

FAMILY PEACEMAKING WITH AN INTERDISCIPLINARY TEAM;  
A THERAPIST'S PERSPECTIVE

Dr Susan Gamache

Registered Psychologist

Clinical Fellow, Marriage & Family Therapy

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In the rapidly evolving field of consensual dispute resolution, interdisciplinary teams provide an unparalleled opportunity for peacemaking in families transitioning through divorce. The introduction and integration of Interdisciplinary Collaborative Practice into the continuum of consensual dispute resolution has opened the door for countless new opportunities to bring different types of professionals together, to elevate our collective understanding of the various disciplines involved, to coordinate services and to become more sophisticated in our practices in order to assist families to not only survive the divorce transition but to thrive and to create a lasting peace for all family members, especially the children. Interdisciplinary teams grow in the fertile field of various types of practice groups within the international Collaborative Practice community. The International Academy of Collaborative Professionals now supports over 5000 members in 25 countries and is growing stronger every day. This community gives collaborative professionals the opportunity to not only meet each other but also to learn, grow and evolve this practice together.

What does peace making mean to family therapists? Within therapeutic traditions, we don't generally think about peace making per se. We think about health and wellbeing, theories of development, of personality and of change for individuals, families and

relationships. We keep our sights on psychological and relational health over the many predictable and unpredictable changes of the lifespan. We consider the needs of various populations such children, teens, adults and families or the patterns of problems such as trauma, personality disorders or addiction. We ask ourselves “Which approaches work best in any given situation?” all the while knowing that one of the most important factors is our working relationship with our client, no matter what the approach, the population or the problem.

At the same time, peace making is certainly one way of describing what we aspire to. For the family experiencing marital transition, it means achieving the best possible living within a 2-household family system; for the adults and the children to get on with their individual lives amid the typical ups and downs of family life. It means having the resilience to deal with whatever challenges lie ahead. It means parents who have the best possible co-parenting relationship. It means that children are happy and secure in their family relationships, focused on their own lives rather than conflict between their parents and are getting on with the job of growing up to be good citizens and to realize their full potential. It means that all the relationships within the immediate and the extended family system are ‘in flow’, in other words, moving in an appropriate way through time, providing love, belonging and security for all and dealing appropriately with what life brings as the family moves through predictable and unpredictable changes across the life span. For some families, it may also mean dealing with a crisis situation or finding a way to live well with chronic problems that may never fully resolve. Therapists have been working with families towards these ends for decades.

However, until the advent of Interdisciplinary Collaborative Practice, family therapists were limited in what they could offer to divorcing families. From a professional perspective, as the couple transitions out of couple therapy and into the divorce process, our role becomes limited to therapeutic support from the sidelines. Sometimes couples resolve their separation problems themselves or through mediation. Sometimes, as a professional group, we watch helplessly as families encounter the hazards of the adversarial process. We are careful not to get drawn into the adversarial system.

As a psychologist and marriage & family therapist, I completed my graduate programs with a primary focus on children and families through divorce and remarriage. To my surprise, even before I had completed my doctoral program and had been licensed as a psychologist, I began to receive requests to provide custody and access reports, something that I had never considered. Without realizing it, I had already made the decision not go to court. So what was I to do? Having already worked for many years with families in transition, I knew that even the greatest therapeutic work could be wiped out by just a little litigation. How was I going to bring forward the best of my training in psychology and marriage & family therapy together with my commitment to divorcing families without going to court - never mind make a living? Perhaps I should just go to court –student life certainly has financial consequences.

Thankfully, just as I was agonizing over this question, Collaborative Practice arrived in Vancouver through the AFCC conference and a 1-day workshop with Stu Webb, Pauline Tesler and Dr Peggy Thomson.<sup>1</sup> This marked the beginning of the interdisciplinary group that became Collaborative Divorce Vancouver. With great relief I channeled my efforts into the creation and development of my local practice group and later the fledgling board of IACP as well as providing training throughout Canada, the US and eventually Europe.

