

Do We Really Need Another Lawyer in the Room? An Opportunity for Social Workers to Serve as Guardians Ad Litem

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Description:

An area of trauma that has gone widely identified yet ineffectively treated is divorce. One of the reasons for this is that many of the effects of divorce are not identified until after the divorce has taken place. The research on the societal impact of divorce conclusively identifies significant areas of individual disturbances in the area of social and mental challenges, school performance, and suicide. Once these issues are identified, there are indeed interventive strategies that can be utilized to help individuals with their challenges. But what if instead of being interventive, the social work profession became preventative in helping families mitigate the ruinous effects that divorce can have on families?

The efforts of social work involvement in the divorce courts of America create an agency context that seeks to promote a paradigm shift of not just exploring the “person in environment” from the outside, but actually participating, clinically, in the environment with the person. Instead of a social work assessment consisting of information about what has already happened, the social worker is intricately involved in what is happening in the moment. This involvement is not simply to soften the initial impact of the divorce created trauma, but to minimize the future influence that this trauma can have on the person and society at large. One of these opportunities is through the appointment of a guardian ad litem. By getting social workers involved in the trauma-causing divorcing process, it will be argued that families can address their unique situations and end up with a final outcome that is not just legally permissible but relationally optimal.

Learning Objectives:

- Explain the history of divorce proceedings starting with the introduction of the Family Court system and the idea of the guardian ad litem. Attendees will understand that the divorcing process has changed over the years and the opportunity to be involved has never been greater.
- The aftershocks of divorce and the traumatized world it creates. Attendees will be able to identify multiple areas of challenges that the trauma of divorce is affecting.
- The distinction between attorneys and social workers. Attendees will understand that both attorneys and social workers have unique talents in the area of divorce settlement, but that the two can actually work together. There are areas specific areas that social workers need to be educated in order to do the job of a guardian ad litem effectively.

Duration: 1:30