



AFCC Alberta Conference 2026

**Crossroads and Cross-Exams:
Helping Families and Decision Makers Hear
What Matters in Parenting Disputes**

March 12 - 13, 2026

**Sheraton Suites
Calgary Eau Claire**

Calgary



The Association of Family and Conciliation Courts (AFCC)

is an international interdisciplinary association promoting collaborative approaches to serving the needs of children among those working in Family Law systems, encouraging education, research, innovation and identifying best practices.

AFCC members include members of the judiciary, lawyers, psychologists, social workers, counsellors, parenting assessors, mediators, researchers, academics, court counsellors, parenting coordinators, parent educators, financial professionals and students.

This year's conference explores what it means to truly listen – across disciplines, across differences, and across the often-complicated terrain of conflicted and ongoing parenting disputes. Whether it's a child's voice, a cultural perspective, or a complex family dynamic, professionals are increasingly called on to make sense of competing narratives and guide families through conflict with insight, care, and clarity.

Sessions will focus on improving the quality of information available to decision-makers, addressing gaps in cultural understanding, training in best practices for domestic violence screening, and elevating the voices that matter most, especially those that are too often overlooked. From blended families to families experiencing violence, from the mediation room to the courtroom, this year's speakers will offer concrete tools and thoughtful discussion on how to help families at critical crossroads.

DAY 1 - March 12, 2026

7:00 am *Registration and Breakfast*

8:15 am **Welcome Ceremony**
Elder Kerrie Moore

9:00 am **KEYNOTE:**
Dr. Patricia L. Papernow, Psychologist
Stepparents and Stepfamily Dynamics: What Family Law Professionals Need to Understand about What Works (and What Doesn't) in "Blended Families"

10:30 am *Break*

10:50 am **Dr. Patricia L. Papernow... continued**

12:05 pm *Lunch Break*

1:10 pm **Managing Challenges in Mediation**
Judith Lake, CMed
Brad Mustard, KC, Family Lawyer

2:40 pm **Diverse Voices Panel**
Aubrey Watson – an anishinaabekwe from Ketegaunseebee, working at The Family Centre

4:20 pm **AFCC Alberta Annual General Meeting**
Brandi Smith, President, AFCC Alberta
Jonathan Tieman, Treasurer, AFCC Alberta

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Join us for our Chapter's AGM, a yearly formal meeting to review the past year's performance, discuss important issues, elect leadership, and present the 2025-2026 financial report.

4:45 pm Cocktails/Networking

DAY 2 - March 13, 2026

7:30 am *Registration and Breakfast*

8:45 am **Welcome**

9:00 am **Domestic Violence Screening in Family Law:
Why It Matters and How to Do it Well**

Jenny Taylor, MSW, RSW, Registered Provisional Clinical Social Worker,
Level Up Wellness Group

Rebecca Blain, Family Lawyer, Mediator

10:15 am *Break*

10:30 am **A Cross-Examination of a Parenting Expert –
A Live Demonstration!**

Sonja Lusignan, KC, B.Ed., J.D.. Family Lawyer

Dr. Jeff Chang, Ph.D., R.Psych

12:00 pm *Lunch Break*

12:45 pm **Distinguished Member Award, AFCC Chapter** presented to
Dr. Lorri Yasenik, Ph.D, RSW, RFM, RPC-Arbitrator
by Dr. Terry Singh, AFCC Alberta Vice-President

1:10 pm **Update from the Court of King's Bench of Alberta;
Family Focused Protocol**

The Honourable Justice **Sherry L. Kachur**, Alberta Court of King's Bench

The Honourable Justice **Anna Loparco**, Alberta Court of King's Bench

Q&A Session

2:30 pm *Break*

2:45 pm **What is Good Evidence in a Parenting Dispute**

The Honourable Justice **April D. Grosse**, Alberta Court of Appeal

The Honourable Justice **Ola Malik**, Court of King's Bench

The Honourable Justice **T. LaRochelle**, Alberta Court of Justice, Calgary
Family and Youth

4:15 pm Closing Remarks



**Dr. Patricia L.
Papernow**
Psychologist

Stepparents and Stepfamily Dynamics: What Family Law Professionals Need to Understand about What Works (and What Doesn't) in “Blended Families”

After separation or divorce, most parents eventually recouple, yet stepparents and stepfamily dynamics are still missing from the majority of parenting plans, parenting plan evaluations, court orders, and therapeutic interventions. This keynote shines a light on what family law professionals need to know about the unique structure and challenges of stepfamilies, including their frequent role in Resist/Refuse dynamics.