That was June of 1999. Now, 15 years later, Vancouver has a vibrant Collaborative community built around our monthly dinner meeting<sup>2</sup>. In Vancouver we have hosted a dinner meeting 10 times per year for the past 15 years. These gatherings provide a place for professional relationships to begin and to build. They are held in a comfortable location with a buffet dinner where members can relax with a glass of wine and chat with colleagues before dinner. After dinner there is either a speaker, a panel addressing a practice issue or an AGM. This professional development reaps benefits for families as we all improve the quality of our client care through this continual training and networking.

Collaborative Practice has at its core an agreement by lawyers to limit the scope of their representation by means of a written agreement to settlement negotiations.<sup>3</sup> The possibility of having non-adversarial legal representation is a wonderful addition to the spectrum of consensual dispute resolution. However, in addition to Collaborative lawyers, Collaborative Practice teams include professionals from the therapeutic and financial domains to bring the best of their disciplines to work in new and exciting ways. The trajectories of these innovations are only just beginning as those of us within the CP community witness the development of different approaches, team structures and processes emerging in different communities.

Most importantly for the therapeutic community, there is finally a way that therapists can fully support families through the divorce process without fear of subpoena. Working as peacemakers in interdisciplinary Collaborative teams allows us to remain in the therapeutically sound template of peace making and problem-solving. For our families, it allows us to work to protect the family and to prevent unnecessary damage through the divorce process itself. We can play a proactive and preventive role: we no longer have to wait

until after the dust settles to try to pick up the pieces and to restore health and harmony to individuals and relationships, especially parenting relationships.

### The Early Years

Two distinct initiatives combined to result in the introduction of interdisciplinary teams into the consensual dispute resolution continuum. In Minneapolis, MN, Stu Webb began the Collaborative Law movement in which family lawyers limit their scope of representation to settlement only.<sup>4</sup> If the problems cannot be resolved collaboratively, all team members resign and the family is referred to trial lawyers. Simultaneously, in the Bay area of San Francisco, psychologist Dr Peggy Thompson and Nancy Ross, LSW together with a financial counselor and a lawyer, were experimenting with ways that interdisciplinary teams could better support families both within and outside the court system. After over 10 years of trying different models, they created the Collaborative Divorce interdisciplinary team that includes a lawyer for each party, a therapist for each party, a neutral financial specialist and a neutral child specialist.<sup>5</sup> These two powerful initiatives were presented together for the first time at the 1999 AFCC conference in Vancouver and a workshop the following day for our fledgling Vancouver group. How fortunate I was to be there.

The integration of these two models is a match made in heaven. Collaborative Law provides a way for clients to have legal representation premised on a problem-solving rather than an adversarial template.<sup>6</sup> However, without the structure of the court system, a troubled or volatile emotional family relationship system can threaten the process. The Collaborative Divorce team provides support to the resolution of the legal issues by containing strong emotions and difficult relationship dynamics and by providing specialized services regarding

finances and children. Taken together, the combined structure of what has been termed *Collaborative Practice* covers all of the elements of the divorce process for families as well as relationship support for the best possible future.

#### Innovations within Collaborative Practice

The power of the out-of-court commitment together with the interdisciplinary team model has created many fundamental innovations to bring peace to families that will continue to evolve for years to come.<sup>7</sup>

The Collaborative Lawyer. Collaborative lawyers commit to limit the scope of their representation to settlement negotiations by a written agreement. This is the cornerstone of the Collaborative community and all processes are dependent on it to keep all Collaborative work in the domain of consensual dispute resolution. This creates safety for all the professionals as well as for the public.

The Neutral Financial Professional. The financial professional acts as a neutral. This professional brings financial expertise to the team and to the parents and integrates the financial issues with parenting and communication. This role may include gathering financial information, educating clients about their financial situation, providing projections based on various assumptions, business valuations, tax advice, etc. The neutral financial professional may also act in a mediation role with the Collaborative Lawyers to help them move through difficult discussions during which conflicting positions and personal dynamics can be challenging.

