



## **Resist, Refuse, & Resolve: Turning the Corner on PCCP Conflict**

**WA AFCC – April 25, 2025**

**Leslie M. Drozd, Ph.D.**

**Barbara Jo Fidler, C.PSYCH, ACC.FM, FDR PC**

**Afternoon, 3:45-4:30, Dr. Drozd**

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## **Playing the Game Aspects of the Interventions**



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### Afternoon - 3:45-4:30

- Review: What is PCCP?
  - Good Enough Parenting
  - Gatekeeping
  - Goals of Child Therapist
  - Best Practices PCCP Treatment
  - Safety & Connection
  - Expectations
  - Do I Persist, if they Resist
  - Taking Responsibility
  - Apologies
  - What if the Team Doesn't Work?
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**Learning Objective #3.** Participants will explain ways in which building trust is critical in the work with families in which a child resists or refuses contact with a parent.

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Review: What is a PPC?

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## PCCP?

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Parent-child contact problems (PCCPs) refer to a spectrum of family dynamics, on a continuum of severity, that result in a child developing resistance and sometimes refusal to have contact with a parent.

PCCPs may derive from a complex interplay of multiple dynamics occurring within a family over time.

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## Characteristics of Alienated Child

Deutsch, 2016

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1. Reactions – unjustified or disproportionate to experience
  2. Reasons – trivial, frivolous, unelaborated or false
  3. Rigidity – refusal to consider alternate views or explanations
  4. Repetition – of parent's words
  5. Rehearsed – (or it sounds like a rehearsed script) with brittle affect that does not match words
  6. Radical – child's rejection is extreme and unrelenting
  7. Revision – history is revised to eliminate positive experiences
  8. Relatives – extended family included in the rejection
  9. Regret and Remorse – absent
  10. Reconciliation – is rejected
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## Good Enough Parenting

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## Good Enough Parenting + Parental Insightfulness

### Good Enough Parenting

Warmth  
Authoritative discipline  
Active involvement  
Academic skill encouragement  
Monitoring of child activities  
Appropriate expectations

+

### Parental Insightfulness



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# Gatekeeping

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<b>Adaptive</b>	<b>Supportive</b>  Parent encourages other parent	<b>Apathetic</b>  Parent abdicates responsibility to other parent	<b>Maladaptive</b>  Does not strongly weigh child safety and wellbeing
	<b>Inconsistent</b>  Use of combined strategies that are both adaptive and maladaptive		
	<b>Protective</b>  Parent protects child from other parent	<b>Unjustified</b>  Parent unjustly restricts child from other parent	
<b>Adaptive</b>			<b>Maladaptive</b>
<b>Restricts Other Parent Involvement</b>			

Saini, Drozd, & Olesen, (April 2017). Family Court Review

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## Goals: Children's Therapist

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### Goals of child therapist



- Develop age-appropriate coping skills. Help child replace avoidance with approach
- Identify and express independent emotions and perceptions
- Modulate emotions
- Build problem solving skills
- Build confidence and competence
- Build mastery around managing distress
- Strengthen empathy and compassion

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## PCCP What Works? Kinds of Interventions

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### Key Important Points in PCCP Treatment



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## Effective Interventions that Can Be Helpful -1

- Favored parent motivates child to reconnect with Resisted parent. Child has safe interaction with rejected parent
- Child sees (or hears about) both parents working together in a safe way
- Children become desensitized to rejected parent
- Parents increase their knowledge of impact of conflict on children
- Parents increase knowledge of factors that strain and impair parent-child relationships
- Expectations are managed
- Family members refrain from hostile thinking, speech, and behaviors towards one another
- Family members replace negative emotions with compassion.
- Difficulty: hard for this to happen in weekly psychotherapy

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## Effective Interventions that Can Be Helpful -2

- Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT)
- Teaches skills to manage strong emotions through mindfulness and behavioral therapy. Based in CBT, it focuses on validation of feelings and change
- Skills include:
  - Mindfulness
  - Distress tolerance: the ability to manage emotional distress in the moment
  - Emotion regulation involves recognizing, accepting, and managing intense emotions.
  - Interpersonal effectiveness focuses on improving communication with other people to strengthen relationships and improve self-esteem.

