

**Advance Orientation in Family Law:
A Conceptual Overview and Future Avenues for Inquiry**

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Abstract

Divorce and custody litigation are among the most stressful life events, often exacerbated by unfamiliar legal procedures and intrusive court-ordered services. This paper introduces Advance Orientation (AO) as a structured, empirically grounded intervention designed to reduce anticipatory anxiety and improve outcomes for families navigating the family law system. Drawing on over fifty years of research in allied fields—including medicine, psychotherapy, and public health—AO programming is shown to enhance consumer comprehension, compliance, and satisfaction while reducing impulsivity and conflict. The paper outlines five foundational principles supporting AO's integration into family law, emphasizing its potential to improve ecological validity, procedural efficiency, and child-centered outcomes. Implementation pathways include court mandates, provider requirements, ally referrals, and self-referral. A sample court order and service agreement language are provided to illustrate practical integration. The paper concludes by advocating for AO as a paradigm shift in family law—one that aligns legal processes with the psychological needs of families and the best interests of children. DEFUSEdivorce.com is presented as a pioneering platform offering accessible AO programming for divorcing and custody-litigating parents.

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“... it’s an extremely emotional time for most people, to go through a divorce.
You’re either already confused—How am I going to survive? What am I going to do?
How am I going to get through this? Where am I going to go?
You’re already thinking all of those things in your head,
and then you’re put into this extremely terrifying situation
with the courthouse and no help.”

(Knowlton et al., 2016, p. 47)

Divorce litigation is often messy and anxiety-provoking, a strenuous reshuffling of social, emotional, environmental, and economic realities. Divorce is commonly associated with large changes to family structure (Garber, in review 2025), a transition that is known to cause significant psychological distress to all involved (Sbarra, 2015; Tavares & Aassve, 2004; Overbeek et al., 2006). Divorce is a process very much like grief and loss (Brodbeck et al., 2019; Sander et al., 2020; Ye et al., 2018), complete with struggles related to identity (Cookston et al., 2015; Saranya et al., 2025) and tremendous anxiety. These experiences are commonly compounded by the stresses associated with the complexities of the legal system and the

perceived threat of unfamiliar and intrusive services including as Parenting Plan Evaluations (PPEs; sometimes known as Child Custody Evaluations [CCEs]), mediation, and parenting coordination (PC).

PPEs, for example, are intrusive, anxiety-inducing, time- and dollar-expensive processes (Bow and Quinnell, 2004) intended to characterize a family's dynamics so as to assist the court to understand the child's best interests (Garber & Deck, 2025). PPEs attempt to draw generalizations about families even at the worst of times. The demands of this process pose the very real and seldom articulated dilemma of ecological validity:

“[PPEs] presume to draw generalizations about families seen at the worst of times: when they are rubbed raw by the enormous social, emotional, and financial pressures of conflicted custody litigation, and then asked to put on their Sunday best to impress an unfamiliar professional whose opinions are likely to shape the rest of their lives” (Garber, 2023, p. 3)

Given the life-altering significance of PPE and related services, family law professionals have a legal (Reiter, in preparation 2025) and ethical (Heiner, in preparation 2025) -if not a moral- responsibility to diminish associated anxiety so as to maximize the validity of the data that the Court relies upon to make child-centered decisions. In the alternative, “[t]he failure to deal adequately with family disputes has long-term costs for parents and their children, often resulting in poverty and loss of positive parent-child relationships” (Lynch, 2019, p. 81).

This chapter introduces the concept of Advance Orientation (AO) as one necessary -even if not sufficient- means of achieving these goals. Research in allied fields spanning more than fifty years has repeatedly found that efforts to orient consumers of a service in *advance* of participating in that service diminishes anticipatory anxiety, improves compliance, efficacy,

efficiency, satisfaction, and ecological validity with numerous secondary benefits to all involved (Garber, 2024; Garber & Deck, 2025). Considering the significance of divorce and custody litigation and the fact that divorcing and custody-litigating parents (particularly but not only those without counsel) seldom understand the legal process or the many services associated with custody litigation, we are working to introduce AO programming to family courts around the world in the best interests of every child. We assert that ordering custody litigants to participate in AO programming can diminish conflict, facilitate service provision, improve child-centered outcomes, ease the stresses of our grossly overburdened courts, and help to assure that each family's particular needs are more fully, efficiently, and accurately served.

