

Who Needs a Mental Health Professional? I'm Ok – Are You?
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“I don't have mental problems!” “We already went to a marriage counselor...and it did no good!” Why are you suggesting this?” “Why do we need this, and, how much is this going to cost!?” Recently, questions and comments like these are being asked and heard in and around the offices of Collaborative Law attorneys who are now practicing a promoting an Interdisciplinary Team Approach to Collaborative Practice.

Much of the literature about divorce speaks to the notion that children may face challenges in their subsequent relationships with their parents. However, the research findings also suggest that if the divorce is handled in the *most amicable way*, if the *costs* are *not financially devastating* and if the parents can *maintain a positive relationship*, particularly around parenting their children; the children will fare better and the possibilities exist for continued adaptation, adjustment and resiliency. These studies have also indicated that constructive communication which leads to less conflicted relationships between parents subsequent to divorce can result in more optimistic interactions between children and their parents throughout their lifespan.

The "interdisciplinary team" approach to CFL, utilizes the expertise of not only lawyers, but also mental health professionals, and sometimes financial advisors and child specialists *collaborating* to make possible diplomatic resolution of issues between the divorcing parties.

Many attorneys have come to the realization of attorneys that they are not adequately prepared with the skills necessary to manage the intense emotions that arise as a result of the divorce process. The proponents of CFL suggest that engaging a mental

health professional who is trained in understanding the dynamics of relationships and interactions between multiple systems simultaneously.

Mental health professionals maintain a neutral position and are well equipped to facilitate communication and ‘coach’ parties to resolve issues including but not limited to ‘sharing’ and co-parenting their children in an effective way via the collaborative process. Doing so can minimize the intensity, facilitate effective problem solving and lead to more peaceful resolution of issues, a more expeditious settlement and co-existence between family members subsequent to their divorce.

So, when asked “Why do we need this?” You might suggest, “why not!”