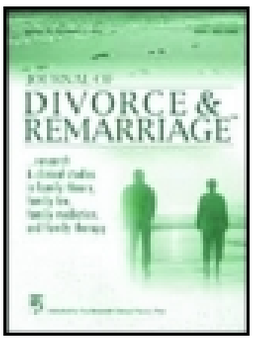

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Benjamin D. Garber

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For the Love of Fluffy: Respecting, Protecting, and Empowering Transitional Objects in the Context of High-Conflict Divorce

Benjamin D. Garber

Family Law Consulting, PLLC, Nashua, New Hampshire, USA

ABSTRACT

Transitional objects are those idiosyncratically determined, beloved blankies and stuffed animals that communicate an absent parent's affection. As such, transitional objects serve the short-term need to cope with separation, and the long-term need to move toward autonomy. This article discusses the value, use, and misuse of transitional objects in the context of coparental conflict. The concept of alienation-by-proxy is introduced. Specific recommendations are provided, including the therapeutic creation and empowerment of transitional objects to assist children experiencing separation anxiety, consideration of the role of transitional objects in child custody evaluations, and the court's responsibility to encourage litigating parents to respect the child's needs for transitional objects.

KEYWORDS

Alienation; attachment; child development; child therapy; coparenting; custody evaluation; divorce; enmeshment; infantilization; parenting; parenting plan; separation anxiety; transitional object; virtual visitation

> The [Mother] sent the [Father] an e-mail explaining that Grace was still experiencing separation anxiety and that the child would be bringing Fluffy with her because she found the stuffed animal emotionally reassuring. … Fluffy was just … *Fluffy*. Just a harmless little toy of no consequence to anyone … except a vulnerable two-year-old caught in the middle of a bitter custody dispute. Would it have killed [Father] to just let the child hang on to her toy? (Pazaratz, J., writing in *Chomos v. Hamilton*, 2016 ONSC 5208 [CanLII], retrieved on March 5, 2017, excerpted §67–73)[1]

There is a paradox inherent in the child's experience of high-conflict divorce: The adults who together cause the child pain are simultaneously the people who are supposed to give him or her comfort.[2] Recognizing and seeking to minimize the developmental and societal costs associated with this dilemma (Rappaport, 2013; Scott, 2001), the court and the family law professionals who work through the court go to great lengths to understand and serve the child's needs. Among the many remedies and recommendations suited to this goal, we have thus far neglected to adequately consider the disposition of the child's secondary sources

CONTACT Benjamin D. Garber bdgarberphd@FamilyLawConsulting.org Family Law Consulting, PLLC, 400 Amherst Street, Suite 407, Nashua, NH 03063.

[1] I am grateful to Dr. Barbara Fidler for bringing this case to my attention.

[2] Throughout this article, gender references and the terms *mother* and *father* are arbitrary conveniences and are not intended to communicate qualities specific to either gender.

of comfort, his or her means of obtaining nurture-by-proxy, transitional objects. This article discusses how family law professionals and the courts can and should respect and empower children's use of and access to transitional objects as one further means of minimizing the long-term impact of coparental conflict, separation, and divorce on children.

WHAT IS A TRANSITIONAL OBJECT?

In the language of psychodynamic psychology, a *transitional object* is anything that communicates security to an individual in the absence of the actual source of that security (Tolpin, 1971; Winnicott, 1953). Transitional objects have been aptly described as "developmental facilitator[s] which may acquire different qualities and serve different psychological functions as the child moves toward physical and emotional independence" (Litt, 1986, p. 383).

In the conventional definition, transitional objects are "transitional" in that they are among the tools that many children use to gradually establish autonomy and self-regulation. They are, in this sense, the manifest evidence of the process of internalization; that is, the healthy child's effort to shift the security experienced in the care of his or her parents into himself or herself. Whereas the infant cannot calm without a caregiver's sensitive and responsive intervention, transitional objects make that intervention portable and immediate. Why wait for mother to respond to a cry if Fluffy the stuffed animal is right there offering familiar warmth and comfort? Transitional objects are thus a first step toward developing the ability to regulate and manage one's own emotional experiences.

