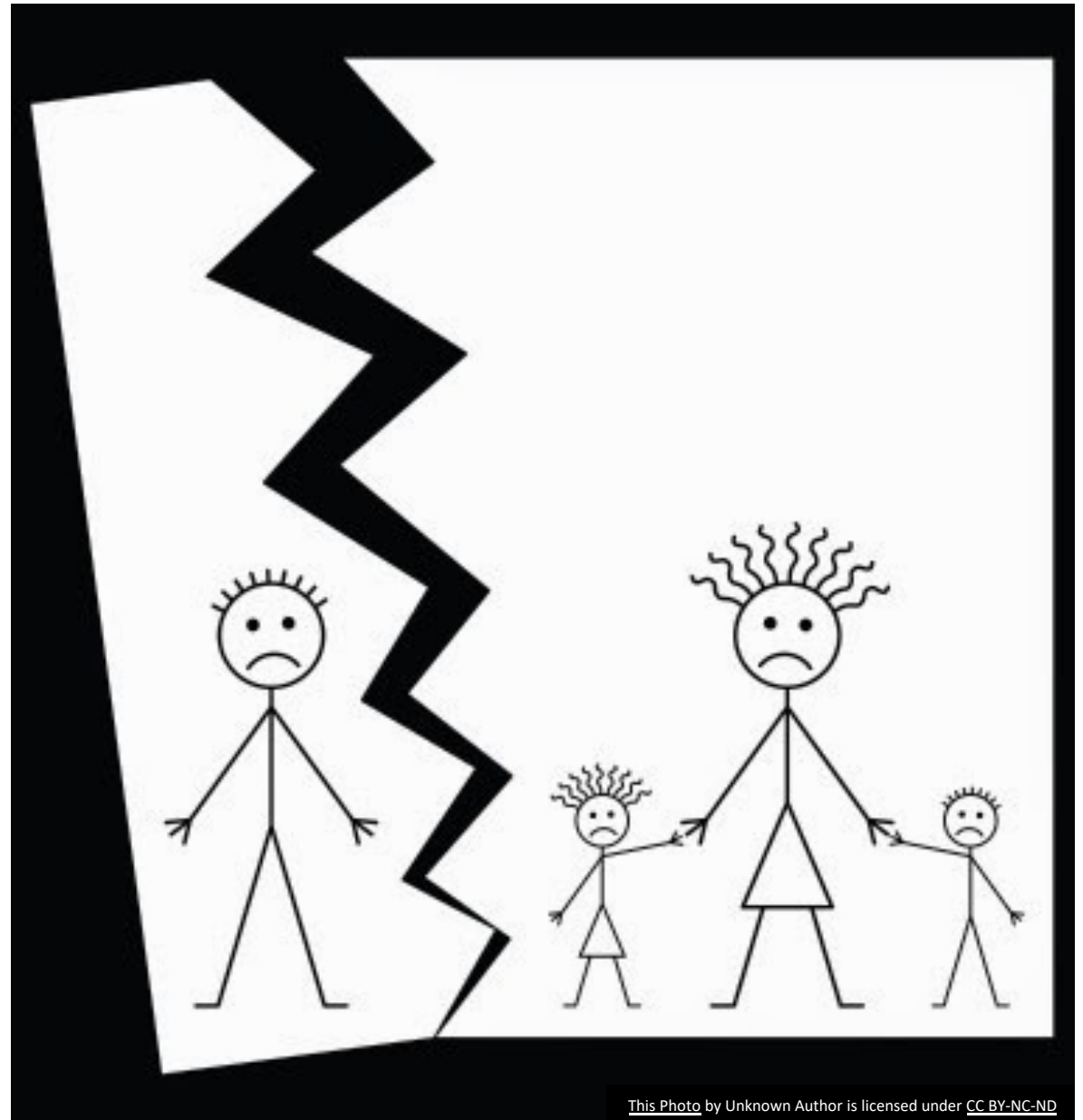


# Play Therapy with Divorce & Custody Cases A Continuing Education Training Workshop

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With Lynn Louise Wonders, LPC,  
RPT-S, CPCS  
[www.WondersCounseling.com](http://www.WondersCounseling.com)



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# Today's Training

- Providing play therapy for children whose parents are embroiled in a high conflict divorce and/or custody case is not for the faint of heart.
- With the proper skills set, clear policies and protocols and an understanding of the intricacies and complexities of these kinds of cases a therapist who provides play therapy services will be prepared to avoid common pitfalls and keep the focus on helping the child through this very difficult time.
- Often play therapists get in over their head because they aren't properly trained to work with these intractable family dynamics.
- This presentation will provide a very thorough and solid foundation of practical knowledge and guidance on how to use play therapy effectively while also knowing how to manage parents who are having high levels of conflict, guardians ad litem, attorneys and how to be prepared for court if necessary.
- This in-depth workshop includes copies of my proprietary documents including my policy forms and informed consent specific to cases involved in litigation as well as numerous resources and review of case scenarios.



