



Quarterly E-Newsletter

Volume 2

January 2006

Chair's Column



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Dear Colleagues,

Welcome to the second edition of the ABA Commission on Domestic Violence's E-Newsletter. In this issue, we address the use of parent coordinators in cases where there is a history of domestic violence. Parent coordinators are intended to facilitate visitation in divorce and custody cases where parents are unable to effectively communicate directly around children's issues. If your jurisdiction has not implemented the use of parent coordinators yet, it is likely to happen soon.

Concerns have been raised by domestic violence victim advocates regarding the appropriateness of using a parent coordinator in family law cases where there is a history of domestic violence. As always, the primary concern is around the safety of survivors and the children when an individual who is untrained in domestic violence is coordinating visitation with an abusive parent. One concern is that an untrained coordinator may view the parent disagreements as solely a communication issue rather than view the inability to communicate as a manifestation of domestic violence. Many of the same arguments are raised when domestic violence advocates raise concerns regarding mediation in domestic violence cases. Importantly, the underlying concern is that unless one fully appreciates the dynamics of an abusive relationship, victim safety may be compromised.

Many domestic violence victims wish the children to remain connected with the abusive parent. Their goal is simply to stop the abuse. Parent coordinators can play an important role where the victim agrees to visitation between the children and the abusive parent. The coordinator can provide safe communication in arranging visitation and resolving related issues.

Visitation is ordered in many divorce and custody cases where there is a history of domestic violence. Nina Zollo and Robin Thompson have experience in educating others of the concerns around parental coordination in domestic violence cases. We are grateful that they were willing to share their experiences and concerns in the article included in this E-Newsletter.

In addition, we have an example of a parent coordination program that appreciates the safety risks to victims and children. Susan Fay and Bunny Flint, with the Vermont Family Court Parent Coordination Project, discuss the process from a domestic violence perspective. Susan and Bunny have developed a program around parent coordination. Many thanks to them for pioneering the safety perspective in this relatively new arena.

We at the Commission would welcome information as to your experiences with the parental coordination process. Our heartfelt thanks to all of you for your work on behalf of survivors and their children.

Margaret Drew
Chair, ABA Commission on Domestic Violence

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