Transitional objects are more broadly transitional in the sense that they help the child to bridge the transition between caring experiences. They enable a needy or distressed or regressed child to manage the gap between direct caregiving experiences. That could mean helping a 3-year-old tolerate falling asleep on her own in the family's new apartment, a 5-year-old to manage the shift from one parent's care into the care of another, or a 12-year-old to walk in the door of his new classroom.

In fact, transitional objects need not be tangible objects at all. In psychodynamic psychology, an object is anything outside of the self. In the present context, a transitional object can be as tangible as a teddy bear or as ephemeral as a scent or a taste, a sound or a texture that subjectively carries the security and comfort of an absent caregiver by association.

In the simplest sense, transitional objects are to human beings what a spare 5-gallon gas can is to a new driver: a just-in-case means of continuing to function when you are far from a gas station and on the verge of a breakdown. These objects are entirely familiar to anyone who knows a toddler. The challenge and excitement of the greater physical mobility normatively experienced in the second and third years of life must somehow be balanced with the terror of separation from those caregivers who have always previously provided safety and nurturance (Passman, 1976). The toddler's answer is to take the felt security

associated with the caregiver along with him as he explores the environment in the form of a favorite blanket, stuffed animal, or pacifier.[3]

Transitional objects are not universal. Many children manage development without obvious or consistent deference to a specific security prop. The literature distinguishing those children who do rely on some form of transitional object at some point in the course of development is sparse, but seems to suggest that specific maternal characteristics (Steir & Brauch Lehman, 2000) [4] and greater psychosocial stress (Litt, 1981), including longer and more frequent separations from caregivers (Fortuna, Baor, Israel, Abadi, & Knafo, 2014), might cause a child to be more likely to incorporate a transitional object. Although the quality of a child's attachment relationships might bear on the child's preferred type of transitional object (Lehman, Denham, Moser, & Reeves, 1992), attachment security is not known to be associated with whether a child adopts a transitional object (Donate-Bartman & Passman, 2004; Passman, 1987).

In their broader definition, transitional objects are not specific to culture (Applegate, 1989; Hong & Townes, 1976) or to age. Grade school children commonly manage anxiety and separation with symbols representing home and loved ones (Stirtzinger & Cholvat, 1990), albeit often a more verbal (e.g., a note from home) or symbolic (e.g., a photograph) object than the toddler's more developmentally primitive (i.e., appealing to tactile, gustatorial, and olfactory senses) object.

Transitional objects can help children learn to manage stressful medical procedures (Ybarra, Passman, & Eisenberg, 2000) and overcome social anxiety (Tai, Zheng, & Narayanan, 2011). They can help remedy teenage somatoform disorders (Erkolahti, Nystrom, Vahlberg, & Ebeling, 2016). They are commonly useful in managing the transition from wakefulness to sleep: "At bedtime, when a child is falling asleep and his or her mother is not present in the room, the transitional object relieves the child of anxiety because it reminds him or her of the constant integrative emotional presence of the absent mother" (McCullough, 2009, p. 20). Indeed, there is reason to believe that transitional objects continue to be important parts of sleep rituals well into the college years, particularly among those students with a history of depression, trauma, or both (Markt & Johnson, 1993).

Adolescents might be described as transitioning between transitional objects. Although they still rely (often covertly and with excruciating embarrassment) on verbal and symbolic representations of family, parents, and home, and likely have their tattered and soiled but beloved blankies and teddy bears hidden in the bottom of a drawer, they move proudly and defiantly toward association with clubs, groups, teams, and gangs. These young adult relationships become critical

[3] It is intriguing to note that Canadian case law has pointedly decided that pacifiers are not toys. They are formally and officially recognized as "a transitional object that helps children adjust to new situations and relieves stress" See *Philips Electronics Ltd v. President of the Canada Border Services Agency*, 2014 CanLII 22,328 (CA CITT; retrieved on July 1, 2018).

