

**Decision Making and  
Parenting Plan Management  
with Special Needs Kids**

4<sup>th</sup> Annual AFCC- Australia Chapter Conference  
August 17-19, 2017  
Crown Conference Centre  
8 Whiteman St, Southbank  
Melbourne VIC 3006

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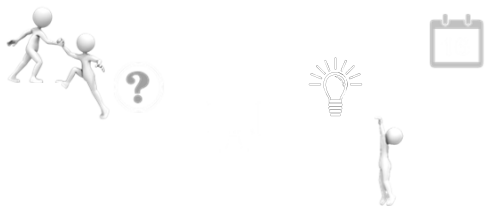
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Managing Special Needs Issues

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**In Custody Disputes**



**Practical** Strategies

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With thanks to...

- oEve Lopez, CFLS
- oDavid Austin, Ph.D.
- oKarin Manger, LCSW
- oAll of the Families that have taught us
  
- oAnd in special tribute to..

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**Lynda Doi Fick, M.A., MFT**

- o 1948-2017
- o Co-Creator of the Child-Centered Conjoint Therapy Model
- o Co-Recipient of the Meyer-Elkins Award
- o Juvenile Dependency Expert, Therapist, Single Expert, Consultant, Co-author, Teacher, Cross-Cultural Expert, Sometime office mate, race-car enthusiast, mandala maker, and friend

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**Defining Terms**

**A "special needs" child is one who**

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graph LR; A[has medical, developmental, emotional, or educational needs/conditions] --> B[that may impact on parenting responsibilities and the best parenting plan]; B --> C[Dizzying array of conditions, services, and opinions as to the best plan]; C --> D[Parents often have different perceptions and different bases of information];
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**Clashing Systems...**

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graph TD; A[Court system considers input from both parents] --> B[Responsibility is usually on the parent]; B --> C[BUT - may default to one parent based on external professional opinion or failure of parents to agree]; C --> D[May require consultation between parents before seeking services for children]; D --> A;
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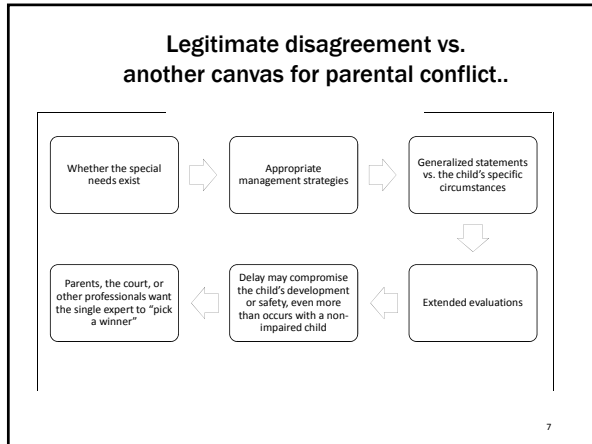
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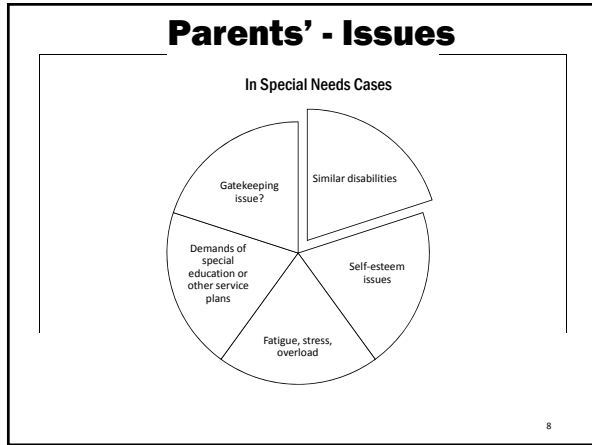
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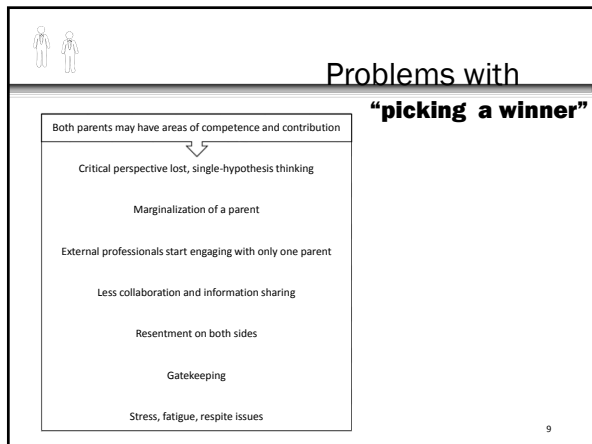
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**Appeal of Sole custody or compartmentalized decision making.....**