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## Why Don't the Puzzle Pieces Fit? What Can Be Done About It?

- Competing narratives among family members and professionals
- The emotions involved are extraordinarily difficult for parents to experience, tolerate, and regulate
- Kids are reticent to accept an apology or move forward because they do not trust that the rejected parent won't make a mistake, and the rejected parent cannot 'prove' they will not make another mistake
- It is difficult to rebuild trust between family members who have experienced painful conflicts with one another
- There are more people involved than in typical cases and it is hard to coordinate all of them: family members, therapist, other MH involvement (GAL, PC, Coordinator), legal professionals
- There are so many issues involved it is hard/impossible to know best practices for each of them
- You are bound to make mistakes
- How to know it is time to end the intervention because in all reasonable likelihood the puzzle pieces are not going to fit?

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## Safety & Connection

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Team vs. No Team

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# Team Considerations

- Confidentiality: Must be customized to suit needs of case. Parents must authorize team members to share information with one another and the court.
- Court Orders: Must be specific and detailed, with clearly stated objectives and expectations.
- Management and Accountability: Cases must be managed with frequent returns to court and immediate consequences for failing to follow Court Orders
- Treat the System: Rejected parent may be most willing and eager to participate in therapy, imperative that the aligned parent is also included.
- Team Coordination: Not uncommon for divisiveness, polarization in family system to be mirrored in the team ("parallel process"). Team must communicate regularly, and ensure effort is coordinated. Must be a liaison to court
- Measurable Treatment Goals and Accountability: How will success be determined?

Robin M. Deutsch, PhD & Jack Moran, PhD 1-15-25

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# Expectations

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# Preferred & Rejected Parents’ Expectations and Reality for Family Therapy (Ward 2024)

## Preferred Parent’s Hopes:

- Validate their feelings, preserve current family dynamics, protect the children (perceived harm not actual harm), reduce need for interaction with the other parent (OP)
- **Rejected Parent’s Hopes:** Rebuilding relationship with children, recognize (perceived) undue influence of other parent, improved contact with children, reduced interaction with OP
- **Reality in Family Therapy:**
  - Competing agendas, children’s resistance to one parent and alignment with OP, battleground for assigning blame, unrealistic expectations and related frustration with therapy

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AFCC (Columbus, OH) Nov. 15, 2024 - Workshop 1

Association of Family and Conciliation Courts (AFCC)  
16th Symposium on Child Custody

November 14-16, 2024  
Columbus, Ohio



When the Resisted Parent asks ...

**SHOULD  
I  
PERSIST**



**WHEN MY  
CHILD  
RESISTS?**

### CONSIDERATIONS TO PERSIST:

PROTECTIVE LENS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Child is developmentally healthy, resilient, and utilizes adaptive coping skills</li><li>• Child has environmental support</li><li>• Child engages with trained trauma-informed family systems therapist</li></ul>
PARENT LENS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Resisted parent utilizes authoritative parenting skills</li><li>• Resisted parent puts safety, attunement and connection skills ahead of self-interest</li><li>• Resisted parent is patient, self-regulated, insightful, resilient and takes responsibility</li></ul>
PROFESSIONAL LENS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Resisted parent’s legal team is affordable and trained</li><li>• Court sets and follows through with sanctions</li><li>• Professionals support a relationship with both parents</li></ul>

### CONSIDERATIONS TO BACK OFF/LET GO:

PROTECTIVE LENS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Child is fragile, utilizes maladaptive coping</li><li>• Child has few or no other supportive adults</li><li>• Child negatively influenced by an untrained therapist</li></ul>
PARENT LENS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Resisted parent uses authoritarian approach</li><li>• Resisted parent blames, corrects or criticizes others, especially preferred parent</li><li>• Resisted parent does not take responsibility; has rigid and monocular vision</li></ul>
PROFESSIONAL LENS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Resisted parent does not have sufficient resources</li><li>• Resisted parent’s legal team and allied professionals are untrained</li><li>• Court does not exercise sufficient authority</li></ul>

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# Responsibility

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## One of the first parts that needs to occur is...