# Learning Objectives

After completion of this training participants will be able to:

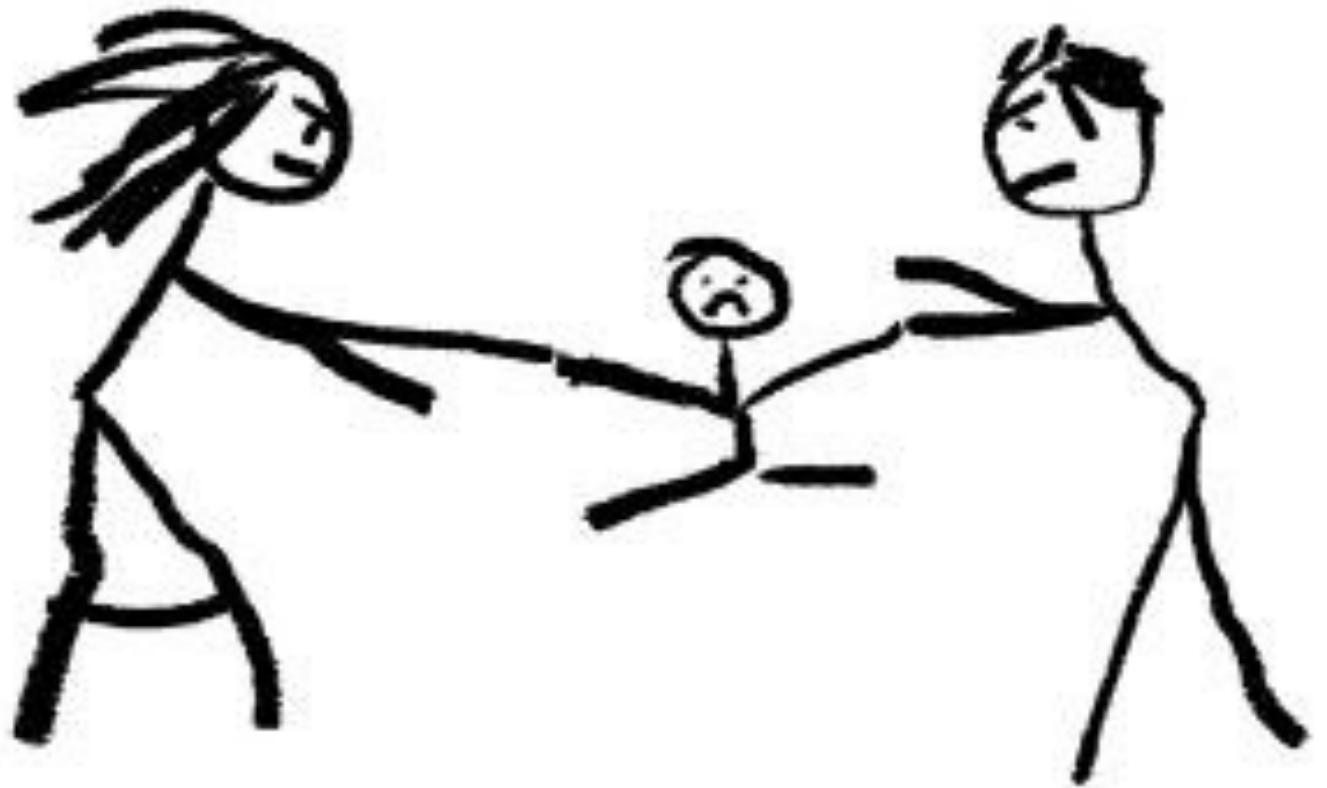
- 1. Describe how to efficiently screen for red and yellow flags during the initial play therapy intake for the vital information that might otherwise be withheld.
- 2. Define and differentiate the appropriate role a therapist providing play therapy observes in a case involving a custody dispute apart from other roles such as that of a custody evaluator.
- 3. Name 3 elements of the process of setting and maintaining clear boundaries with parents in order to protect the integrity of the play therapy process.
- 4. Define concepts of alienation, polarization and loyalty conflict.
- 5. Identify elements of alienation, polarization and loyalty conflict and describe how to manage the therapeutic process with the child in play therapy and the parents when these elements have been identified.
- 6. Describe how to ethically document, communicate with attorneys and guardians ad litem and be prepared for court testimony if needed throughout the play therapy process.
- 7. Name 10 play based interventions to use with children whose families are involved in a high conflict divorce or custody



