



2018 VTLA Family Law Seminar
September 11, 2018
Embassy Suites Springfield and live-streaming
Seminar Chair: Jason Seiden, *MichieHamlett*, Charlottesville

PARENTAL ALIENATION IN CUSTODY CASES

AGENDA

8:30 a.m. **Registration**

8:50 a.m. **Welcome**

9:00 a.m. **The Role of a Court Appointed Co-parenting Coordinator and Co-parenting Counselor** (CLE = 45 mins)

Amy E. Wilson, Ph.D., *Charlottesville Psychological Associates*, Charlottesville

Parenting Coordination can be an effective intervention to address alienation and other forms of parent-child contact problems in custody cases. Both lawyers and courts look to parenting coordination professionals to assist in cases where allegations or findings of parental alienation exist. Dr. Wilson will address new frameworks for conceptualizing alienation, common features of alienation cases, and how parenting coordination can be effective in addressing visitation resistance/refusal dynamics in high conflict custody cases.

9:45 a.m. **The Role of the Lawyer in an Alienation Case** (CLE= 45 mins)

Katharine W. Maddox, *Maddox & Gerock, PC*, Falls Church

In parental alienation cases, most commonly you are serving as one of the parent's attorneys. You may also be court-appointed as a GAL for the child. Whether you represent the preferred or rejected parent, you must understand the possible causes of contact refusal. When serving as the child's GAL, you have the duty to identify and serve the best interests of the child. Regardless of who your client is, you face difficult circumstances and decisions. We need the knowledge to recognize and understand alienation tactics. We need the skill sets of legal procedures and strategies beyond those used in most other family law cases. Join Kathy for an insightful discussion on how to best navigate the waters in these types of circumstances.

10:30 a.m. **Break**

10:45 a.m. **Attachment Theory and Practice: Legal Framework Application** (CLE = 60 mins)
William “Bill” Whelan, Ph.D., *Virginia Child & Family Attachment Center*,
Charlottesville

Working with parents in contested, high-conflict custody cases, it helps to have a basic understanding of the social science research involving separation impact on their children. Attachment with parents is central to a child's development, and the quality of this attachment in early childhood can have life-long consequences. By using custody evaluations and assessments with attachment theory, judges, lawyers, mediators and mental health professionals gain important perspectives on the decisions made for and about the children. Dr. Whelan will help us correctly understand how attachment theory creates a critical foundation for all professionals working with separated families.

11:45 p.m. **Working Lunch**
Adverse Childhood Experiences and Clinical Reunification (CLE = 60 mins)
C. David Missar, Ph.D., Washington D.C.

Parents often look to lawyers as influential voices guiding them through divorce and custody cases. Judges often wonder how to heal these strained relationships. As we are the ones offering solutions to both the family and the court, we need to hear from a voice representing the child's clinical perspective. Can children reunify with the rejected parent? Is it healthy for the child to remain with the favored parent? With careful steps taken, successful reunification is the ultimate goal most of the time. Dr. Missar will guide us in taking the best interests of children into consideration when they, the more vulnerable, need our help the most.

1:00 p.m. **Roundtable Panel: Parental Alienation/Attachment Issues** (CLE = 90 mins)
Moderator: Hayden O. Lee, *ShounBach, PC*, Fairfax
Judges: (2) The Hon Daniel E. Ortiz, Fairfax Circuit Court, and The Hon. Ashley K. Tunner, Richmond Juvenile & Domestic Relations District Court
Psychologists: (2) William Whelan, Psy.D., *Virginia Child & Family Attachment Center*, Charlottesville; and Amy E. Wilson, PhD, *Charlottesville Psychological Associates*, Charlottesville
Attorneys (2): Joseph A. Condo, *Offit Kurman, PC*, Tysons Corner
Katharine Maddox, *Maddox & Gerock, PC*, Falls Church

This promises to be a lively discussion from the unique perspectives of the bench, the clinicians, and the bar. The legal system in Virginia has resources available to assist high conflict families. Hear what others in the field are doing and share what works and what doesn't for you. Why should family law attorneys care about parent alienation and attachment issues in children? How should you be addressing alienation and rejection of a parent? What if your client is the favored parent? Can

alienation be proven? What specific roles can the Court take in alienation cases – can the Court order behavior change and provide judicial review to ensure compliance? What are tips for crafting orders? Come learn and ask these questions and more of our guest experts!

2:30 p.m. **Break**

2:45 p.m. **Significant Legislative Changes** (CLE = 45 mins)
Lawrence D. Diehl, *Barnes & Diehl, PC*, Richmond

An overview of recent legislative changes and/or proposed changes will be discussed.

3:30 p.m. **Case Law Update** (CLE = 45 mins)
Susan M. Hicks, *The Susan Hicks Group, PC*, Fairfax

An annual review highlighting cases impacting the work of Virginia’s practicing family law attorneys.

4:15 p.m. **Ethics: What to Do When Your Client is Sabotaging Their Own Case and/or Their Children's Best Interest?** (CLE = 60 mins)
Professor Dale Margolin Cecka, Director, Family Law Clinic, University of Richmond School of Law

Building on the morning’s discussion of *The Role of the Lawyer in An Alienation Case*, we will discuss specific scenarios of challenge and heartbreak for parents' attorneys. When is it appropriate to withdraw? What to do when you see a better way, especially for the children, but cannot convince your client to follow it? Questions such as these and more will be addressed.

5:15 p.m. **Adjournment**

MCLE Hours = 7.5 (1.0 hr Ethics)
GAL Hours = 6.0