[4] "Toddlers' soft-object attachments were found to be predicted by the maternal variables of constraint and positive affectivity, the latter in combination with low child activity level" (Steir & Brauch Lehman, 2000, p. 340).

sources of emotional security and launching pads that help youth move away from the family of origin out toward intimate partnerships. The teenagers' choice of colors and styles and brand names, the media that they consume, and the hardware (e.g., phones, gaming systems, cars) that they show off are all transitional objects, carrying with them the felt security of the group affiliation by association (Garber, 2016b).

Adults commonly carry transitional objects, as well. A wedding ring or a photo taped to a workplace computer monitor provides many healthy adults with a dose of security by association while apart from loved ones (Kalpidou, 2012). We tend to think of these as keepsakes, mementoes, and trinkets. In truth, we turn to these things for comfort exactly in the same way that the toddler clutches his or her blankie when anxiety becomes overwhelming. In the recurrent nightmare of our contemporary world, adults locked down in an active shooter scenario or faced with a terrorist threat routinely tell stories about seeking comfort from images and gifted jewelry (as examples) by association to absent loved ones (Barlow et al., 2012).

ANXIETY, REGRESSION, AND ATTACHMENT

Evolution has programmed the species to respond to anxiety by seeking physical safety and emotional security from proximal caregivers. Children seek out the comfort of caregivers they have previously experienced to have been sensitive and responsive to their needs (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). Children who are able to use the parent's presence to calm and resume mature functioning are described as evidencing a secure attachment. Secure attachment experiences early in life are associated with a broad and impressive collection of healthy and successful outcomes later in life (Sroufe, Egeland, Carlson, & Collins, 2005).

When stress is substantial or persistent, regression occurs. *Regression* describes the abandonment of more recent and developmentally mature coping strategies in favor of previously tried-and-true, albeit developmentally primitive coping strategies. Thus, when father is hospitalized with a heart attack, his previously compliant 6-year-old begins to refuse to go to school, becomes clingy, and resumes sucking her thumb. When the family home is destroyed by fire, the previously gregarious and defiant 12-year-old insists on sleeping with mother and carrying a charred bit of a previously favorite toy in his pocket every day.

Consider the case of 2-year-old Grace, as described eloquently by the court in *Chomos*. Faced with the profound and persistent stress of her parents' conflict and separation, Grace clung to Fluffy, "a small, white, stuffed animal Grace became attached to when she was about seven months old" (§67). Tragically, father rejected Fluffy with the vehemence and cruelty with which he rejected Grace's mother, unwilling to respect that mother (and thereby Fluffy as distinct from all other stuffed animals) remained a critical emotional anchor to his daughter.

WHAT IS NOT A TRANSITIONAL OBJECT?

Borrowing a term from psychopharmacology, transitional objects are only one class of anxiolytics. Some anxiety-reducing interventions are healthier, some are illegal, and some require a prescription. The 10-year-old who copes with anxiety by immersing himself in video games is not relying on transitional objects.[5] The 4-year-old who acts out in the form of a temper tantrum is not relying on a transitional object, neither is the 17-year-old who drinks or uses drugs. For the purpose of this discussion, a transitional object is anything that is portable and has idiosyncratic meaning to the individual in that it communicates comfort by association with an absent source of emotional nurturance and affection.

Are Distance Media Transitional Objects?

A child's technology-mediated distance contact with an absent parent ("virtual visitation;" e.g., phone calls, Skype, FaceTime) falls into a gray area between transitional object and fleeting reunion. On one hand, virtual visitation does potentially refill the child's emotional gas tank so as to better manage separation (Tarasuik & Kaufman, 2017). On the other hand, virtual visitation does not draw on a child's representation of or association to the absent parent in that the parent is present, albeit removed from all but visual and auditory experience. Virtual visitation furthermore falls outside our usual understanding of transitional objects in that it does not provide the child with a talisman or symbol of the absent parent that can be referenced in times of need.[6] On this basis, virtual visitation is not considered here as a type of transitional object.

