

**Objectives:** The goals of this presentation are to provide: 1) a balanced and accurate overview of research relevant to parenting plans for children under the age of 4 whose parents have separated; 2) empirically supported guidelines that reflect an international consensus about the implications of research for policy and practice.

**Methods:** Drafts of a report on the scientific literature relevant to custody of young children were vetted and incorporated feedback from researchers and practitioners in the fields of attachment, early child development, parent-child relations, and divorce. Co-signers included luminaries in their fields, many of whom conducted the seminal studies analyzed in the report. The project analyzed evidence relevant to the issues of whether giving children more time with their fathers, aimed at strengthening father-child relationships, risks harming the mother-child relationships and whether having overnights away from her, rather than ensure that a child has a high quality relationship with both parents, will result in the child's having poor relationships with both parents.

**Results:** This 2-year project resulted in a broad consensus statement signed by 111 scholars from 15 countries and published in the American Psychological Association's flagship forensic journal. The report provides a set of recommendations to promote optimal child development and parent-child relations.

**Conclusions:** In normal circumstances, the evidence supports shared residential arrangements for children under 4 whose parents live apart from each other, and the evidence fails to support the idea that children under 4 need to spend nearly all their time living with only one parent, when their other parent is also loving and attentive. Studies identify overnights as a protective factor, and no studies demonstrate any net risk of overnights. Babies and toddlers need parents who respond consistently, affectionately, and sensitively to their needs. They do not need one parent's full-time presence. To maximize infants' chances of having a secure lifelong bond with both parents, the consensus recommended that public policy should encourage both parents to actively participate in daytime and overnight care of their young children and maximize the time they spend with their young children.

#### DV EC FCP

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2016.07.540>

### 18.3 THE EVIDENCE-BASED CHILD CUSTODY EVALUATION

*Louis J. Kraus, MD, Psychiatry, Rush University Medical Center, 1645 West Jackson, Suite 603, Chicago, IL 60612*

**Objectives:** Child and adolescent custody evaluations have occurred for decades, since the time of the industrial revolution. Prior to that time, children essentially had the rights of and were treated as chattel in a paternally-based court system. As time progressed into the mid-twentieth century, the focus changed to "the best interest of the child." The importance of the parents' interaction with the child, the child's attachment to parents, trauma and loss, and studies regarding the impact of child custody decisions have all come into play. Judges and experts often used their own anecdotal stories in formulating custody recommendations. In recent years, there has been a progressive focus on evidence-based custody decisions, which are explained in this presentation. Also, this session addresses areas without scientific evidence of support.

**Methods:** A history of child custody is discussed. This leads to the progress of research from the focus on the best interest of the child to current research and its usefulness in child custody decisions. Some states do not use the terminology of custody anymore. They look at decision processes,

which require evidence on each type of decision process for each set of parents.

**Results:** This presentation provides an understanding of the evolution of child custody decisions and how evidence-based decisions are used within the court system at the present time. The complexity of child custody decisions and what goes into the construct of the best interest of the child as well as the limitations of evidence-based custody decisions are explained. Learned knowledge of experienced professionals and ongoing research are both pertinent in regard to making comprehensive and successful custody recommendations for children.

**Conclusions:** Clinicians gain a greater understanding regarding evidence-based treatment in custody decisions. They understand core components necessary for these decisions and the use of evidence-based research to assist with their evaluation process. They realize the complexity of what goes into a child custody evaluation, the need for the assessment to focus on healthy parent-child relationships, and the benefits of those relationships.

#### FCP

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2016.07.541>

### 18.4 IMPORTANT UPDATES REGARDING PARENTAL ALIENATION

*William Berner, MD, Psychiatry, Vanderbilt University, 1313 21st Ave S, 209 Oxford House, Nashville, TN 37232-0001*

**Objectives:** Parental alienation (PA) is a serious mental condition in which a child – usually one whose parents are engaged in a high-conflict separation or divorce – allies himself strongly with one parent (the preferred parent) and rejects a relationship with the other parent (the target parent) without legitimate justification. PA was described by multiple writers in the 1980s, followed by many descriptive, qualitative research studies in professional journals and book chapters. In recent years, there has been a shift toward reproducible, quantitative research. The goal of this presentation is to summarize recent quantitative research regarding PA.

**Methods:** Research is reviewed regarding: 1) a method for distinguishing alienation and estrangement; 2) the long-term psychological consequences of alienating behaviors; and 3) treatment programs for severe PA.

**Results:** One of the core features of PA is that alienated children engage in splitting, i.e., perceiving one parent as totally good and the other parent as totally evil or unlovable. This feature of PA is demonstrated quantitatively by a psychological test, the Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (PARQ). Children's scores on the PARQ clearly separate the alienated and estranged children. With regard to the long-term consequences of experiencing alienating behaviors, the data of a large study indicate strong and statistically significant associations between exposure to alienating behaviors (as children) and symptomatology (as adults), measured by the Symptom Checklist-90-Revised questionnaire. The treatment of severe PA usually requires removing the child temporarily from the influence of the preferred or alienating parent. Studies show that when courts remove severely alienated children from the influence of the alienating parent and order an appropriate intervention, at least 90% of the children are restored to a satisfactory relationship with both parents.

**Conclusions:** Participants learn that recent research helps clinicians and forensic practitioners identify PA, appreciate the long-term consequences of alienating behaviors, and understand the treatment of severe PA.

#### DV FAM FCP

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2016.07.542>