The Therapeutic Professionals. The Collaborative Divorce model articulates two types of therapeutic professionals.

The term 'Collaborative Divorce Coach' (CDC) was articulated to describe the role of the therapeutic professional(s) who work with the parents. It has been described as: "a process, facilitated by a family therapist<sup>8</sup>, that seamlessly integrates the appropriate professional knowledge bases, services and interdisciplinary processes and forums, calibrated to the client(s) unique combination of characteristics, capacities, complexities and commitments, in order to resolve the tasks of parental separation and divorce so as to encourage the highest possible level of well-being post-separation for all family members, especially the children."<sup>9</sup>

The original model developed by the Collaborative Divorce team included 2 CDC working as a team, one aligned with each parent. The 2 CDC work individually with their respective client as needed and also consult extensively with the other CDC to maintain a unified clinical process. Both CDC meet with the parents together in 4way meetings to create a forum for the conversations necessary to resolve the problems of the separation that relate to general parenting, children's needs, co-parenting, communication etc. This is the most highly supported therapeutic process available to separating parents and supports the containment and repair of the parents' relationship to the point where the problems can be constructively addressed and settlement tasks accomplished.. This process also lays the foundation for the best quality post divorce parenting by establishing a structure for future conflict resolution processes for the couple to use as the family evolves through the predictable and unpredictable changes that life will bring.

Sometimes parents reconcile. Early on in my work in CP I was asked by several different clients if the Collaborative 2-coach/therapist model could be used to help marriages stay together. This seemed to me to be a stroke of brilliance and I immediately agreed. Since that time I offer the 2-therapist model to clients who are on the edge of separation, especially if

they have already worked with therapists in the traditional neutral role before. I also suggest it for couples where one spouse wants to the end the relationship and the other does not. I explain that we do not need to have a goal, such as reconciliation or separation. We can create a safe and highly assisted forum to support them to enter into the conversation that needs to happen in order to clarify the situation and work toward moving forward as is appropriate.

An adaptation to this two coach model was developed in which the Neutral Team MHP (Mental Health Professional) is used. The neutral team MHP works toward the same goals as the CDC in the original model but as a neutral coach who intervenes with both members of the couple. The neutral team MHP often attends lawyer joint meetings to support the parents and also to act as process facilitator in these meetings.<sup>10</sup>

The Child Specialist. The Child Specialist role is another highlight of this model. It is a powerful innovation that creates a neutral safe place for children to share their experiences, to be therapeutically supported to have their voices in the process and still be protected from their parent's conflict. The Child Specialist is a therapeutic professional with depth of training and experience of child development, child therapy, divorce etc. They are neutral to the parents and are a part of the therapeutic team. They have direct contact with the children and as is appropriate, share that information with the team and the parents. The CS can also attend meetings to support the child in difficult conversations with their parents.

Together the therapeutic professionals create what I call, the 3-way counseling model. This powerful team structure can efficiently stabilize a family system and coordinate support to distressed children and parents. The 3-way counseling model has been successfully used with high conflict families and in reunification processes with children who are resisting parental contact through or post separation.

Team leader. Some interdisciplinary CP groups include a team leader. This is often one of the therapeutic professionals or a mediator who does not have direct contact with the clients. Their task is to make sure that the appropriate meetings occur, that the process is on track, and that possible problems within the team itself can be efficiently resolved.

Twenty years of evolution.

Over the past 20 years, team process choices have developed differently in different parts of the CP community. In some practice groups, the tradition is to bring all team members on board first, hold a team meeting with the parents present to bring everyone together and to organize the work to be done. In other groups, the team is assembled in a step-wise progression guided by the needs and desires of the family. In both approaches, team meetings are used to maintain a depth of understanding of the family, keep the team coordinated and to problem-solve difficult situations.