- Allows timely decisions when necessary
- Appears easier to external professionals (although may be at the cost of bias)
- Gets the family out of the courtroom

**But What About The Next Day?**

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**The Case for Early, Systemic Intervention**

- Risks of delay
- Difficulties of intervening when problems become entrenched
- Initial treatment goals surround universal issues
- Available tools in children's activities and daily routines
- Opportunities to send clear, early messages to parents and follow them up if litigation continues
- Intervention versus evaluation/assessment: which is most helpful when?

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**Early Intervention Approach**

- Managed by neutral professionals with some authority
- May precede, follow, or narrow issues for single expert witness
- May inform ongoing evaluation
- May obviate need for evaluation, promote settlement

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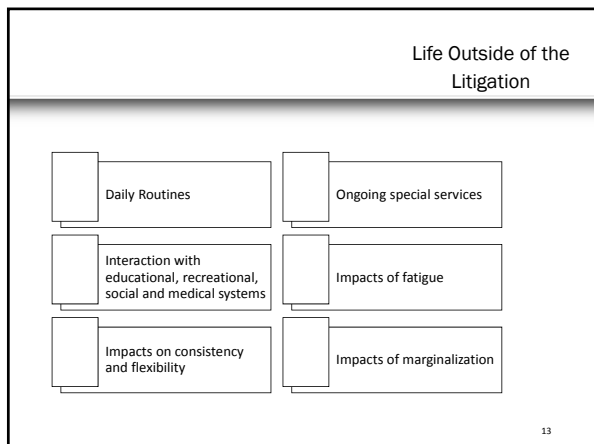
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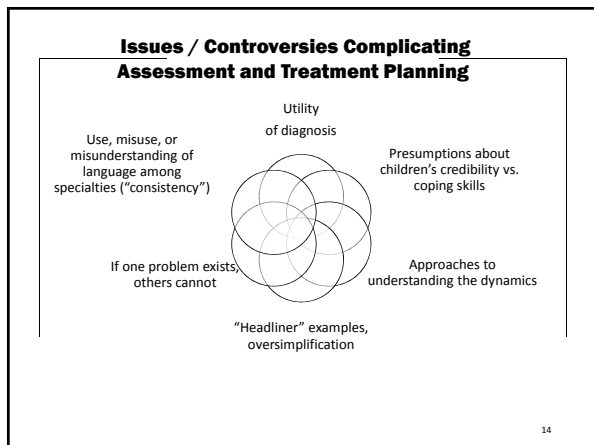
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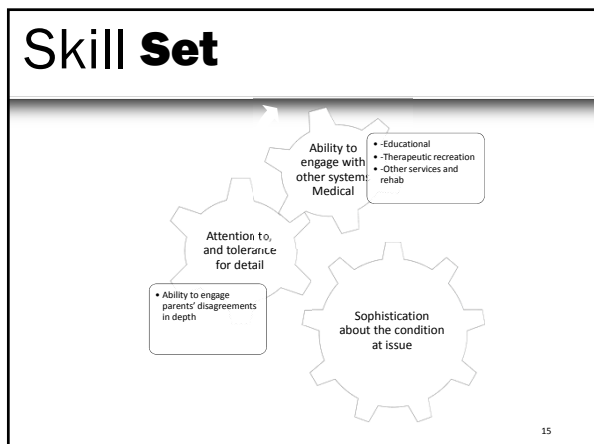
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### Goals of Early Intervention

- Minimize risks
- Maintain developmental progress
- Expand coparenting options
- Provide opportunities for parents to expand or demonstrate parenting and coparenting abilities
- Maintain integration of child and community
- Maximize resources