How I got here and why you need  
to know this information . . .

“The bottom line is that high conflict divorce and custody cases are complex, very challenging and can be exhausting and emotionally draining for therapists. I am on a mission to help therapists avoid the pitfalls that often come along with these kinds of cases.” - Lynn Louise Wonders, *Parents at War: A Child Therapist’s Guide to Navigating High Conflict Divorce & Custody Cases*

# The Nature of High Conflict Divorce & Custody Cases



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# A Video

High Conflict Divorce

An interview with Dr. Richard Warshak

# Janet Johnston's 1994 Article: High Conflict Divorce



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# The Divorce Conflict Continuum

- Business-like Divorce
- Friendly Divorce
- Dedicated but irritated Divorce
- Normal conflicted divorce
- Habitual fight-mode divorce
- High conflict divorce

# Johnston's 3 Dimensions of Conflict



THE SUBJECT



THE MANNER OF  
EXPRESSION



THE DEGREE OF  
HOSTILITY

# The Presence of Pathology

Parents experiencing NORMAL levels of conflict typically are receptive to guidance, feedback and redirection from the therapist.

Parents with potential pathology when provided guidance, feedback or redirection may turn their rage toward the therapist and the child's experience with that parent may grow even worse.





# Learn from MY Error . . .

A Story

# Initial Screening: Your Golden Opportunity



Gain and gather vital info for discerning whether good fit



Look for the yellow and red flags



Establish important boundaries, protocols and polices from GO



Explain what your role is and what it is not from GO



Begin rapport building



# Yellow Flags and What to Do

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# Red Flags

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# Conducting the Parent Intake: Things to Do When You Know There is a Divorce

Explain your role

Obtain copy of most current standing court order if applicable

Get signed informed consent from both parents BEFORE seeing child

Explain your plan for communication with both parents equally

Explain possibility of family dyad sessions if determined to be needed

Your policy about going to court

Go over fee collection process and fees for reading emails and phone calls.

No recording of sessions.

Regularity of child's sessions scheduled

Keeping focus on best interest of child, not on conflict between parents.



# Parents' Behavior Traits: Personalities and Potential Pathology

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While we are not diagnosing... it's good to have a framework of understanding for personality disorders



# An 11 Minute Overview of Personality Disorders

[10 Types of Personality Disorder Video](#)



# Potential Pathology Signs

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Splitting

---

Poor Boundaries

---

Rigidity

---

Mood Swings

---

Extreme Swings in Energy Levels

---

Hyperbolic/Grandiosity

---

Lying/Deception

---

Explosive Behavior

---

High Hostility/Rage

---

Extreme, Persistent Anxiety

---

Depressed Mood

---

Inappropriate Social Behavior

---

Obsessive/Compulsive

---

Histrionis/Dramatic Display

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# Challenging Parent Personalities



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# Helicopter Parent



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# Drama Mama/Papa



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# Drill Sergeant

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# Over-Sharer



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# Lackadaisical Parent

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# Sneaky Parent

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# Splitting Parent

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# Strategies for Dealing with Challenging Parents

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Screen for flags – know when to refer out

---

Seek to understand

---

Clear policies and protocols – follow them!

---

Know and establish your role – repeat as needed

---

Build trust and rapport from go

---

Keep focus child's therapy

---

Neutral gear is your friend

---

Treatment plan is your anchor

---

Document, document, document

---

Termination talk from start

---

Be strength based in the way you talk about the child to parents

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# Intractable Dynamics

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Be ready to  
adjust the  
treatment plan...



