagree. The interventionist has to be very active in this stage (as in all stages) to step in immediately if the couple reverts to older, well-worn tactics of criticizing or demeaning the other parent's perspective. The goal of the enactment phase is to help parents see that they can have a civil conversation, buffeted by the stylized ways of interacting they learned during the skill building phase, so that further progress in coparenting might ultimately be made.

The intervention wraps up with time spent during the last session on identifying a "shared plan" for their child – one that both partners can subscribe and commit to. Parents first create goal lists individually, then share with one another to arrive at a common set that they both agree represent their wishes for their child's future. If there are

contentious differences in arriving at common goals (and this is not common), parents are encouraged to use newly acquired skills to discuss why they see the goals differently, with the interventionist stepping in to help only as needed. Parents later sign a commitment statement promising to work on these aims to support their shared child, and to support one another's efforts to use what was learned in the "Through the Eyes of the Child" intervention whenever one of them adopts the mode of using the stylized conversations when a major disagreement has cropped up.

Throughout the intervention, the focus is on consensus building. Interventionists are not drawn into resolving which parenting stance is more "correct"; this would be foolhardy. Differences between parents in their beliefs regarding what is best for their child are nearly universal, and parenting stances – whatever their philosophy – are most always borne of good intent. Parents' care and concern about their children often comes into question in legal proceedings. "Through the Eyes of the Child" is guided by the humanistic frame that all parents want good things for their children and deserve to be validated for their drive to provide what's best for children. If a conflict regarding one parent's overprotection versus the other's inadequate monitoring can be transformed into an agreement by both parties that they both want to have a child who is safe and protected, and autonomous, inquisitive and exploratory, conversations about how best to achieve these shared aims becomes more possible. But such conversations are not possible until parents can be helped to see the family through the eyes of the child.

At present, "Through the Eyes of the Child" is a new intervention with as-yet no empirical evidentiary support. Parents who participated in the National Cooperative Parenting Center-sponsored field testing of the "Through the Eyes of the Child" curriculum with PCs they had previously worked with expressed hope – for some, for the first time – that they might find ways to work more effectively for their children after they had completed the intervention. Some exemplary comments,

reflecting improved insight, child-centeredness and resolve, included: “I’m at that place again after the course – okay, let’s give it another shot. We’re taking steps now that we haven’t taken up to this point, like me meeting with their stepdad and my ex-wife meeting my wife” (Pilot Father); “The most important thing I learned was just remembering that the kids do come from both of us and they’re not just mine” (Pilot Mother), and, “There was an exercise that got me thinking back when I was a kid and I have good memories of my childhood... realizing my kids are going to look back on their childhood one day on this time they’re in right now...” (Pilot Father). The intervention was acceptable to parents, and families were able to adhere to the guidelines of staying focused on the child, and not auxiliary conflicts and issues, throughout the work. These preliminary positive experiences with “Through the Eyes of the Child” are hopeful, but empirical study of the intervention clearly beckons.

THE ROAD AHEAD

Considerations for further exploration

One compelling question raised by work to date concerns how and in which phase of the parenting coordination work “Through the Eyes of the Child” might best be incorporated, should the achievement of better child and coparenting outcomes be acknowledged by both parents during the parenting coordination intervention. The Integrated Model of Parenting Coordination (Carter, 2011) occurs in three phases. The initial phase (Phase I: *Data Gathering & Establishing Framework*) includes assessments, establishment of a communication protocol, structuring the collaborative support team, and setting boundaries to help parents disengage from acrimonious interactions. Because conflict is dependent on engagement between the parents, the PC assists the parents in recognizing and beginning to develop means for better disengaging. Once these initial aims have been accomplished, the aims of Phase II: Conflict Resolution or Containment become structuring an effective coparenting relationship, providing education about post-divorce impact on children and quality of parenting, and facilitating conflict resolution. For high conflict divorce, it is not until this phase that “Through the Eyes of the Child” can potentially be of benefit for some parents; for others, who may have severe underlying interpersonal conflicts and/or contributing psychopathology, the best outcome may remain the management and containment of interparent conflict. Phase III: *Maintenance & Tune Ups* occurs when coparents are able to function effectively and resolve parenting disputes with less oversight, intervention, and monitoring by the PC. It is during this phase of parenting coordination that parents will have ongoing opportunities to utilize their new skills and