Drawing on current research, the session explores what supports stepfamilies in functioning well, and what tends to go wrong when old maps are used to navigate new realities. Participants will leave with a better understanding of how to bring stepfamily-specific knowledge into their work to support children's wellbeing and make more informed decisions in conflicted parenting disputes.

Managing Challenges in Mediation

Join Brad and Judith as they compare their mediation practices, the challenges they commonly encounter, and the increasing complexities of recent years.

They'll highlight important protocols and the tools they use for navigating these difficulties and outline how other professionals can better prepare clients for mediation and help set the stage for productive discussions and successful resolutions.



Judith Lake
CMed



Brad Mustard
KC, Family Lawyer

JOIN the AFCC – BECOME A MEMBER **An Investment in Professional Excellence**

There is no better way to keep pace with the rapidly changing environment for those who work with families in conflict than being an AFCC member. Your membership will provide you with the latest information, most knowledgeable resources and access to supportive colleagues, saving you valuable time and money.



Aubrey Watson
MSW

Diverse Voices Panel: How do you develop a diversity lens.

This panel brings together lived experience and professional insight to explore how culture, religion, ability, and other aspects of identity shape family dynamics and influence decision-making in legal and mental health contexts. With voices from lawyers and mental health professionals, we'll examine what it means to develop a "diversity lens" in your work, especially when navigating unfamiliar territory.

Panelists will share strategies for recognizing the limits of your own knowledge and offer practical ways to respond when you're outside your depth. How do you ask the right questions? How do you avoid doing harm, even with good intentions? And how can you be most helpful in moments where identity, culture, or accessibility matter deeply, but understanding is incomplete?

This session encourages reflection, humility, and a commitment to learning, equipping attendees with tools to approach their work with families in more inclusive and culturally responsive ways.

Domestic Violence Screening in Family Law: Why It Matters and How to Do It Well

Screening for domestic violence is the first and most vital step in creating safer outcomes for children and families.

This session explores the purpose and power of structured screening in family law, with a focus on asking the right questions in the right way. The why, the how and the what next of screening will be discussed, such as:

- who should you screen first and does that order matter?
- what tools are available and appropriate, what do you do with the information once you have it? and
- why is screening necessary even when there are no obvious red flags?

This session will be appropriate for both beginner and intermediate professionals seeking to build or strengthen their skills in this essential area.

Participants will walk away with recommended tools and resources.



Rebecca Blain
Family Lawyer



Jenny Taylor
MSW, RSW



Sonja Lusignan
KC, B.Ed., J.D.. Family
Lawyer



Dr. Jeff Chang
Ph.D., R.Psych

A Cross-Examination of a Parenting Expert: A Live Demonstration!

Join us for a dynamic and instructive presentation featuring a live cross-examination of parenting expert Dr. Jeff Chang, Ph.D., R.Psych., conducted by family lawyer Sonja Lusignan, KC, B.Ed., J.D. This session will showcase the structure, strategy, and common challenges involved in cross-examining experts in parenting matters.

Through this live demonstration, family law professionals will gain practical insights into effective techniques for questioning expert witnesses, while parenting experts will benefit from an experiential understanding of what to expect during cross-examination.

The presentation will also explore best practices for conducting ethical and impactful cross-examinations, as well as for providing clear, professional testimony as a parenting expert.

The AFCC-Alberta Parenting Plan Guide & Template is available [HERE](#).