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### Children's Outcome

#### Is Related To

- Coping *effectiveness* (healthy coping skills)
- Coping *efficacy* (belief that what one says or does will work)
- Access to healthy relationships
- Stability
- Authoritative parenting
- Access to normative activities
- Management of developmental risks

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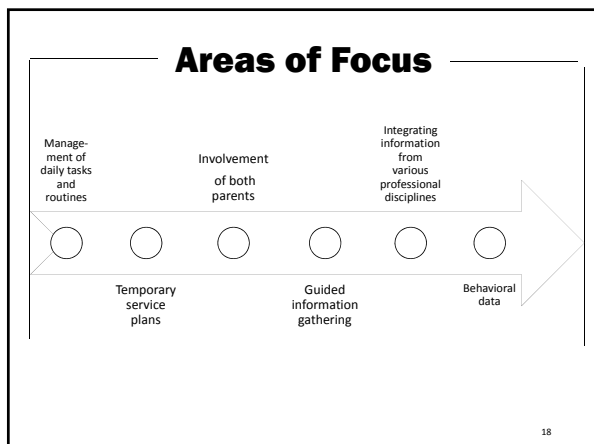
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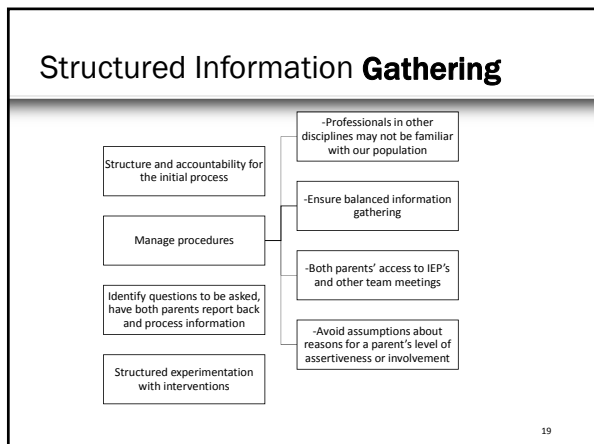
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  - Stability
  - Authoritative parenting
  - Access to normative activities
  - Management of developmental risks
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### Deciphering the Doctor's note:

- Is there a diagnosis?
- Is there a plan specific to the child?
- Is there a recommendation for a "trial," or a temporary intervention pending further assessment?
- Does this MD have ongoing responsibility for the child?
- What's the follow-up plan?
- Were both parents consulted?
- Was an alternative presented to the doctor, or mentioned by the doctor, but not reported?

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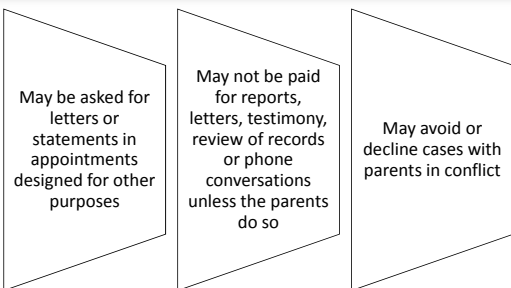
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### External Professionals



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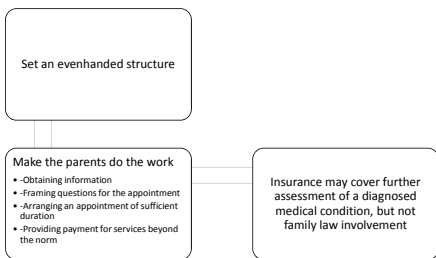
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### Considerations in seeking additional medical information



