

**Eighth Judicial Circuit Family Law Advisory Group (FLAG)
Minutes of February 25, 2008**

The FLAG met on Monday, February 25, 2008 at the Alachua County Family and Civil Justice Center. Present were: Josh Fischer, Leon Plympton, Theresa Harrison, Judge Ysleta W. McDonald, Bill Farley, Dr. Harry Krop, Myrna Neims, Molly McGowan, and Nancy Wilkov.

The Parenting Plan and Website Committee report was given by Myrna Neims, as Ruth Angaran was not present. Myrna mentioned that last Friday's meeting was cancelled. She explained that the parenting plan will be presented to the judges before it is presented to the FLAG. She also mentioned that circuits 3 and 12 are utilizing a parenting plan that was developed in Arizona. Myrna explained that a fuller definition of joint parental responsibility will be coming out later this month.

Myrna Neims announced that there will be a collaborative divorce training this Friday and Saturday at the UF Law School. She stated to contact Ruth Angaran for more details and provided Ruth's email address as cassoc2@bellsouth.net.

Myrna Neims explained that there is some confusion about the list of parenting coordinators listed on the Family Court website. She explained that several people have called the coordinators and are under the impression that they can come to the coordinator's office without an order. A follow up with Arlene Huszar will take place to address this issue.

Myrna Neims stated that there currently have been no changes to the list of names on the FLAG list. She mentioned that if anyone wanted to be added or removed from the list to notify her.

Myrna Neims announced that the Florida Association of Family and Conciliation Courts (FLAFCC) is stepping up their efforts to support FLAGs throughout the state.

It was agreed upon by the group to change the date of the next FLAG meeting from March 31st to March 24th.

Our speaker was Dr. Harry Krop who gave a presentation about parental alienation syndrome. He provided a handout explaining parental alienation that included pages 67 through 97 from a chapter of the book, "The Parental Alienation Syndrome and the Differentiation Between Fabricated and Genuine Child Sexual Abuse" by Richard A. Gardner, M.D.

Dr. Krop asked Judge McDonald if she has heard the term parental alienation syndrome being used in court. She explained that it has been used a few times in court, but that the facts of the case are typically argued, as opposed to the term itself being used.

Dr. Krop explained that parental alienation syndrome is a controversial term. He explained that only seven to nine cases or so have dealt with it as an issue. Dr. Krop mentioned that he is permitted to testify in court about parental alienation syndrome if

nobody objects. He then went on to explain that Dr. Gardner uses a specific definition to describe parental alienation syndrome.

Dr. Krop described a court case where one of the clearest examples of pathological parental alienation syndrome took place. He explained that nine mental health professionals had provided assistance to the family. The case was a custody battle and included two children. Dr. Krop explained that there were sexual allegations against the father. He also mentioned that there was a history of domestic violence between the parents. Dr. Krop was granted access to both children. However, the mother, who lived in another county, refused to bring the child to Gainesville because that is where the father lived. She later called the police and stated that she thought the father might kidnap the child and several police officers were present at the child's appointment to ensure the father was not there. In addition, the mother called the police and accused Dr. Krop of attempting to kidnap the child because of him making arrangements to interview the child in Gainesville.

Dr. Krop provided a written report to the court and explained his concerns regarding parental alienation syndrome taking place in the case. He also watched a Child Protection Team video and reviewed depositions in the case. Dr. Krop's conclusion was there was not sufficient evidence that sexual abuse occurred. His recommendation was that the children remain with the mother and the father have supervised visits at the Family Visitation Center. Recently, the Department of Children Families received new allegations about this family, including drug use by the father, and Dr. Krop has been asked by the court to complete an updated report on the family.

Dr. Krop explained that Dr. Gardner provides different examples and levels of parental alienation syndrome in the handout provided. Dr. Krop also explained that brainwashing is an intentional attempt where one parent is stating that the other parent is bad. However, most times, the alienation is subtle. Typically, the parent who is the alienating parent has a lack of recognition of how detrimental the alienation is to the child. Dr. Krop explained that there is difficulty in determining at what point you determine to remove a child from an alienating parent. He explained that the courts want to do shared parental responsibility more. Dr. Krop mentioned that in the past, fathers were typically not a player in custody issues where parental alienation syndrome existed. He explained that when asked, a child sometimes has a hard time being specific about parental alienation syndrome or they tend to repeat themselves when providing details.

Dr. Krop then provided an example scenario of a mother being the alienating parent. He explained that a formal psychological evaluation and testing of the child and father takes place. If sexual allegations are made, he then conducts a psychosexual evaluation on the father. Dr. Krop then speaks to the child alone while the mother is in the waiting room. The child is typically hostile when describing the father, paternal grandparents and paternal aunts and uncles. Dr. Krop explained that when a neutral party brings the child to an appointment and is in the waiting room, the child is softer. Dr. Krop went on to explain that he then plays games with the child. In addition, there is a session with the father about parameters on how to respond to the child when they are hostile. Dr. Krop explained that the evaluation process and the recommendations are long-term.

Judge McDonald discussed having teenagers testify in court. She explained that the parents are cleared out of the courtroom and the attorneys remain in the courtroom. Dr. Krop stated that children testifying in court depends on the child's maturity level. He also mentioned that if they do not testify the child may feel they have no control over the decisions being made about them. He explained that there is a chapter in the handout that addresses this.

Dr. Krop mentioned that parental alienation syndrome is not always looked at. He stated that the facts are sometimes taken at face value. He explained that children tend to downplay or minimize to overprotect parents. Dr. Krop encouraged custody evaluators to look at both sides of the issue.

The next meeting of the FLAG will be Monday, March 24, 2008 at which Judge Ysleta W. McDonald will discuss Unified Family Court (UFC).