

AzAMFT NEWSLETTER



SPRING/SUMMER UPDATE

MELISSA A. BAKER, MS, LMFT

As I sit down to write this letter, my newsfeeds are filled with personal stories, offers of support, and shared hotline information for anyone contemplating suicide. In our work, we are acutely cognizant of the widespread struggles with mental and physical health issues, family conflict, loneliness, life transitions, discrimination, and substance use. Our choice of profession was in some way borne out of an awareness of these turmoils, paired with a desire to support and encourage those around us. This week has been a somber reminder that our work is incredibly vital, and open dialogue about the topics that can lead people to seek services is crucial to reducing stigma and welcoming those in need to find support. As marriage and family therapists, we understand the dynamic and multiplicative effects of stresses in a system, and the benefits of quality therapy to manage those effects. Let's continue to provide safe havens for change to those in our communities.

Transitioning to a discussion of the practice of marriage and family therapy here in Arizona, we want to ensure that everyone is aware of the

rules changes being proposed by the Board of Behavioral Health Examiners. Please go to their website (azbbhe.us) and view the rulemaking filing under Board News. Some of the revisions are a result of the legislative session, and the discussions surrounding HB2406/HB2411 and SB1246. Your AzAMFT Board was actively involved in the legislative process regarding both of these bills, and ultimately supported the review of current practices and reduction in fees and barriers to licensure that were included in the final versions of those bills. Transportability of license should be made easier as a result of these revisions, which has been a common complaint of AzAMFT members for years.

The current proposed rulemaking takes the legislative adjustments a step further, and additionally allows for associate licensed therapists to own, operate, or manage their own practices while obtaining clinical supervision toward independent licensure. This plan would align with the state's goals to reduce regulation and increase the ease of doing business in Arizona. We know that this change would represent a remarkable shift to both the practice of psychotherapy and the practice of clinical supervision in our state. We

are in communication with AAMFT regarding these modifications and will be presenting a formal statement to BBHE regarding our position on the various aspects of the proposed changes. Please send us your thoughts as well, as we continue to represent the experiences and concerns of our membership to our state's legislative and regulatory entities. You can also communicate your ideas directly to the BBHE via email (rulesfeedback@azbbhe.us) or at one of the upcoming public hearings, on July 17 or August 1.

If you would like to host a one- to two-hour CEU event at your practice, please contact us. We are seeking to respond to member requests to expand our CEU opportunities, as well as offering opportunities for practice marketing.

As we head into the summer season, let's stay cool and stay connected – with each other, with our field, and those we encounter each and every day.

"Be somebody that makes everyone feel like a somebody."



APRIL-MAY RECAP

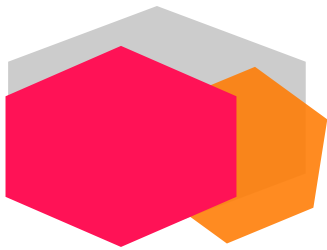
Our 2018 Spring Conference was a hit - our attendees enjoyed Dr Furrow and Faren and Vera Akins. At our annual meeting, we discussed membership changes in AAMFT, and reminded everyone to "check the box" for Arizona Interest Network membership. We are awaiting word from AAMFT regarding our next steps in division transition.

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**SUPPORTING ARIZONA'S
MARRIAGE AND FAMILY
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We recorded our 2nd AzAMFT podcast at the conference! Jade Rice interviewed Dr Furrow, retiring long-time Spring Conference Committee Member Gerry Blakeman, and our conference sponsors.

Link Here:
<https://bit.ly/2JayZuc>



LMFT'S AND PROFESSIONAL FAMILY MEDIATORS:

Mutual Goals, Distinct Objectives, Shared Techniques

By: Michael Aurit, JD, MDR and Karen Aurit, LAMFT

Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists and Professional Family Mediators have core mutual goals: to help family members improve communication, solve problems, understand themselves and one another better, and to create a better functioning family environment. Couples therapists guide spouses toward potential reconciliation. Family Mediators pick up where therapists left off in cases where reconciliation is not possible and guide spouses through healthiest possible divorce. While the specific objectives of therapists and mediators are different, their foundational techniques to advance their distinct objectives are strikingly similar.

Objectives of Couples Therapy and Divorce Mediation

Therapy seeks to solve *behavioral* problems by exploring past behavioral patterns to eliminate, change or produce future behaviors that improve relationship dynamics. Mediation seeks to solve immediate *issue based* problems by creating opportunities for mutual agreement. Reaching agreements in mediation can bring about behavioral changes in spouses (soon to be "former spouses"), but only because of heightened communication within the mediation process and from behavioral changes resulting from adherence to mediation agreements.