2026 DISTINGUISHED MEMBER AWARD Alberta Chapter

Dr. Lorri Yasenik

Presented by Dr. Terry Singh
AFCC Alberta Vice-President

The Distinguished Member Award recognizes experienced AFCC Alberta Chapter members for their significant and substantial contributions to the resolution of family conflict, the family and conciliation courts, and the AFCC itself. The award is bestowed sparingly, and facilitates the intergenerational transmission of knowledge and insights amongst the AFCC Alberta Chapter community.



Dr. Lorri Yasenik
Ph.D, RSW, RFM, RPC-
Arbitrator

JOIN the AFCC – BECOME A MEMBER

An Investment in Professional Excellence

Events

Resources & Information

Member Pricing

Discourse & Debate

Discounts & Scholarships

Global & Diverse Perspectives

Update from Justices on the Court of King's Bench Family Focused Protocol (FFP)

Join us for an update on the Court of King's Bench Family Focused Protocol (FFP). This will be a great opportunity for participants to come with questions and get answers.

The Honourable Justice
Sherry L. Kachur
Alberta Court of King's Bench

The Honourable Justice
Anna Loparco
Alberta Court of King's Bench



What is Good Evidence in a Parenting Dispute?

What evidence is a decision maker looking for in considering the best interests of children? How to gather and present good evidence. What are mental health professionals including in their reports/recommendations that make a difference for decision-makers? The Honourable Justices will work off of a case problem where they will review practical evidence in respect of the above considerations.

The Honourable Justice **April D. Grosse**
Alberta Court of Appeal

The Honourable Justice **Ola Malik**
Alberta Court of King's Bench

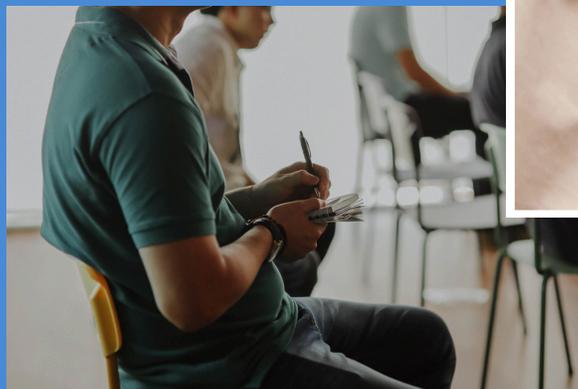
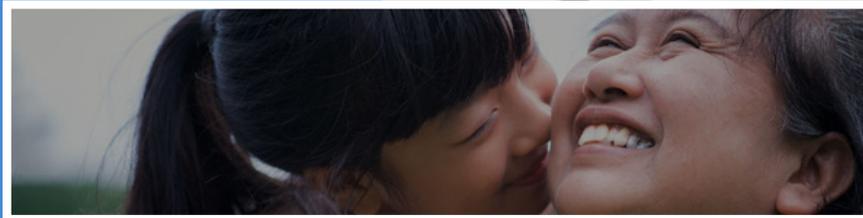
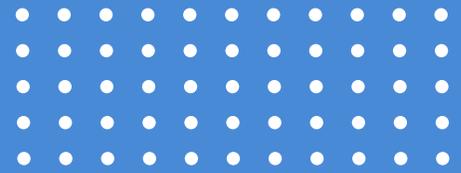
The Honourable Justice **T. LaRochelle**
Alberta Court of Justice,
Calgary Family and Youth



AFCC ALBERTA AGM

Annual General Meeting - AGENDA

- Board of Directors Election
- Annual Financial Report
- President's Report and Chapter Activities
- Bylaw amendments *(if any)*
- Membership Report
- Community Outreach



AFCC Alberta acknowledges that Alberta is the traditional homeland of many diverse First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people.

We are grateful for the means to learn from the traditional peoples of these lands and thankful for the sharing of their traditional peacemaking processes that have been used to resolve conflict for thousands of years.

JOIN US AT THE 2027 AFCC ALBERTA CONFERENCE

For more information about or to join the AFCC Alberta Chapter visit

<https://www.afccalberta.org>

