



ABA FLS and APA

By Gregg Herman, Chair-Elect

In December 2005, a group of family law attorneys representing the American Bar Association Family Law Section met in Washington, D.C., with a group of psychologists representing the American Psychological Association. The dialogue covered numerous areas of common concern, including use of psychologists as evaluators, use of lawyers as guardians for children, the effect of domestic violence on children, the effectiveness of parenting coordinators, alternative families and much more. The clear message which arose out of the meeting was the desperate need of the two professions to communicate with each other to share information, ideas and strategies.

Included in the discussion was a proposal for a second joint meeting between the two professional organizations. Such a meeting had been held in April 1997 in Los Angeles, and while it was universally deemed highly valuable, there was no continuation or follow-up. This time, a joint meeting will be a step on an ongoing journey, rather than an end, in and of itself. To foster the relationship, the major topics of joint concern were broken down into seven categories of mutual concern. These categories are:

- I. Psychological Evaluation and Assessment**
- II. Custody and Parenting Plans**
- III. Issues of Alleged Abuse, Neglect, or Endangerment**
- IV. Representing and Advocating for Children**
- V. Ethics and Standards**
- VI. Psychological and Legal Interventions with Parents, Children, and Families**
- VII. Alternatives to Traditional Models and Process-Collaborative law**

For each topic, a working group has now been established. Each working group is being co-chaired by an attorney from the ABA FLS and a psychologist from the APA. Each working group has been charged with the task of discussing their topic and devising ideas in which the two professions can collaborate. Some of these collaborative efforts may involve publications, website information and educational conferences.

We are planning a joint meeting with the APA for our spring meeting from April 29 - May 3, 2008, to be held in Chicago. At that meeting, CLE programs will be produced for psychologists, lawyers and for both professions together to discuss areas of common interest and learn from each other.

For too long, these overlapping professions have operated independently - at times, even a bit suspicious of each other. The ongoing relationship between the ABA FLS and the APA is designed to bridge this gap. How this will be done will require a great deal of work

and creativity. Hopefully, I will be able to report back with concrete examples of this collaboration in action.

For more thoughts on the relationship between the two professions, please take a look at a series of articles which I wrote for my state law journal and which you can access at: <http://www.loebherman.com/articles/herman/wlj06psychcol.pdf>. Any ideas or suggestions would be welcome. Send me an email at: gberman@loebherman.com