In other words, therapists seek to identify *underlying behavioral problems* in marital systems to change the behavior. Mediators seek to identify *underlying interests* of each spouse on a specific set of issues to address immediate problems that need to be resolved. However, Therapists and Professional Mediators use many of the same strategies to help guide, influence, and manage clients toward their distinct objectives.

I am often asked: How do you help spouses who completely disagree on an issue suddenly reach an agreement that they both support? Well, magic, of course! At least, sometimes it feels that way. But, the deeper answer reflects how the mediator employs strategic techniques and astute judgment that can create the space for agreements to flourish among people who are at odds. Therapists are familiar with these following techniques, and may find value in how mediation strategy also depends on their proper utilization.

Normalizing

An essential task of the mediator is to establish that both

spouses have normal, resolvable problems. One of a mediator's most powerful strategies is to acknowledge when a person's feelings, or that a past action, or reaction from another person or behavioral pattern in children, or some other set of circumstances is *normal* -- is common -- is not unusual.

Educating clients that whatever might be causing anxiety, stress, or even conflict is normal, can immediately help lower their individual anxiety level and de-escalate conflict between them. Both general circumstances as well as specific circumstances can be normalized.

Normalizing general circumstances

A mediator who senses that clients fear they will not be successful in reaching agreements might say in a joint mediation meeting: *"I understand there is some conflict between you, or else you probably wouldn't be here. I've never sat with divorce mediation clients who had no conflict between them. But, actually, your past conflict has little to do with your ability to have a very successful mediation process and reach thoughtful agreements today regarding your children."*

What has this done for clients? For one, it has acknowledged their fear of being unable to reach agreements. It has also provided them comfort to understand that they are not alone -- that everyone in mediation has conflict, and that the vast majority reach agreements, so they can too. It diffuses their angst. It gives them permission to keep going and gives them confidence that these circumstances and their feelings surrounding them are normal. Keep calm, and carry on.

Normalizing specific circumstances

When a mediator normalizes certain specific circumstances, it can prevent the explosion of a divorce war. Therapists have an opportunity to do the same for their clients for issues relating to children's behavior during divorce.

Divorce mediation scene.... action!

Mom: They are just not ready yet for overnights with Dad. Every time I hand them over to him, they cry and scream that they don't want to go. They want to stay with me.

Dad: Yeah, but once they are with me they don't want to leave. Last week, they even said ' please can we stay with you longer, we don't want to go back!'

Mom: You're lying! They obviously want to be with me.

Dad: Oh, really? Let's ask them! They'll tell you that they would rather be with me.

The mediator now has an opportunity to educate clients about certain researched child coping behaviors that will normalize the situation and as a result, lower conflict in the moment, and in the future.

Protecting parents self-esteem is when children try to comfort or "take care" of their parents during the difficulty of the divorce. Although it is true that children love and have empathy for their parents' pain during divorce, this behavior is triggered more often to preserve their own emotional survival. A child may attempt to boost the self-esteem of each parent because the child needs stability with each parent and fears emotional abandonment.

Thus, a child may tell Mom that she wants to live with her, and also tell Dad that she wants to live with him. This is a classic, normal way children cope with divorce. However, as a result, both parents become convinced that the child really wants to live with them and this can create terrible child custody battles in court. If only parents knew this was *normal*.

Proving loyalty happens when a child feels that it is not possible to love both parents, if parents no longer love one another. This results in the child sacrificing, at least temporarily, the relationship with one parent, to "prove loyalty" to the other. Mom is angry at Dad because Dad hurt Mom. So how can I, a child, still want to spend time with Dad? Won't Mom be mad at me if I want to spend half of my time with Dad too?

Children may feel the need to prove loyalty because of their need to be cared for and feel safe. This results in a child siding entirely with one parent and cutting off the other. The child subconsciously accepts that it is better to have one parent 100% than risk alienating both. Misinterpretations of this extreme behavior in kids can cause both parents to seek "full custody."

Separation distress can happen when a child is exchanged from one parent to the other. During the exchange, children may cry or resist leaving a parent—demonstrating the emotional loss of leaving a parent. However, this often indicates a close bond with *both parents*. Well-meaning mothers may misinterpret this behavior as proof that the child does not want to be with Dad. An exasperated father reacts by assuming

that Mother's bad-mouthing is the cause for their daughter crying when she comes to him. Both parents fight for more parenting time, or even sole custody, based on false assumptions.

