

**Key Takeaways**  
**Resist, Refuse & Resolve: Turning the Corner on PCCP Conflict**  
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**Morning Presentation:**

**Current Landscape, Mitigating Cognitive Biases & Differentiated Interventions**

- The field is plagued by polarized perspectives, advanced by advocacy groups and characterized by either/or thinking and false dichotomies. Fluid and flexible thinking is needed to adequately understand, assess and intervene in the complexity and nuance of parent-child contact problems and the legal and clinical remedies.
- Implicit and cognitive bias are part of being human. Proactive and intentional steps must be taken to mitigate biases, such as approaching each case individually, collecting varied information from multiple sources, and considering reasonable alternative hypotheses for understanding the many interacting causes of the contact problem and implementing legal remedies and clinical interventions.
- Parent-child contact problems exist on a spectrum and result from a dynamic interplay of many factors creating complexity and nuance.
- Conduct a thorough trauma-informed clinical or forensic assessment to screen for safety and suitability before recommending interventions. Screening for safety is not a discrete event and must continue during interventions.
- Interventions should be trauma- and evidence-informed and be based on the nature and severity of the parent-child contact problem.
- Family therapy may be suitable for mild and moderate parent-child contact problems involving resist/refuse dynamics.
- Family therapy must involve the participation of all family members in various combinations. While individual parent or child therapy and/or therapy with the resisted parent and child may be necessary, these are not sufficient, given the systemic nature of the family problem. The preferred or closer parent must be involved in the interventions.
- The family therapist should never recommend or determine the parenting time schedule as this puts the therapist in a dual role. One of the many functions of the therapist is to attempt to implement the previously determined parenting time schedule, which may range from highly restrictive to expansive or be a stepped-up schedule.
- When the child's rejection of a parent is due primarily to violence, child abuse or severely compromised parent, a stepwise approach is necessary. The offending parent must obtain treatment aimed to remedy their abusive or violent behaviour, while the child separately obtains therapy to address their trauma. Any reunification of the child with the previously

offending parent will require the offending parent to demonstrate accountability and behavior change and an ongoing assessment of the child's readiness to reunify.

- When severe parental alienating behaviors, considered emotionally abusive, are the primary cause of the child's rejection of a parent, there are two last resort options to consider:
  - One option is for the court to order the child reside to reside with the rejected parent for an interim period of restorative contact, while having a period of protection (no contact, typically for 30-90 days) with the favored parent. Sequential interventions may be implemented, first with the child and the rejected parent, followed by a separate intervention with the favored parent. The ultimate goal is for the child to ultimately have contact and a good relationship with both parent.
  - Another last resort option is to cease efforts to enforce parenting time, which may or may not be combined with a therapeutic "goodbye for now" intervention.

### **Afternoon Presentation:**

#### **Family Therapy for Parent-Child Contact Problems: Key Interventions**

- As with screening and assessment, a trauma-informed approach to treat parent-child contact problems is necessary.
- Motivational interviewing will help to surface ambivalence and in turn promote change.
- Other key elements to promote change include instilling hope and enhancing the therapist-client relationship.
- The goals of family therapy in parent-child contact problem cases go beyond parent-child reunification, and include addressing the parenting skills of both parents, improving the child's overall adjustment and coping skills, and improving coparenting functioning.
- Coparenting work, an essential building block necessary to repair strained parent-child relationships, includes assisting the parents to identify their mutual aspirations for their children, psycho-education, setting up coparenting rules of engagement and communication and information sharing protocols, and developing a jointly constructive (corrective) narrative for the parents to eventually deliver to the children. This coparenting message that will hopefully be delivered to the children jointly, will include each parent's apologies to the children.