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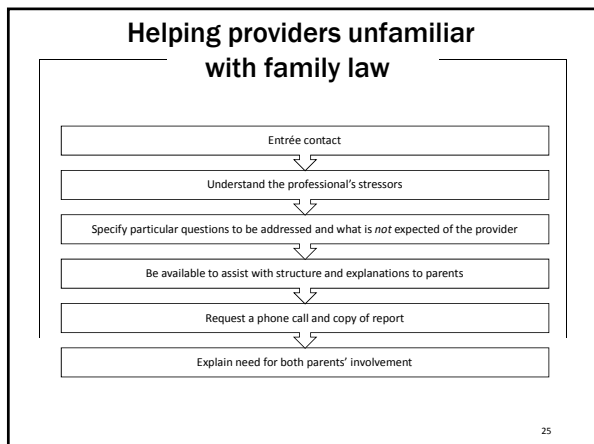
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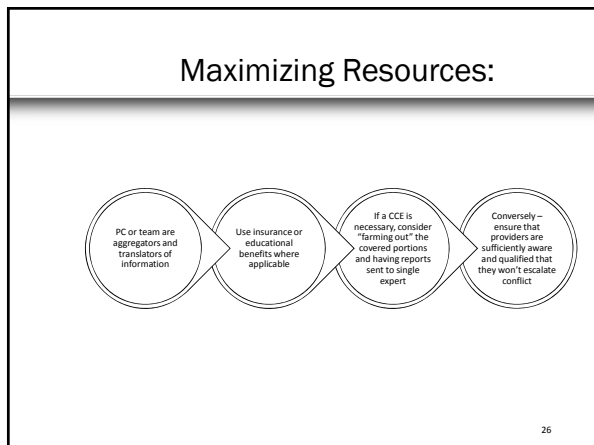
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- ### Established Medical Conditions
- o Are both parents aware?
  - o Have recommendations been made to both parents?
  - o Were they accurately interpreted?
  - o How well have the parents followed recommendations?
  - o If a parent disagreed, did he/she return to the doctor or propose an alternative?
  - o Is MD seeing differential follow-up at time of court dates, or after weekends with either parent?
  - o Consistency vs. Rigidity
  - o Attempts at mitigation of risks
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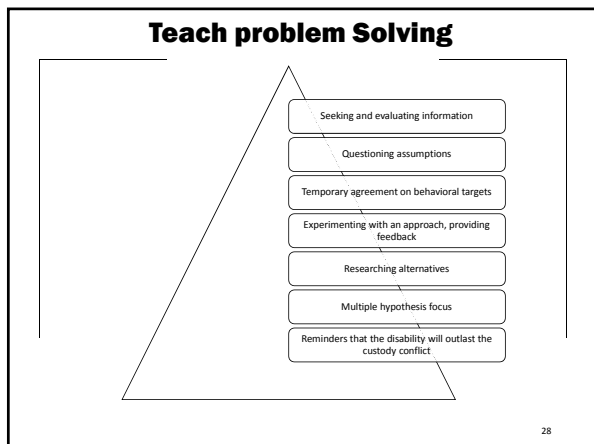
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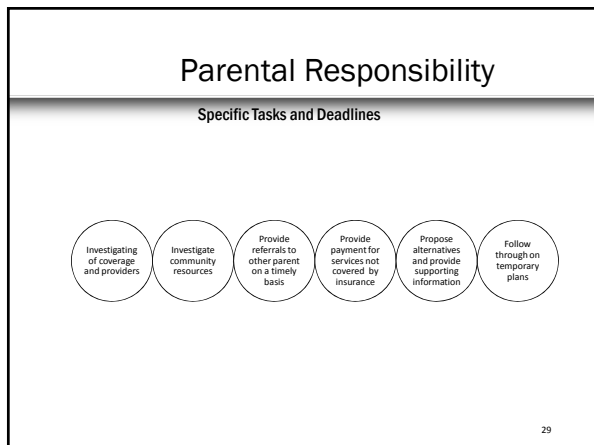
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- ### Plans for chronic conditions often require home-based maintenance..
- Familiar parenting variables apply
  - Consistency (caution re definition)
  - Attunement to Child
  - Authoritative parenting
  - Ability to set limits and promote positive coping
  - Willingness to implement treatment plans
  - Facilitative rather than restrictive gatekeeping (Kaufman and Pickar, 2017)
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**A Coparenting – Team is still better**

Successful outcomes most likely with

- Effective coordination among professionals
- Structured, involved decision-making

Promoting adaptability in the child

Accessing each parent's strengths

Attention to fatigue, self-care, structured cooperation

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**Suggested References**

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