The neutral MHP process is slightly different than that of the original 2 coach model. However, given the great variety of families in our society, having the possibility of both models in all practice groups would seem to provide the most choice both for the professionals and the families to which they seek to provide service..

Whatever the process, interdisciplinary teams create a container of peace and depth of understanding of all relevant aspects of the family's divorce for all team members.<sup>11</sup> The interdisciplinary team provides a stable foundation for all services provided by the team, a central hub to coordinate any other services needed and processes through which all services can be coordinated around the needs and characteristics of the family.

Divorce is a family Rorschach test – everything is visible including strengths, aspirations, historical problems and problems exacerbated by the stress of the divorce transition. Additional services may be needed such as a psychiatric assessment for a child, addiction services for an adult etc. The therapeutic team can help stabilize the family by identifying what is needed, make the necessary referrals and help clients access those services efficiently.

Regardless of which professional is present, standard CP protocol provides that there will be a conversation about the client's vision for a successful outcome . What would a successful outcome of a settlement and for a divorce look like?<sup>12</sup> Where would they like to be 1 year, 5 years or 10 years down the road? What do they want their children's graduation to be like, their weddings or the day their children bring home that first baby? What kind of relationships do they want to work towards for the adults and the children? What do they want the story to be, that their children tell for the rest of their lives, about their parents' divorce? What legacy do they want to leave for their children regarding the divorce? What values do they want to be exemplified in their divorce process? Working in alignment with the clients' goals and aspirations provides the energy and motivation to fully engage with the process and to sustain that engagement through challenging issues. Understanding the obstacles to achieving these goals creates the job description for the Collaborative team.

Since we are all connected through a heart felt desire for the betterment of the family we are working with, it generally does not take long to get into sync with each other. Once the interdisciplinary Collaborative Practice group is established and group members have some experience working in teams, the synergy and cross-pollination of ideas, intentions and commitments create a type of Collaborative Awareness or Collaborative Team IQ. Each team

member develops a general awareness of all aspects of the process. We understand not only our own piece but also how our piece influences all the other pieces. As we work with our clients, we have the process of our teammates in mind and can help our clients link the various aspects of their separation process together. We develop a type of Collaborative presence or mindfulness sensing when to step up, when to step back, when to hold still.

For example, as a therapist working towards peacemaking in interdisciplinary teams, I am continually faced with the often intense, subjective experience of my client(s). For example, "I must have the house!" At these times I am so grateful for my collaborative law colleagues. Within the confidential environment of the team process, I bring this information to my legal colleagues together with how I understand my client to have come to this experience; their emotional landscape, relationship history and any other aspects of my clients experience or my observations that I believe are relevant. I count on my legal colleagues to also establish a strong and trusting relationship with our mutual client(s), to hear the client's concerns completely and to bring ideas about social justice and the spirit and structure of the law regarding the division of assets and well as depth in non-adversarial representation, mediation and communication to this issue. The financial neutral with depth in financial expertise and process awareness, as well as the child specialist with their focus on the children's experience, may also be involved in resolving this issue. I am not alone to solve this central and multifaceted problem. The problem will rest in this interdisciplinary territory and be solved in a way that is both fully informed and in alignment with the goals and aspirations of the family. This leaves me free to focus on my therapeutic relationship with my client, to work with my coaching partner and the other spouse, remaining completely confident that the problem will be solved in the best way possible. The structure of the law and comprehensive understanding

of both the financial information and the children's experiences are wonderful compliments to the subjective fluidness of the therapeutic process.