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Definitions

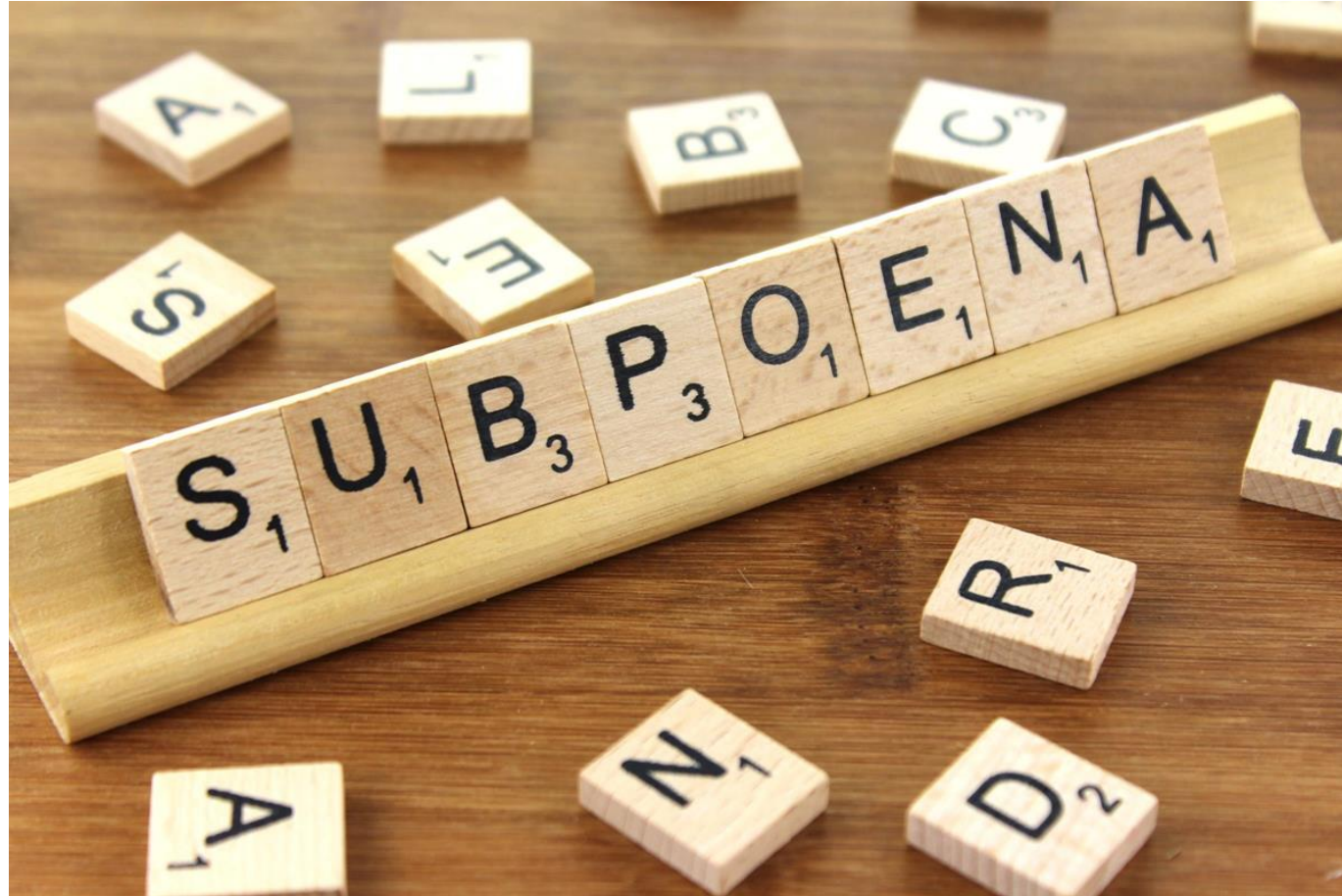
# Alienation, Rejection, Loyalty Conflict

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# Attorneys, Guardians ad Litem, Subpoenas



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# Parenting Guidance: The Bill of Rights



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# Co-parenting and Parallel Parenting

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What to do  
with a  
subpoena?



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Going to Court: Be prepared





# How Divorce Affects Children

A Video



# Play Therapy for Helping Children of Divorce

- Prescriptive Approach!
  - How Play Therapy Becomes an Oasis
  - When Child Centered Play Therapy is Best
  - Bibliotherapy interventions
  - Creative & Expressive Activities interventions
  - Sand Tray Therapy
- 
- TAKE NOTES! LOTS OF CREATIVE IDEAS!

# Treatment Planning with a Fictional Case



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# Questions and Answers?

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