What is Advance Orientation?

Advance Orientation (AO) describes any structured, pre-engagement tool designed to prepare individuals (hereinafter “consumers”) to participate in an anticipated but otherwise unfamiliar professional service. AO programming reduces anxiety by providing consumers with a road map for what lies ahead. It works to make the unfamiliar predictable and, in so doing, diminishes anticipatory anxiety by increasing transparency and understanding.

Anxiety, of course, compromises higher order functioning leaving consumers frustrated, confused, and feeling unheard (Yu, 2016). These outcomes become seeds which can grow into professional licensure complaints, needlessly prolonged and antagonistic litigation, inappropriate service outcomes (e.g., child custody evaluation recommendations), inadequate judicial rulings, and endless appeals.

Advance Orientation minimizes these expensive and painful outcomes by providing consumers with tailored and accessible information *before* engaging in unfamiliar and high-stakes processes. This general idea is likely familiar to any reader who has endured any medical

procedure. Doctors, nurses, and allied medical professionals (among others) learned long ago that orienting a patient to an upcoming procedure improves compliance and outcomes.

Indeed, AO programming has long been in use in allied health care fields. Watching a video that explains an upcoming surgery, reading a brochure about the pros and cons of a new medication, taking a child-birth class in the third trimester, meeting the surgeon or touring the recovery suite before the surgery all function to ease anticipatory anxiety and constitute various forms of advance orientation. Reading about how psychotherapy works, what the therapist's and the patient's respective roles are in advance of intake can make the process more satisfying, effective, and efficient. Giving a child a chance to play in the dentist's chair and meet the professional behind the sterile mask before his first cleaning will help the child manage the anxiety of the experience. In each of these and many similar circumstances, AO programming is the proverbial ounce of prevention worth many pounds of cure.

Conceptual Overview and Rationale for Advance Orientation in Family Law

Divorcing and custody-disputing parents who turn to the family courts for relief encounter an arcane environment riddled with seemingly random rules and complicated by frustrating and sometimes insurmountable hurdles all presented in a foreign language (Knowlton et al., 2016). Even with the benefit of counsel, the paperwork, deadlines, communications, vocabulary, and expectations associated with the family courts needlessly add anxiety to an already overburdened and suffering population (Kohn, 2025). Recognizing the burden that these hurdles pose to litigants, the field is beginning to recognize and shift toward using colloquial terms and more transparent methods so as to make the system more accessible (Berthenthal, 2017; Grieshofer et al., 2022; Rabeea, 2015).

To illustrate the problem, consider the Institute for the Advancement of the American Legal System (IAALS) 2016 literature review and a survey of self-represented litigants' (SRL) experiences in the courts (Knowlton et al., 2016). The IAALS summary report is fascinating and compelling and should be read by every family law professional, at least to the extent that it highlights the injustices that occur when litigants don't understand the legal process. For example, referring to prior research, the report advised that "'Virtually every SRL in the sample... complained that they found the language in the court forms confusing, complex,' with some self-represented litigants finding the language 'simply incomprehensible – referring to terms and concepts with which they were unfamiliar'" (p. 38). Perhaps more directly, one IAALS study participant is quoted as having said, "The emotional ups and downs of the stress of it...it can be debilitating, I'll say that, and without any exaggeration. It can be debilitating when you have that amount of stuff, your life, your children, hanging over your head—and it's in the balance of your hands" (Knowlton et al., 2016, p. 45).

We contend that Advance Orientation programming can help to relieve this burden. AO programming promises an easy, inexpensive means of defusing this pain. This promise rests on five common sense and empirically validated pillars.