However, technology-mediated representations (e.g., saved text messages, saved voice messages, and recorded video clips akin to a handwritten note or a photo taped inside a lunchbox) do qualify as transitional objects to the extent that they are portable and communicate the absent caregiver's affection, do not require real-time interaction, and remain accessible to the child in acute times of need.[7]

Of course, neither virtual visitation nor technology-mediated representations communicate to the child's primitive senses (e.g., taste, texture, smell), and thus fall short of the compelling sensory appeal of the soiled and smelly old blankie that must never be washed. The court has recognized this distinction: "[It is] highly unlikely that a voice on the telephone or a grainy

[5] Although there is no reason that the child could not create an avatar representing an absent parent who comforts the avatar representing self in a proxy-on-proxy digital form of nurturance.

[6] "Technologies such as telephone, e-mail, instant messaging, and Skype, or other Webcam applications, provide the nonresident parent the opportunity to play a greater role in the child's day-to-day life. However, virtual parenting is no substitute for regular, physical contact between a parent and child" (Himel et al., 2016, p. 460). In the context of discussing visitation with incarcerated parents, Fasah (2018) observed that, "Virtual visitation is not necessarily the best form of visitation for children below the age of fourteen and is definitely not the best form of visitation for children under the age of seven. … Children do not receive the same connection with parents unless there is physical interaction" (p. 143).

[7] Like Fluffy, a child's access to technology-mediated representations is always subject to the proximal parent's control. Unlike Fluffy, technology-mediated representations are additionally limited by fallible hardware (e.g., cell phones that go uncharged).

picture on a computer will be any substitute for a flesh and blood father sitting him on his lap or kissing him goodnight" (Himel, Paulseth, & Cohen, 2016, pp. 463–464, quoting J. Levy in *A.D.P. v. T.E.W.*, 2005 NSFC 22).[8]

Are Pets Transitional Objects?

A pet can become a child's constant source of unambiguous nurturance, warmth, and support (Hawkins & Williams, 2017; Maharaj, 2016; Strand, 2004). The presence of a pet—particularly a dog—has been shown to decrease cortisol levels in children as compared to the presence of a friendly adult or a toy dog (Beetz, Julius, Turner, & Kotrschal, 2012). "Pets can facilitate the development of human attachment relationships and can act as another attachment figure in the absence or disruption of human attachment relationships, such as parental divorce" (Hawkins & Williams, 2017, p. 2).

Pets, like therapists, grandparents, coaches, neighbors, and siblings, can serve as a child's emotional "port in the storm;" that is, a secure base or relationship anchor that can help to relieve some of the anxiety associated with parental conflict, separation, and divorce (Garber, 2008, 2009, 2013; Rutter, 2007). However, these secondary attachment figures are not transitional objects in that they do not communicate comfort and reassurance by association to an absent caregiver, unless they do.

When Billy takes mother's puppy for the weekend to father's home, the dog could well be both a secondary attachment figure and a transitional object. Fido's cuddly warmth, wet licks, and playful love are comforting in and of themselves, but also carry with them mother's affection by association. Cuddling with Fido helps Billy manage his separation anxiety, in part because Fido represents his absent mother's love. This exception might not be worth noting were it not for the literature that discusses behavior that might be identified as alienation-by-proxy; that is, the dynamic at work when one adult's hatred of another is extended to otherwise benign objects by association, including "pets of the rejected parent" (Fidler & Bala, 2010, p. 17).

Transitional Objects and Alienation?