Another type of interdisciplinary complementarity that is a part of my daily work life is that of the 3-way counseling team made up of 2 CDC and a Child Specialist. When parents are caught in the 'he said – she said' of how the children feel, the feedback from the child specialist provides a powerful tool to reset the conversation to the children's needs. In introducing the child specialist process to the parents I often say that we know that children will sometimes say different things to different parents out of their love for them and the strong desire of the child to see them smile. Sometimes the children are dealing with the anxiety that the couple conflict arouses in them and so are trying in their own way to calm the situation.<sup>13</sup>

The child specialist feedback occurs in a 5way meeting with the child specialist, both CDC and the parents.<sup>14</sup> The CDC contain the conflict of the parents so that the child specialist can stay focused on the children's information. Often the information the CS brings not only addresses the original questions but also brings something unexpected from the children's experience of the separation that evokes the parents' absolute love of their children and their profound desire to protect them. Neurobiologically speaking, we know they cannot experience both their anger and frustration with each other and their deep abiding love for their children at the same time. As they experience their love for their children there are opportunities to get past the conflict to find a way forward. One picture created by a child can bring a peaceful, resonant silence to a conflicted parent feedback meeting that no amount of professional cleverness can achieve.

In Vancouver, the 3-way counseling model has recently been linked with the role of the Parenting Coordinator. This combination provides the depth and strength of the therapeutic

team to provide comprehensive support to the family as well as a bridge to court when there are orders in place. This again supports the therapeutic team to remain outside the court system and at the same time, through the role of the PC, supports compliance with court orders and more immediate feedback for the court. Together this creates another way to stabilize family relationships.<sup>15</sup> This is proving very useful in situations where children are resisting contact with a parent post separation or there are other outstanding relational issues that are getting in the way of the family moving forward into more peaceful living.

### Related Ideas

As a society we desperately need processes that support peace and health through the divorce process and beyond for today's families, especially the children. The interdisciplinary environment of Collaborative Practice brings countless fresh possibilities.

Normalizing Divorce. Divorce is a mainstream event in western culture. In Canada and the US roughly half of all marriages end through the choice of one of the spouses before the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary affecting 35,000 children annually in Canada and 1,000,000 children annually in the US.<sup>16</sup> We know that the event of a divorce is not a strong predictor of social, emotional or educational wellbeing for children. However prolonged exposure to parental conflict is a strong predictor of negative outcomes for children. Given that divorce has become a common experience, it behooves us as a society to find ways to reduce the conflict associated with divorce and to support the best possible outcomes for these families, especially for the children.

Family Centric. Interdisciplinary teams allow the family to be at the center of the process and for each professional to bridge the best and most relevant aspects of their

discipline to the process in a timely fashion. Services can be unbundled such that a wide range of families with many different characteristics, capacities, complexities and process commitments can receive the services they need. The interdisciplinary CP team creates a rich environment for each family to access the services and resources they need for their unique process.

Moving targets In family therapy, we know that families are moving targets as they travel through the life span. They are constantly in motion as each individual moves through their own developmental trajectory in relationship to other family members. By definition we know that our families will finish the divorce process in a different place than where they started. With our help it will hopefully be a better one, or at the very least, the best possible one. As family therapists working with divorcing families, we are often working with pre-existing problems that may have been a part of causing the separation or have been exacerbated by the separation and are getting in the way of the divorce process. By identifying and addressing these problems as much as possible, the families not only resolve the problems of the divorce but also have the opportunity to increase the wellbeing of the entire family for the future. The interdisciplinary team environment supports growth and change in the family system as the family moves through the divorce process.

Relationships between professionals.

In interdisciplinary teams, our professional relationships are among our most important commodities. These relationships build the communities that contain the professional networks that make effective interdisciplinary work possible. At the same time, the interdisciplinary community of Collaborative Practice groups is in itself, a new professional

environment. Never before have lawyers, therapists and financial professionals had the opportunity to link their professional lives and integrate their professional services in such an intimate way.

Most groups develop through a grassroots initiative among private practitioners and as such are independent of any other organizing structure.<sup>15</sup> As Collaborative professionals, we self select to be a part of this community and to engage in this work. We come with the best intentions to help children and families move through the divorce transition in a life-enhancing way. We bring years of education and professional experience in our respective disciplines.

