

MEMBER PROFILE

David Medoff, Ph.D.

David Medoff, Ph.D., Forensic Psychologist. Associate Professor of Education and Human Services and Director of the Mental Health and Counseling Program at Suffolk University, and President of the Massachusetts Chapter of AFCC, Boston, Massachusetts.

What does your current position entail?

In my private practice, I conduct a wide variety of forensic psychological evaluations and consultations. I am trained in both pediatric and adult forensic assessment and I perform evaluations that involve high conflict divorce, child custody, parent-child contact and visitation, child development and attachment, child abuse and neglect, and juvenile delinquency. My specialized areas of interest include forensic psychological testing, the evaluation of sexual offenders, psychodiagnostic assessments and fitness for duty evaluations. It is in my capacity as a Designated Forensic Psychologist (DFP) in Massachusetts that I also performed various evaluations related to criminal law including Competency to Stand Trial, Criminal Responsibility and Aid in Sentencing evaluations. In my capacity as a tenured Associate Professor, I direct a graduate program in Mental Health Counseling and teach a variety of graduate courses including forensic psychological assessment, psychological testing, ethical and legal issues, psychological diagnosis and others. I also conduct research, publish and present in professional workshops and seminars on a wide variety of clinical and forensic topics.

How did you become interested in the field of separation and divorce?

I first became interested in this area of forensic practice when I was subpoenaed to court as a fact witness in my role as a therapist for a young boy who had been sexually abused. I was only an intern at The Children's Hospital in Boston at the time and I distinctly recall walking into the courtroom and seeing a forensic psychologist testifying on the witness stand in a child custody case. He had a nearly unbelievable command of the diverse knowledge needed to do this work well, and he had such an astounding presence in the courtroom that every person within the sound of his voice had stopped in their tracks, riveted, to hear his every word. I recall thinking, "Who is that guy?" and "I want to do what he does!" Well, as it turns out, "that guy" was Dr. Kenneth Herman—a true pioneer in the field of high-conflict divorce and child custody—and he was the Director of the Children and the Law Post-Doctoral Fellowship Program at the Massachusetts General Hospital. I immediately applied to that program where I received remarkable training in the field of separation and divorce, the field I've been working in ever since.



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What advice would you give to someone entering the field now?

My best piece of advice to anyone entering the field is to acquire thorough and formal training in this area of practice. For both mental health professionals and attorneys, this type of work can be so diverse and rich in complexity that it demands a breadth and depth of knowledge that is impossible to acquire without solid training. For mental health practitioners, it is the merging of clinical knowledge and experience with the foreign culture of the law. For attorneys, it is the blending of specialized legal knowledge with the complexity of psychopathology and the field of mental health. Both fields are fully established independent areas of practice, and it is where these fields intersect that it gets really exciting and challenging. To meet these challenges well, one needs thorough formal training.

What are the greatest challenges (or biggest changes) you see in the field now?

In my opinion, the greatest challenges and the biggest changes in the field right now are the development and promulgation of practice standards. This is not the Old West anymore, where one can shoot from the hip and hit the bullseye, and this is a good thing. From the advances established by the Supreme Judicial Court in the legal considerations for admissibility of evidence, e.g., the Daubert, Kumho and Joiner decisions, to the organizational publication of guidelines and standards, our field is ratcheting-up the qualifications and competencies required to do this work. And it should. I cannot think of any stakes higher and more important than those involving the health and welfare of children. We need the best and the brightest working in this field, and we get this with the requirement of training and with the establishment of standards of practice.

What would you like to see happen in the field 10 years from now?

Ten years from now it would be nice to see an incremental increase in both the training opportunities for those involved in this work and in the wide spread reliance on such training, thus raising the level of practice in which we all engage. We are clearly headed in this direction as a field, and AFCC plays a large role in this endeavor.

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What aspect of your work do you enjoy the most?

I love what I do. I think the collaboration and interaction with others that is inherent in my work is what I enjoy the most. Whether it is teaching my graduate students or conducting an evaluation for a child custody matter, I am involved with others for a common goal. When teaching, I am assisting in the provision of newly attained knowledge, and that is extremely gratifying. When engaged in child custody work, I am providing valuable information to the court, in some instances the single entity that can exert a direct impact on the best interest of a child. That is more than gratifying. Even when being cross-examined on the witness stand, I am engaged with that lawyer for the purpose of informing the court to the best of my ability. While it can be frustrating at times, it can also be quite gratifying, and I like to think that it serves a noble goal.

How and when did you first learn about AFCC?

I first learned about AFCC in the mid 1990s when I was training as a forensic psychologist at the Children and the Law Program at the Massachusetts General Hospital. My supervisor at the time was involved with AFCC and arranged the opportunity for me to assist the AFCC staff with registration at a Boston conference in exchange for the registration fee. I jumped at the chance and I'm glad I did.

What do you like most about AFCC?

In my experience, the truly remarkable interdisciplinary nature of AFCC is quite rare, and this, coupled with the opportunities I have experienced in collaborating with some of the brightest, most well-informed and thoughtful practitioners in the field, has been simply extraordinary. Many organizations claim to be interdisciplinary, and they may

well be, but the AFCC culture of “leaving your ego at the door” provides a context in which all members are treated as equals. From judges, to mental health professionals, to attorneys, to mediators, to court clerks to probation and family service officers—it's incredible. This in turn allows for what would ordinarily be unique opportunities to become commonplace, for the rich and complex exchange of ideas to flourish and for the cutting-edge advancement of our field to take place. This is what AFCC is all about. I've also managed to have a lot of fun in the process.

What is your proudest personal achievement?

Although this may sound corny or trite, my proudest personal achievement is raising two kind, beautiful and self-confident children, Jake and Robin, with the wise and generous collaboration of my wife Donna. I am a lucky man.

What do you enjoy doing in your free time?

In my free time I have been known to sit back, relax and light up a nice cigar. The good news is that I don't have that much free time. I also enjoy spending time with my family and friends.

Tell us something about yourself that your AFCC colleagues don't know.

I have very fond memories of going freshwater spin fishing as a child with my father and my brother. Although I do not seem to find enough time to do so, I still find myself returning to that rare childhood-like peaceful state of mind when I get the opportunity to cast a line.