Alienation describes those adult behaviors that selfishly and without good reason seek to undermine the security of a child's relationship with another parent. Case law and the family law literature have been rife with discussion of alienation for more than a decade (e.g., Templer, Matthewson, Haines, & Cox, 2017). By

[8] Note, though, Tarasuik, Galligan, and Kaufman's (2011) intriguing use of a Strange Situation–like paradigm in which reunion occurred via video link: "For young children a video connection can have many of the same effects as a physical presence. This is a significant finding as it is the first such empirical demonstration and indicates considerable promise in video communication as a tool to maintain family relationships when physical presence is not possible" (p. 1).

extension, alienation-by-proxy describes those adult behaviors that needlessly damn another parent via reference to objects associated with that parent, specifically, a child's transitional objects.

Recognizing that a child's future confidence and security are built on the foundation of her experience of caregiver security and that internalization of this experience occurs in part via transitional objects highlights the self-serving cruelty of alienating behaviors. Parent A's rejection of Parent B as a partner might be defensible, but his efforts to deprive his child of the benefits of Parent B's healthy care and comfort are simply destructive. Extending this effort to reject those objects that communicate Parent B's love to the child is an insidious cruelty.

Chomos illustrates this dynamic dramatically. In *Chomos*, father initially, "pulled Fluffy from Grace's arm, pushed Fluffy into [mother]'s face, and told her 'I have my own stuffed animals.'" He subsequently "removed Fluffy from the child's arms, this time throwing Fluffy onto the driveway." Finally, father returned the beloved toy to mother "doused in an offensive and potentially dangerous substance" (§67–72).

WHEN ARE TRANSITIONAL OBJECTS DEVELOPMENTALLY INAPPROPRIATE?

In the typical course of development, the toddler's ragged and beloved teddy bear is gradually and spontaneously retired from use. Winnicott (1986) referred to this as *decathection*, the weakening or extinction of the emotional association between prop and attachment figure.

There are occasions, nonetheless, when transitional objects overstay their welcome socially, even if they remain valuable to the child emotionally. These are the children who refuse to attend sleepovers because they're embarrassed to still need their blankie at bedtime, and the children who resist kindergarten because the school forbids the import of toys from home. In some instances, they are simply the stories of children whose parents have decided that the pragmatics of assuring that child and prop are never separated are too demanding, or that continuing reliance on that prop somehow does harm.

The relationship problems that can become associated with a child's use of a transitional object are often easily resolved. Rather than carry Fluffy, a few threads cut from her synthetic fur might suffice. Rather than cling to blankie, a corner of the cloth secreted in a pocket might communicate the desired comfort less obtrusively. Rather than risk losing Teddy at school, a photo of Teddy taped in the child's cubby might be enough. We know anecdotally (although not empirically) that the abrupt, forceful, and angry removal of a transitional object intended to build greater independence can have the opposite effect.[9]

[9] The American Academy of Pediatrics advises that transitional objects are valuable and typically should not be removed. See https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/baby/Pages/Transitional-Objects.aspx (accessed July 14, 2018).

There is no evidence that reliance on transitional objects does harm except to the extent that carrying a teddy bear elicits others' ridicule and rejection. To the contrary, every bit of emotional fuel that helps a child manage stress should be welcome. Indeed, when access to a caregiver is limited by the vagaries of parenting schedules, transitional objects are to be encouraged.

RESPECTING, PROTECTING, AND EMPOWERING TRANSITIONAL OBJECTS IN THE CONTEXT OF HIGH-CONFLICT DIVORCE

Recognizing the anxiety that children commonly experience associated with parental conflict, separation, and divorce, and recognizing the anxiolytic value of transitional objects, it stands to reason that the courts, the evaluators who serve the courts, the therapists who serve the children and families involved in the courts, and the parenting plans generated by the courts all must take them into account.

Although the family law literature has not previously focused on the role of transitional objects, they often are referenced incidentally. For example, in discussing postdivorce care schedules for young children, Zeanah et al. (2011) stressed that, "child comfort may be increased [by] … both parents allowing the child to use the same transitional object (e.g., favorite stuffed animal) when with both of them" (p. 828).