First, we know that family change fuels anxiety and inflames emotions. Divorce is well known to be among the most anxiety-inducing, emotionally evocative, and practically disruptive life events anyone can endure (Holmes and Rahe, 1967; Wallace et al., 2023).¹

Second, both personal experience and decades of psychological research demonstrate that anxiety compromises higher order or more "mature" functioning (McKnight et al., 2016; Nguyen

¹ Its interesting to note that divorce was ranked second (to death of a partner) among stressors in the 1967 study and 4th among stressors in the 2023 replication (behind death of a partner, death of a close family member, and detention in jail).

et al., 2025; Weisberg et al., 2010; Rauch et al., 2025). This is the primitive fight/flight/freeze function of the human brain, an autonomic reflex that diverts critical resources from brain to muscle in the face of perceived threat. Thus, faced with a hungry tiger or a terrifying cross-examination, we are not biologically predisposed to think clearly or function maturely. In the case of the carnivore, the answer is to escape or attack. In the case of the courtroom, neither applies. Family law litigants need the means to overcome this anxiety and resume clear thinking so as to more effectively advocate for themselves and their children. That is precisely the purpose of advance orientation programming.

The fact that anxiety compromises clear and coherent thinking is well-established (Gkintoni & Ortiz, 2023; Llera & Newman, 2020; Vytal et al., 2013). When anxiety is high, fight/flight/freeze reflexes fuel impulsivity and exacerbate interpersonal conflict (Fosco et al., 2025; Malivoire & Koerner, 2022; Jakuszkowiak-Wojten et al., 2015). Within families, parental anxiety is known to inhibit the capacity to communicate and advocate for children's needs (Arellano et al., 2018; Gao et al., 2024) and often causes children's anxiety which, in turn, feeds back on parent anxiety in a downward spiral (Gouze et al., 2016). When the anxiety associated with divorce and custody conflicts bring a family to court, the parties thus examined are not wearing their Sunday best. To the contrary, the Court, the Guardian *ad litem*, and the evaluator are each at risk of basing life altering opinions on the behavior of people who are struggling under the tectonic pressures of change.

Third, we know that knowledge is the antidote to anxiety. Even when the information obtained is subjectively distressing, the simple act of understanding what lies ahead instills a sense of mastery, diminishes anxiety, and facilitates healthier coping strategies (Zhao et al.,

2022A).² Anxiety is believed to have specific deleterious effects on perception and response including inflated estimates of threat, hypervigilance, inadequate or deficient coping, and exaggerated responses. These, in turn, pump up anxiety which redoubles these responses in a downward spiral of withdrawal, avoidance, and terror (Grupe and Nitschke, 2013). Information works to interrupt this maladaptive cycle by fostering a more realistic evaluation of the threat and more adaptive responses. Indeed, information in the form of graduated exposure paired with anxiety management is at the foundation of longstanding conventional psychotherapies (Wolpe et al., 1973) and more recent divorce-related services (Garber, 2015).

Fourth, we know that anxiety fuels conflict (and vice versa). When anxiety doesn't spark flight or freeze reflexes, it is likely to spark the fight reflex. The association between anxiety and conflict within families (Iovolli et al., 2025) and between conflicted families and the professionals who seek to serve them (e.g., Judge and Ward, 2017) are well known.

Fifth and finally, we know that family conflict harms children. In fact, psychology and family law long ago burst the bubble of mistruth that once-upon-a-time suggested that divorce harms children. Divorce need be no more disruptive to a child than what happens when parents file taxes. It's the experience of chronic, extreme, and unresolved conflict between parents and the risk of being triangulated amidst these conflicts that harms children regardless of the legal status of the adult relationship (Emery, 1999; Kelly, 2000).

These five pillars invite a simple calculus: Given that anxiety is associated with a greater risk of conflict and less mature functioning, that conflict harms children, and that information

² Psychology discusses this paradigm in terms of "... the buildup of the if-then plan in implementation intention, which is a widely known form of automatic emotion regulation, is effective in reducing anticipatory anxiety..." (Zhao et al., 2022B, p. 199).

diminishes anxiety, then providing divorcing parents with more information that works to diminish their anxiety ultimately helps children.

