

“Parallel Parenting” – origin of the term and its use (george.ferrick@jud.ca.gov)

References to “parallel parenting” and F. Furstenberg appear in the article “**Co-parenting: A Review of the Literature**” by Terry Arendell (The website National Center on Fathers and Families) <http://www.ncoff.gse.upenn.edu/content/co-parenting-review-literature>

Excerpts:

Terms Used

Terms used to describe post divorce parenting arrangements and the meanings conveyed in the research literature vary. So too the use of co-parenting in the divorce context carries various definitions. For instance, **Furstenberg (1988) distinguished between co-parenting and parallel parenting:**

The term 'co-parenting', coined by social scientists to describe the collaborative efforts of parents who live apart, implies a certain level of cooperation in the common task of child rearing; a more common pattern among families in which fathers continue to see their children might be characterized as **parallel parenting** [in which parents] maintain separate and segregated relations with each of their children and have a tacit agreement not to interfere in each other's lives (Furstenberg and Cherlin, 1991:39-40).

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Moreover, many scholars remain concerned that assigning parents shared residential custody against one or the other's wishes will only exacerbate former spousal conflict (e.g., Garkinkel and McLanahan, 1990; Furstenberg and Cherlin, 1991). The opportunities for former spousal dissension and disagreement are great in joint custody situations since the parents are likely to have continued and extensive contact with each other, despite divorce. **Furstenberg (1987:57-8), for instance, observed that parallel parenting** may be functional in that it reduces conflict by segregating a parent's respective activities; reduces strain by limiting possibilities for observing the other parent in relation to the child; and reduces competition between parents and stepparents.

Furstenberg, F. (1987). The new extended family: The experience of parents and children after remarriage. In K. Pasley & M. Ihinger-Tallman (Eds.), *Remarriage and stepparenting: Current research and theory* (pp. 42-61). New York: Guilford.

Furstenberg, F. (1988). Good dads--bad dads: Two faces of fatherhood. In A. Cherlin (Ed.), *The changing American family and public policy* (pp. 193-209). Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute.

Furstenberg, F., & Cherlin, A. (1991). *Divided families: What happens to children when parents part*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Furstenberg, F., Morgan, S., & Allison, P. (1987). Parental participation and children's well-being after marital dissolution. *American Sociological Review*, 52, 695-701.

Personal Communication with Prof. Furstenberg: Dec 13, 2011

Dear Prof. Furstenberg:

A couple colleagues and myself are presenting a workshop on Parallel Parenting on Dec 15th at the attached conference [Beyond the Bench 21, Dec 15, 2011, San Francisco] sponsored by the California Administrative Office of the Courts:

Parallel Parenting: When Co-Parenting May Be Too Much to Expect*

Is parallel parenting a better approach than co-parenting for some parents and circumstances? During a mediation session, it may become clear that co-parenting may be out of reach for some couples, at least at the present time. Is parallel parenting a better-suited approach to their parenting plan and expectations? Key elements of parallel parenting will be discussed. Insights from the research of John Gottman and from Connie Ahrons' spectrum of separating couples will also be included.

Learning Objectives – Participants will:

- ✍ Contrast the appropriateness of co-parenting and parallel parenting;
- ✍ Identify elements of parallel parenting; and
- ✍ Relate concepts from professional literature to parallel parenting.

Without the capability of doing extensive research, it is my sense that you may have been the first to coin the phrase “parallel parenting” in reference to divorced parents. Though I’ve also read that this is a term that may have been in use in other parenting contexts. Can you throw any light on this topic, or refer to literature that might point to the origin of this term. For now, I will reference you as the one who introduced the concept in the context of divorced parenting.

Thank you,

George Ferrick

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Dec 14, 2011

Dear Mr. Ferrick,

Yes, I believe that I did coin the term or, at least, I had not heard it used before I discussed the process that I contrasted to coparenting, a notion that implied more collaboration. The work you are doing is fascinating. I wish you continued success. ff

See home page for Frank Furstenberg: <http://www.ssc.upenn.edu/~fff/>