Imagine the impact that normalizing these child coping behaviors can have for parents. In the mediation room, we can immediately refocus parents away from blaming and toward problem-solving. Imagine the intense future conflict that such normalizing has prevented.

Mutualizing

Mutualizing is a technique where the mediator frames or re-frames a statement in a way that shows spouses that they have a mutual interest, when they might not have realized it. Recognizing common interests helps people come closer to reaching agreements.

Often, Mom and Dad each have a position on an issue that on the surface seems far apart. The mediator can show that they have a mutual interest. For example:

Mom: The children need their Mother!

Dad: No, the children need their Father!

Mediator: I would imagine the children love and need both their Mother and their Father.

Another example: Mom wants a "1-week on, 1-week off parenting time schedule." Dad wants a 2-2-5-5-schedule -- with Mom on Mondays and Tuesdays, with Dad on Wednesdays and Thursdays, and alternating weekends. How can the mediator mutualize where they agree?

Mediator: Mom, I'm guessing that spending a full weekend with the children is important to you, rather than splitting time on the weekend. Is that right?

Mom: Yes.

Mediator: And Dad, the full weekend with the children is important to you as well?

Dad: Very important.

Mediator: Okay, so a full weekend with the kids is important to *both of you*, good.

Mutualizing this, helps them see that although they believe they are polarized, they have a common interest. Substantively and psychologically, it may bring them just a bit closer to an ultimate agreement.

The mediator would then continue to ask Mom and Dad what else is important to each of them when creating their ideal plan. After hearing those interests, we see that they actually share several key common

interests: Consistency of days and predictability, less exchanges, and no physical exchanges directly between parents.

These interests have been mutualized during a fifteen-minute discussion. Parents, while in conflict, have established an array of interests on which they agree. Now, the mediator can help brainstorm parenting schedule options that check the boxes of their mutual interests. It will be far easier for them to agree on a plan having done this groundwork because their interests have been mutualized in advance of the decision phase of the conversation. From there, they will create a time-sharing plan that works for both of them.

Summarizing

Summarizing moves the mediation process forward by helping spouses hear and understand what they have agreed upon, where they are close to agreeing, and where exactly they are not in agreement. It focuses the conversation and helps them attack their disagreements, rather than attacking one another.

Summarizing also gives spouses their bearings in a sea of issues being discussed. It further can take the form of positive reinforcement to show spouses how much they have accomplished. Strategic summarizing can help generate forward momentum. It also helps the mediator keep the rapid-fire exchange of information straight too.

Imagine: Mom says what she wants, Dad overlaps with what he wants, Mom chimes back in fast, Dad shoots back, then, the mediator summarizes by saying, "it sounds like Mom and Dad both agree on this, and each want that, but there is still an agreement needed on the specific issue of X."

Reframing

Inherent in the idea of summarizing is the concept of "reframing." Think of reframing as the mediator or therapist reflecting to the speaker the essence of their ideas in the professional's own words. Just as the original statement had both *content* and *emotion*, the professional's reframing should also mirror the content and emotion of what was said. But, when reframing, the professional can filter the original message in a strategic way, so that the reframe acknowledges accurately what was said, and allows the other spouse in mediation better hear and process what was said.

Effective reframing has huge benefits to each party and to the quality of the mediation process. It demonstrates to the party being reframed that they have been heard

by the mediator. It reduces confusion and conflict by getting parties on the same page about the meaning of what was said. It allows the mediator to be corrected if the summary does not accurately reflect what was said or meant. And it moves the process forward when a good summary reframe sets up the foundation for the next steps toward resolution. Mediators are constantly reframing. Sometimes, sentence by sentence, as parents engage in dialogue to keep the conversation focused and on track.

Husband: (Wife is also sitting in the room) I can't stand the idea of alimony. She wants the divorce, and now I have to pay her for it! All those years, I was the one who went out and worked my tail off, while she stayed home with kids. It makes me so angry!

Mediator: So, I think I hear you saying that the issue of spousal support is going to be challenging from your perspective. You're frustrated about it, but acknowledge that since you worked outside of the home and your spouse worked inside the home for many years, that spousal support is necessary for each of you to be financially stable after divorce.

Husband: Yea.

Husband and I essentially said the same things, but in very different ways. My hypothesis of what Husband meant was confirmed as correct, but my framing is far more workable to move the conversation forward.