Empirical Foundations of Advance Orientation in Related Health Care Fields

Evidence-based or data-driven services are unfortunately as rare in family law as they are important (Millar, 2009; Robertson et al., 2019). Indeed, the most common standard of admissibility in family law (*Daubert v. Merrell Dow Pharmaceuticals, Inc.*, 509 U.S. 579 (1993)) requires, in relevant part, that services have established error rates, a metric that calls for an evidence-based foundation of statistically demonstrable effectiveness. Best practice guidelines similarly emphasize “evidence-based, multitrait-multimethod” approaches to child custody matters (American Psychological Association, 2022, p. 6). Advance orientation programming fulfills these criteria.

In medical settings, for example, patients who participated in brief video orientation in advance of surgery were statistically less likely to have pre-operative anxiety, need less post-operative pain medication, had briefer hospital stays, and were more likely to be satisfied with their overall experience than matched controls who did not participate in AO programming (Gagliano, 1988; Krouse, 2001; Zarina et al., 2019; Zeev et al., 2007). These effects are so robust that the American College of Surgeons advises that “[t]he education that patients receive before surgery helps to manage expectations and results in significant positive effects on surgery outcomes and quality of life” (American College of Surgeons, n.d.).

Pediatric dental patients who participated in Advance Orientation video programming had less dental anxiety, were less disruptive, and thereby had better outcomes than same-aged patients who did not engage in AO programming (Al-Namankany, 2017; Melamed et al., 1975). Women who completed a video orientation in advance of genetic screening tests for breast

cancer vulnerability were less anxious and more satisfied with the process regardless of the results than those who did not complete the AO programming (Cull et al., 1998). Advance Orientation regarding COVID transmission and active shooter awareness has been associated with diminished public anxiety and greater confidence as compared to populations without access to comparable programming (Liu et al., 2023). Finally, adults who engaged in an orientation in advance of commencing psychotherapy emphasizing role definition and responsibilities were routinely found to be more compliant in therapy, more likely to remain in therapy, and more likely to benefit from therapy than similar patients who did not have the benefit of participating in AO programming. (Orne & Wender, 1968; Swift et al., 2023).

Research is now underway directed by the second author in collaboration with Western Carolina University to begin to establish a similar empirical basis for the value of AO programming among divorcing and child-custody litigating parents. As a first step, family law professionals' present understanding and use of advance orientation in all of its many forms are being surveyed. These same professionals are being asked to view an advance orientation program called "Preparing to Participate in a Parenting plan Evaluation" hosted at DEFUSEdivorce.com so as to advise if and how they believe this program can help parents and the courts better serve children's needs. As follow up, plans are in place to compare the duration, complexity, and outcomes of contested custody cases as a function of the parents' participation in this same AO program. There is every reason to expect that a brief, inexpensive, up-front orientation will benefit consumers of family law services at least as much as such programs have been proven to consistently benefit the consumers of other professional services.

Introducing advance orientation to family law

As applied to family law, Advance Orientation represents a novel application of these very basic and common sense principles. In this context, AO programming is believed to diminish divorcing and custody-litigating parents' anxiety by helping them to better anticipate not just the logistics of what will happen as their divorce proceeds through the courts (e.g., CCEs) but also the rationale behind each service, the roles of participants and professionals, and the potential outcomes they may encounter.

Advance orientation complements and goes far beyond the standard and obligatory informed consent or assent associated with any particular professional service (Association of Family and Conciliatory Courts, 2022). Whereas informed consent communicates a consumer's legal rights and responsibilities, thereby often fueling anxiety (Goldberger et al., 2011), AO programming works to diminish anxiety. Advance orientation works to clarify expectations, improve familiarity, and increase predictability.

Advance Orientation has been proven effective in many forms. These include printed documents or delivered in hand or posted in waiting rooms, audio recordings provided by phone, video delivered on demand, via broadcast, or hosted online, animated cartoon-like enactments suited to children's needs and interests, augmented reality tours of a service environment (e.g., a surgery suite) explaining devices and procedures, and virtual reality opportunities to engage digitally in a service as either patient or provider using avatars in advance of engaging in the actual process.