In contrast, most of us come with little or no organizational development experience that would provide us with information or awareness about ourselves as group or team members or the finer points of conflict resolution with a Collaborative colleague. As we build this international community, develop innovative practices and engage in shoulder-to-shoulder teamwork in conflicted situations, it is inevitable that we also become more aware of our own reactivity and potential for conflict. Collaborative practice groups institute on-going opportunities for strengthening and maintaining these professional relationships through retreats, organizational development and conflict resolution training.

The families we seek to serve are advantaged by these close professional relationships and our efforts to create sustainable communities. The local CP group is the life blood of collaborative activity in any community. There can be no collaborative practice without it. Through these groups professionals meet each other, develop working relationships and learn more about integrating the various professional services of all the professional groups. The

local SP group is often the port of entry for clients as they become aware of these possibilities in their communities, through the advertising, presentations and social media presence of the group members. As we work together, starting with our first family, we learn about ourselves and each other. Hopefully our first families are not the most difficult however experience has shown us that this is not always the case. As we work with each new family, our working relationships are the medium through which we continue to learn about many aspects of our practice and ourselves and to hone our skills. Our practice groups are the foundation of our professional lives as well as the backdrop to both our successes and our failures and as such offer resources and support to our continued professional growth.

As we gain experience working in teams, we become more effective in our practice. Our communication is more efficient, our ability to coordinate our professional services increases as does our capacity to handle more difficult situations. The children and families we work with gain the benefit of our greater sophistication and effectiveness. Not only do we work faster and more efficiently, but we also extend our reach into populations that would not be able to make it through their separation within a consensual framework without integrated therapeutic support, thereby protecting more families and children from the risks of adversarial processes.

#### In conclusion

In The Family Court Review special issue on Collaborative Law<sup>17</sup>, Forrest Mosten made many interesting predications about the development of Collaborative Practice by 2030. In prediction number IV, Mosten predicts that mental health professional bodies will incorporate

Collaborative Practice into their rules of professional conduct and into professional educational curriculum. He envisions CP becoming part of the professional education curriculum for mental health professionals, that future therapists will receive training within their academic programs to work in all manner of roles and interdisciplinary teams, that therapists will be able to become divorce specialists and that these activities will qualify for contributing to the requirements for licensure.

With interdisciplinary teams well established as a part of the consensual dispute resolution possibilities, I am confident Mosten's predictions will be realized. The integration of therapeutic services within the consensual dispute resolution continuum finally solves the problem that has plagued family and child therapists for decades – how to bring the best of therapeutic services to separating families and especially their children, (and those on the verge of separation) in relevant and constructive ways, proactively and within the divorce process itself without getting drawn into the litigation process. With the specter of court involvement removed at last, therapeutic professionals, their educational institutions and professional bodies can breathe a collective sigh of relief and get to work. Not only does this make good therapeutic sense for the nearly 50% of families and millions of children that experience parental separation and divorce, it also makes good business sense for family and child therapists at a time when our professional bodies work to advocate for us in ever more complex political arenas. As the power of integrating therapeutic services with legal, financial and child focused processes external to the court system becomes more visible in our professional communities, our professional bodies will have an opportunity to advocate for this practice as a service for a vast number of children and families in our communities,<sup>18</sup> This will create many opportunities for family therapists, their educational institutions and

professional bodies to step forward and to engage directly with divorce at the level of the family and to support the therapeutic professionals who are committed to creating therapeutic services that can improve the lives of millions of children and families experiencing separation and divorce.

In Mosten's prediction number XII he noted that at that time there were Collaborative practice groups in 18 countries (2011) and expected Collaborative Practice to proliferate. By the time of this writing (2014) there are already CP groups in 25 countries – a 30 % increase.