As a second example, Lally, Higuchi, and Joyner-Hall (2014) offered a case study illustrating some of the ways in which a parenting coordinator (PC) can assist parents to better meet their children's needs:

> "[At] the PC's suggestion, and in line with the little girl's need for consistency, the mother made a tape recording of her reading a story that could be played during the 2 weeks when the child was with the father. Pictures of both parents were placed in both households, as were duplicate toys. The doctoral student PC also helped the father … better understand his daughter's needs (e.g., that a blanket can serve as a transitional object)" (p.128-129).

Finally, Hartson and Payne's (2006) discussion of parenting plans recommends that, "If a child has a strong attachment to a transitional object, then it really goes without saying that he or she will need to have that object with him or her during transitions between caregivers … transitional objects should be respected by both parents" (p. 53).

Intervening to Create and Empower Transitional Objects

Although the most emotionally evocative and palliative transitional objects are likely those that spontaneously emerge in the child's world, its often therapeutic to catalyze, preempt, or assist this process. Using inexpensive craft materials or repurposing existing possessions (e.g., an old wallet or necklace), parents can

proactively craft a transitional object for or with a child. Child and family therapists can assist parent–child dyads to create and exchange trinkets with the same intent (Garber, 2007).[10] The specific form that the transitional object takes will be idiosyncratic, but imbuing each with a bit of magic in the form of a parent's kisses or a lock of hair sealed under transparent tape is usually welcome. The ease and immediacy of digital photography, sound recording, and video recording make for innumerable variations well-suited to a more emotionally mature child than the old-school idea of a blankie or a stuffed animal.

With less emotionally mature children, the co-creation or gifting of a transitional object can be facilitated by accompanying rituals and stories. "The Kissing Hand" (Penn, 1993) or "The Flyaway Blanket" (Peterkin, 2012), for example, communicate the portability and durability of love even during separation.

When tangible transitional objects are eschewed as cause for embarrassment, as symbols of betrayal, or as vulnerable to alienation-by-proxy, less conspicuous alternatives are possible. In one memorable instance, mother made a habit of spritzing her familiar perfume on her 10-year-old's night clothes before separating, creating for the child a subliminal and reassuring connection at bedtime.

Cooperative separated coparents can each draw (or audio or video record) a series of very brief messages of reassurance for their child to be held in escrow in the child's other home in case of future need. The child's independence is served and the opportunity for adult conflict is minimized when father can salve his daughter's separation anxiety by producing a symbol of mother's affection as the need arises, for example.

Finally, some special needs (e.g., anxious or autistic spectrum disorder) children's reliance on familiarity can sometimes be accommodated through the use of transitional objects.[11] Cooperative but separated coparents can transfer a child's collapsible cardboard clubhouse or beloved bed tent between homes to minimize the child's experience of change regardless of street address.

Child Custody Evaluations and Transitional Objects

The law and best practices require that child custody evaluations (CCEs) speak first and foremost to the child's social and emotional needs and to the caregivers respective abilities to serve those needs (e.g., Martindale et al., 2007). This discussion suggests that CCEs must take a developmental perspective, capturing

[10] "A transitional object can be any tangible and pocketable thing that allows parent and child to feel emotionally connected even while apart. The nature of the transitional object is unique to each dyad, from a shared piece of polar fleece fabric to matching rings or necklaces" (Garber, 2007, p. 591).

[11] "For many [autistic spectrum disorder] children, the need for sameness in environment may supersede the need for sameness of routine" (Pickar & Kaufman, 2015, p. 129).

not only a snapshot of the system in the present, but anticipating the child's developmental trajectory into the future. A child's use of transitional objects and the parents' attitudes toward these objects should be critical elements of this consideration.