Across these very different platforms, effective AO content is careful not to assume that consumers know anything about the service. It presents relevant concepts using language, at a pace, and by a speaker suited to consumers' needs, identity, skills, and interests. It is accessible to consumers at times and in a manner suited to their needs, when they are least anxious and

therefore best able to take in new information, and it is inclusive of all consumers across all demographics, circumstances, and needs.

The accessibility of AO programming is particularly important. On one hand, a brochure posted in a waiting room or delivered in hand upon arrival for a service may be very accessible but implicitly asks the consumer to take in new information in a very anxious moment. On the other hand, high tech (e.g., augmented reality and virtual reality programs) may be accessible at any time day or night long in advance of a service but only for those few who might have access to requisite hardware, thus limiting accessibility. In this age of computerized everything (including court filings in many jurisdictions) we believe that brief video programming hosted online, narrated by a diverse collection of professionals and available 24/7/365 optimizes accessibility.

Online advance orientation also serves professionals

Family law professionals and the court-ordered or court-adjacent services that they provide also benefit when divorcing and litigating parents have participated in AO programming. These benefits are evident in several distinct but interrelated ways.

1. Providing generic advance orientation to individual consumers costs professionals a tremendous amount of time engaged in redundant activity, time better spent responding to consumers' unique needs. This time, of course, comes at a cost to the consumer that is routinely many times greater than the cost of participating in AO programming.
2. Professionals who provide each consumer with advance orientation increase the likelihood of answering repetitive questions and managing many more off-hour

interruptions from consumers who quite reasonably couldn't follow all of the information provided the first time. When AO programming is available online, consumers can review and reassure themselves when panic awakens them at two in the morning.

3. When two (or more) disputing parties are ordered to engage in parallel services (e.g., Mother and Father must each complete psychological testing), the likelihood that a single provider serving both or -worse- that two separate providers working in parallel will provide the two consumers with the same advance orientation is quite low. Different wording, emphasis, and sequence can communicate very different ideas which, in turn, can confound efforts to compare the two parties. Online AO programming minimizes these confounds by assuring that both parties receive identical information prior to engagement.
4. Everyone benefits when informed consumers are less contentious, interrupt services less often with basic questions, make fewer missteps through the process, are less impulsive and better prepared at potential trigger points. For professionals, this means more time-efficient services, shorter wait lists, less crowded waiting rooms and courtrooms, and a generally more conciliatory and child-centered process.

Overall, we believe that the benefits associated with Advance Orientation programming promises a paradigm shift in family law. When understood and implemented effectively, AO programming defuses the anxiety that has for decades needlessly confounded custody-related processes. AO programming gives us the opportunity to make the legal process less of an overwhelming threat and more of a navigable journey.

Integrating Advance Orientation in Family Court Practice

To meaningfully illustrate our position, we present four mutually compatible scenarios in which AO programming can be introduced into the legal process. These are participation mandated by Court order, participation required by a service provider, referral by an ally or advocate, and self-referral. ,

Participation mandated by court order

We believe that the most efficient and effective means of assuring that both (all) litigants enjoy the psychological, practical, and procedural benefits associated with AO programming is when such programming is routinely integrated into the courts' orders for specific services. For example, when the Court orders a PPE *sui sponte* or in response to litigants' pleas, the enabling order should require litigants to complete advance orientation specific to the process. We offer sample wording specific to PPE below. Similar language and expectations apply when other services (e.g., mediation, parenting coordination, Guardian ad litem investigation) are ordered.

Sample Court Order

[begin inset box]

“In the interest of promoting child-centered outcomes, procedural efficiency, time- and cost- savings, improving evaluator accuracy, and reducing participant anxiety, the Court hereby orders both parties to complete the Advance Orientation (AO) program on parenting plan evaluations available at [site] prior to commencing the court-ordered evaluation. Parties are additionally encouraged to review this program at any time during the pendency of the evaluation so as to better understand the evaluation process.

This program is impartial and empirically supported. Research spanning numerous fields demonstrates that AO improves participant satisfaction, reduces complaints, and enhances both the efficiency and efficacy of professional services.