- For healing to occur, one of the first steps is for a parent to take responsibility for their past, current, future behaviors behavior
- Most interventions attempt to put boundaries around conflict.....
- Short-term solutions help mitigate immediate disagreements.....which is not focused on repairing relationships.....which in turn leaves emotional issues

This results in the parents being stuck in perpetuating conflict and.....

- Perpetuates negative dynamics between individuals.
- Overlooks the crucial work of healing and rebuilding trust.
- It can delay emotional recovery and growth.
- It gives clients the impression that conflict resolution involves winning or losing.

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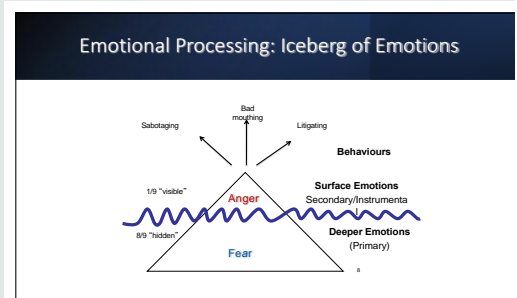


# Trust

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## How to intervene...<sub>-1</sub>

- Consider seeing the high conflict as temporary and situational and simply a challenge
- Process the underlying feels of deeper emotions including fear
- View conflict through a trust lens.
- Assume that trust is critical in coparenting
- Address conflict as a trust violation
- Goal is to rebuilt trust after conflict.
- The Benefits Of Considering Trust In Conflict Resolution = Trust can address resistance to participation.
- Trust-building can lay the foundation for future relationships.
- Building trust ensures that information flows freely



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## How to intervene...-2

- “Scholars tend to mention [trust] in passing, to allude to it as a fundamental ingredient or lubricant, an unavoidable dimension of social interaction, only to move on to deal with less intractable matters.” (Gambetta (1988))
- Trust has been identified as a key element of successful conflict resolution (Avivar-Cáceres et al., 2021).
- Trust is associated with enhanced cooperation, information sharing, and problem-solving (Guo, et al., 2021).
- Trust is critical to conflict resolution (& peace).

## Kinds of Trust

- Incremental Trust
- What do you want to change?

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### Word Association of “Trust

- Take a moment to think about what trust means to you.
- If you had to describe trust in just one word, what would that word be?



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# Apologies

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What is an apology  
and how does the  
process work?

Five components of  
an apology.

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## The Internal and External Family in PCCP Cases "Paint a Picture"



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## Family Pictures

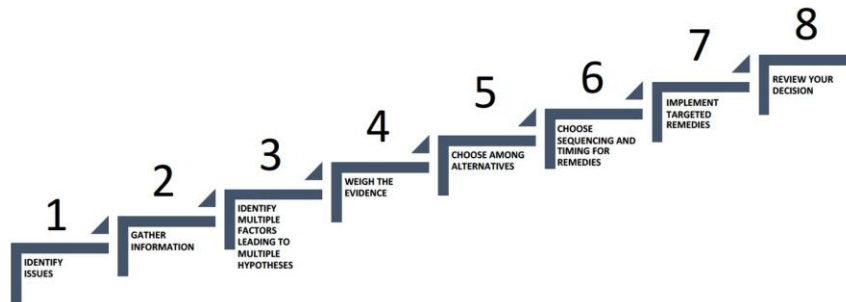
Repeating past  
trauma through  
Internal family work



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## Step-Wise Decision Making for PCCP



View through a trauma lens in the beginning, the end, and throughout.

Drozd, Saini, & Harrison (in press). A Trauma Informed Approach to Parent Child Contact Problem (PCCP) Cases, in *Parenting Plan Evaluations: Applied Research for Family Court*, editors: Leslie M. Drozd, Michael A. Saini, & Nancy W. Olesen, Oxford University Press

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