Husband feels heard, both substantively and emotionally. I've also reinforced his own subtle acknowledgement in a more direct way that spousal support of some degree will be paid, and the reasons for this are due to the choices made during the marriage about who would earn an income and who would care for the children.

My jumping in to reframe before Wife has a chance to respond also eliminates the need for Wife to respond. Wife may have responded in a way that only heard that Husband did not want to pay support and thus, Wife may have lashed back in self-defense. But because I intervened, Wife hears that Husband is willing to pay spousal support. Her dignity is restored to some degree by my framing of her "working inside the home."

My reframed summary to of Husband also mutualized the importance of both being financially stable after divorce.

The mediator may even go on to normalize and anchor the conversation as follows:

Mediator: So, let's be real -- the topic of spousal support is a very sensitive conversation. I don't know that I've ever met any spouse who felt comfortable discussing the issue. Support itself is something that both payers and recipients aren't a fan of for different reasons. So, let's go about this conversation understanding the realities of the circumstances today. Your children's well-being depends on each of you being financially stable. Let's talk with each other in the very best we can.

Mediators and therapists must be very cautious and calculating when reframing. For example, if Wife refers to Husband as an ass, it would not be well advised to reflect Wife's word choice when reframing her statement. Helpful? Not so much.

When reframing, the professional should focus only on the important information, potentially omitting parts that are not relevant or counterproductive. But, we must remain true to the deeper meaning of what was communicated, never twisting or manipulating it, but rather crafting the communication in a way that it can be better heard by the other person. In mediation, we are defining a mutual problem to come to a mutual agreement, so any reframe that will bring the parties closer together can be very helpful. In therapy, family systems also produce a mutual problem where the art of reframing may be extremely useful.

Conclusion

Therapists and family mediators should recognize that in addition to sharing the foundational professional techniques of normalizing, mutualizing, summarizing and reframing, among others, that through our strategic work we provide clients with what they need most when moving through their work with us: we give them hope.

LMFT's provide hope for their marital relationship. Professional Family Mediators provide hope for their redefined relationship as co-parents. Working in tandem, we support the healthiest possible outcomes for parents and children whether through reconciliation or through divorce.

Michael Aurit, JD, MDR, is a nationally recognized professional divorce and family mediator, attorney, and Co-Founder of The Aurit Center

for Divorce Mediation in Scottsdale, Arizona.



Karen Aurit, LAMFT, is an expert in family dispute resolution systems design and Director of Mediation Services as well as Co-Founder of The Aurit Center for Divorce Mediation.



This month, we are excited to offer our first Az MFT Open House series event on June 22nd. The Aurit Center for Divorce Mediation will be offering a program on The Partnership of Therapists and Family Mediators. If you are interested in these free CEUs for AzAMFT members, please RSVP to karen@auritmediation.com **SEE BELOW FOR MORE INFO...**

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Protecting Children by Preventing Divorce Wars:

The Partnership of Therapists
and Family Mediators

FREE 90 MINUTE CEU PROGRAM

*Presented by
The Aurit Center for Divorce Mediation
&
The Arizona Association for Marriage and Family Therapy*

When: Friday, June 22, 2018 (9:30AM – 11:30AM) *Breakfast will be provided**

Where: The Aurit Center For Divorce Mediation
7231 East Princess Blvd. Suite 202, Scottsdale, AZ 85255

Cost: Free to attend

Register at: <https://auritmediation.com/ceu/>

This interactive program will explain how the divorce mediation process works – from beginning to end – and how mediation supports healthier co-parenting during and after divorce.

Participants will learn how divorce mediation compares to litigation in court. Arizona divorce and child custody law will be covered. Foundational mediation concepts will be explained including neutrality, confidentiality, ethics, and “interest-based negotiation.”

Effective conflict resolution strategies will be demonstrated. Family mediation research will be included, as well as ways therapists can help prevent child custody battles. There will be significant time for open “ask the mediators” Q & A.

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networks.aamft.org/arizona

For More Up-to-Date Info, Events and to view previous editions of the AzAMFT Newsletter!



Letter From The Editors:

Our time with the AzAMFT newsletter is coming to an end at the end of this year. We are looking for 2 volunteers to take over our positions as editors and designers of the newsletter. Please contact us if interested! As always, thank you for taking the time to read the newsletter and to be a part of our wonderful AzAMFT Community. We welcome all feedback, comments and suggestions to make the newsletter better for everyone. Send us an email at: dmoor@asu.edu / eab99030@marymount.edu



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