reinforce new coparenting dynamics. In some jurisdictions, a fourth or *Final Termination Phase* (Scott, et al., 2010) is identified where services are terminated either because parents no longer need them or have reached the end of their service agreement. In this phase, the PC provides exiting parents with information on appropriate aftercare service providers in the event they need help in the future.

It is the responsibility of every PC to assess each parent’s readiness and ability to reflect on their communications to the other parent, to be receptive to feedback from the PC, and to modify their behavior considering this feedback. Such capacities are very much affected by the following factors: the parent’s psychological adjustment to the divorce, preexisting personality problems, history of trauma, current financial and other stressors, the availability or lack of supportive family and friends, and whether the marital separation unfolded in a way that was traumatic. Parenting coordination is not a clinical intervention, and unlike the protections afforded in a psychotherapist-patient relationship, parenting coordination will focus on coparenting disputes and will attempt to structure and control the coparents engagements with each other. Because the inclusion of a TEC component in Phase II of the parenting coordination work itself can introduce potential emotional risks for some parents who have been unaware of and unable to process their own internalization of relationship patterns constructed from past experiences that contribute to the intractable nature of the inter-parent conflict, PCss must gauge parental capacities for restraint given potential vulnerabilities inherent in asking parents to reflect on their own behaviors and to make links between family-of-origin relationships and current ways of relating to their coparent. This is a primary reason to carefully consider the wisdom and propriety of incorporating interventions that tap into unconscious patterns within the context of a dispute resolution process (Carter, 2014). The PC will be obligated to determine whether “Through the Eyes of the Child” might be successfully enjoined to enhance the parenting coordination work itself, or whether it would be better utilized as an adjunct intervention, provided by an interventionist outside the process.

In many countries, parenting coordination is practiced by professionals from different disciplines, some of whom have had little or no mental health training (Piccinelli, et al., 2014). “Through the Eyes of the Child” is certainly an intervention that will require some clinical sensitivity, including the ability to understand family and coparenting dynamics as well as the concept of internalized relationship schemata. Understanding these constructs helps give the PC an entry point into each parent’s frame of reference, so that they can help make their irrational attitudes and behaviors toward the other parent more comprehensible. Because the “Through the Eyes of the Child” intervention offers a prescribed struc-

ture, sequence, and clear set of manualized skill-building techniques that call largely upon skills already helpful in mediation or parenting coordination work, the potential for the intervention to be successfully utilized by non-mental health professionals is strong, although a modicum of clinical acumen is needed, and a humanistic orientation can be helpful.

CONCLUSION

Creative approaches are needed to help high conflict post-divorce parents make material changes to improve their coparenting capacity and support their children's post-divorce socioemotional adjustment. A consultation that capitalizes on experiential (rather than simply psychoeducational) methods to heighten parents' consciousness about the impact of coparenting on their children's post-divorce adjustment and their resolve to coparent deliberately and mindfully may be one means toward achieving these ends. "Through the Eyes of the Child" affords PCs tools to disrupt coparents' self-perpetuating systems of intractable conflict and model an attitude toward experiences and perceptions of their coparent that incorporates, at its heart, openness to learning. The validation and mutual respect of both parents' deeply held beliefs about responsible parenthood and the creation of common ground between them are unique elements of "Through the Eyes of the Child" that open a door to the learning of new skills and enactments of new practices, both in the consultation room and at home. We encourage further exploration of this, and other innovative methods designed to address seemingly intractable differences between deadlocked parents.

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