By directing our attention and professional services toward divorcing families through interdisciplinary teams, we make a critical and timely social contribution; reducing the risks of separation and divorce and working toward peaceful, safe and efficient divorce transitions for all family members, especially the children.

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<sup>1</sup> The inspiration and organization of this workshop came from Nancy Cameron QC and Phyllis Kenny, LLB. who had created a working group of interested lawyers 6 months prior.

<sup>2</sup> Stu Webb's supported the development of Collaborative Law with potluck dinners. It just goes to show how food and wine can help to bring people together.

<sup>3</sup> See The Definition of Collaborative Practice: Moving from Branding to Unification by Diane S. Deal, The Collaborative Review, 2013, Volume 13, Issue 1

<sup>4</sup> See Webb, S. & Ousky, R., (2006). The Collaborative Way to Divorce. Hudson Street Press. New York.

<sup>5</sup> See Fagerstrom, K., Kalish, M., Nurse, A., Ross, N., Thompson, P., Wilde, D., Worlfum, T. Divorce: A Problem to be Solved, Not a Battle to be Fought. Brookwood Publishing: Orinda (1997).

<sup>6</sup> I often tell clients "The law is the law, whether you chose to use a problem-solving or adversarial approach."

<sup>7</sup> Cameron, N., Collaborative Practice: Deepening the Dialogue (2004), Continuing Legal Education Society of BC, Mosten, F., Collaborative Divorce Handbook; Helping Families Without Going To Court, 2009, Wiley & Sons, Tesler, P & Thompson, P., Collaborative Divorce, 2006, Harper Collins.

<sup>8</sup> Given that family relationships and family dynamics at the time of divorce can often be quite intense and complex, the role of the CDC is better suited to well established and experienced therapists with a strong background in family therapy.

<sup>9</sup> Gamache, S, Collaborative Divorce Coaching; Working Toward a Definition and Theoretical Location For the Family Therapist. The Collaborative Review, 2013, Vol 13, Issue 1.

<sup>10</sup> These two coaching models were compared and contrasted at the 2010 IACP Networking Forum in Washington DC in a Pre-conference Institute.

<sup>11</sup> Conflict is expensive and often damaging no matter which process is used. Every member of the Collaborative Practice team is committed to reducing conflict.

<sup>12</sup> Divorce Mission Statements can help parties prepare for this discussion of expected and hopeful outcomes. See template of a Divorce Mission Statement in Diana Mercer, Making Divorce Work (2013). A copy of this template can be downloaded off the book's website, [www.MakingDivorceWork.com](http://www.MakingDivorceWork.com)

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<sup>13</sup> In situations in which estrangement or alienation dynamics are a possibility, the Child Specialist process is best done by very experienced professionals well versed in these dynamics and with an understanding of the family system as a whole.

<sup>14</sup> In the model using the Neutral Team MHP, the Child Specialist feedback meeting includes the Child Specialist and the Neutral Team MHP together with the parents.

<sup>15</sup> Editor's Note: See article by Christine Coates on Parent Coordination in this issue that supports the discussion of Dr. Gamache

<sup>16</sup> In the 1700s in the US, the average length of a marriage was about 7 years because one of the spouses died. Today, with our children's life expectance around 100, we can have marriages that *on average*, last 60 or more years. Sociologists now consider divorce the functional substitute for death in a culture in which the life span is greatly extended. See Coontz, S. (1992) *The Way We Never Were*, Basic Books; (2005) *Marriage, A History*, Penguin Books

<sup>17</sup> Family Court Review Special Issue on Collaborative Practice, April 2011 Forrest Mosten Guest Editor

<sup>18</sup> Equally, the 3way counseling model will open more opportunities for developing therapeutic approaches with more difficult families. For example, Dr Sandra Stith has developed a therapeutic protocol for couples that have experienced domestic violence and wish to repair their relationship. The model describes two therapists working with clients alternatively one-on-one in individual meetings and then in jointly in 4way meetings. (Personal communication with the author, 2011.)