Transitional objects provide the examiner with a window into the child's typically ambivalent movement toward healthy autonomy. One aspect of the examiner's inquiry into the child's coping strategies, capacity for self-regulation, and resilience should be consideration of when, where, how, and why the child employs his or her idiosyncratic variant of Fluffy. In some instances, the examiner is wise to actually interview Fluffy, both as a means of validating the child's world and to better access the child's wishes, fears, needs, and strengths. this writer's experience that young children make very impressive ventriloquists in this situation.

The parents' perspectives on the child's transitional object can also provide valuable insight into empathy, sensitivity, parenting and coparenting practices. The simple mechanics of cooperating to assure that the child has his or her Teddy bear speak to the coparents' capacity for child-centered cooperation. The parents' attitudes about when and how a child's transitional object should be accessible will speak to their respective developmental expectations and social sensitivities. Each parent's real or imagined capacity to soothe the child when the beloved item is misplaced, lost, or destroyed might be among the most demanding tests of the parent–child relationship.

Further, evidence that a parent disparages or outright forbids a child's access to a transitional object associated with the child's other parent or home has often proven to be the tip of the otherwise well-hidden alienation and enmeshment iceberg. Parental behaviors such as those described in *Chomos* should alert examiners to look very closely at the ways in which that parent supports the child's relationship with the other parent and nurtures the child's healthy growth toward autonomy (Garber, 2011).

Court Orders and Parenting Plans

The court's allocation of parenting time and responsibilities establish the parenting and coparenting structures intended to serve the child's needs. In the course of determining the structures suited to a given child's best interests, the court is well advised to consider the child's access to and use of idiosyncratic transitional objects.

A developmentally informed parenting plan must recognize that, above and beyond the use of distance media, children often benefit from access to concrete symbols (e.g., photographs, audio and video recordings) and items (e.g., a particular stuffed animal) emotionally associated with an absent parent. Parents must be educated to respect and empower these transitional objects as appropriate means of supporting the child's relationship with the absent parent.

The Need for Empirical Support

Research involving high-conflict, litigating families is at least as important as it is difficult to conduct. Concerns about due process, discovery, and intrusions into the lives of people already enduring very high stress all make the prospect and the process very challenging for even the most dedicated researcher.

Given a cooperative jurisdiction, the first priority must be to determine base rates. The extant literature provides an overview of the frequency of transitional object reliance among children across ages in general. No one knows, however, whether children caught up in family conflict and transition are more or less likely to spontaneously adopt transitional objects as one means of coping with the associated stresses. This writer's hypothesize that consistent with general population studies (Fortuna et al., 2014; Litt, 1981), children of high-conflict divorce are more likely to adopt transitional objects than children in the general population and children enduring low-stress family transitions.

Given reliable base rate studies among children of high-conflict divorce, the door opens to understanding whether (a) children who spontaneously adopt a transitional object fare better than those who do not on common short- and long-term outcome variables such as self-esteem, academic achievement, measures of anxiety, and depression; and (b) whether children provided with these props improve on the same short- and long-term dependent measures as compared to matched controls given a random (control) toy. Once again, this writer's hypothesize that interventions that help children to carry around the affection of an absent caregiver will work to the child's social and emotional benefit.

More simply and realistically, this writer's presently recruiting jurisdictions willing to include information about the value of transitional objects in both parenting plans and in state-mandated divorce training and child impact classes for parents. The goal will be to look for differences in child outcomes and recidivist litigation between parents in participating jurisdictions and those who divorce in nonparticipating jurisdictions.

CONCLUSIONS

To serve the needs of any child, mental health and family law professionals must consider those conditions that fuel the child's sense of security. With this in mind, the professional literature has appropriately focused on assessment and intervention intended to facilitate the quality of parent–child relationships. Unfortunately, the powerful role of transitional objects has often been neglected in this discussion. This article defines the concept of the transitional object, applies it to high-conflict divorce dynamics, and emphasizes some of the many and varied ways in which these developmentally adaptive tools can be used in support of the child's growth

toward healthy autonomy and management of the stresses inherent in family transition.

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