The Court finds that AO programming is consistent with best practices in family law. It is distinct from informed consent and does not constitute coaching. AO prepares litigants to engage more effectively in the evaluation process, thereby supporting the child's best interests.

Each party shall be responsible for his/her associated costs. Each party shall complete the program within fourteen (14) days of this order and prior to commencing the evaluation. Proof of participation shall be submitted to the designated evaluator. Each party is free to view this program with trusted adult allies. The children are not to be exposed to this program directly or incidentally."

[close inset box]

Requiring Advance Orientation through a standing order or case-by-case mandate represents a paradigm shift in family law, one that treats procedural anxiety and confusion not as inevitable byproducts of litigation, but as modifiable variables. The widespread implementation of similar sample orders would not only benefit individual families but would also enhance global system functioning. Moreover, implementing sample orders like the one above introduces a low-cost, high-impact intervention into a legal ecosystem that is often overwhelmed, underfunded, and slow to adopt innovation. Advance Orientation represents a rare instance in which equity, efficiency, and empirical support converge in a scalable way. As Advance Orientation, programming becomes more mainstream, court orders like this one could be adapted

for a wide range of family law services, including mediation, parenting coordination, co-parenting therapy, or even judicial settlement conferences. The sample order provides a flexible template, adaptable across jurisdictions and service types.

Participation required by a service provider

With or without a court order, service providers should routinely require that consumers complete AO programming prior to commencing the service. Best practice calls for Parenting Plan Evaluators, mediators, parenting coordinators, Guardians ad litem, and allied child-centered forensic professionals to have consumers endorse an initial Service Agreement or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU; Association of Family and Conciliation Courts, 2022) before providing a service. These documents typically detail the nature and limitations of the proposed service. Incorporating a requirement to participate in AO programming is a very natural and universally beneficial evolution of these documents.

Referral by an ally or advocate

Divorcing and custody-litigating parents commonly seek out court-adjacent but not court-ordered services to support them as they manage the stresses of family change and the legal process. This includes, for example, psychotherapists, domestic violence and child protection advocates, substance abuse counselors, and life coaches. Each of these professionals plays a potentially powerful role as the family's conflict is addressed and changes occur. No matter how much or how little each such professional may be familiar with the legal process, child-centered, or systemically-informed, assuring that consumers take the opportunity to participate in relevant AO programming benefits all. In our anecdotal experience, AO programming can be most useful

when viewed together with a trusted ally or advocate such that the content of the programming is integrated into the larger professional service.

Self-referral

Divorcing and custody-litigating parents often engage in extensive online research in support of their position and their perceptions of their children's needs. Knowlton et al. (2016, p. 26), for example, reported that, "The vast majority of self-represented litigant study participants actively worked to identify resources and conduct research. Over 90% of self-represented litigant participants reported using at least one resource to help them understand and navigate the process; more than 85% leveraged multiple resources." Ideally that research -including word-of-mouth referrals within divorcing parents' online communities- yields access to AO programming.

DEFUSEdivorce.com

DEFUSEdivorce.com is the embodiment of this science. Created in 2023 by the second author, DEFUSEdivorce.com remains planet earth's only means for divorcing and custody-litigating adults to access online advance orientation to the many facets of the legal process.

As of this writing, DEFUSEdivorce.com hosts thirteen curated video AO programs intended for adults and a fourteenth program intended for parents and children to view together. These programs range from approximately thirty to sixty minutes in length. They are available in video or audio-only format. They are hosted by family law professionals from around the world representing every guild (e.g., lawyers, social workers, psychologists, judges), many races, varied ages, and professional orientations. Across this intentional diversity, every program curated by and hosted at DEFUSEdivorce.com speaks to people struggling amidst overwhelming

stress in calming, clear, simple language. Programs are accompanied by links to valuable related services available around the world.

Conclusion

Divorce and custody litigation represent far more than a legal process. These are deeply human experiences marked by loss, uncertainty, and often profound anxiety. For most parents, entering the family court system is as unfamiliar and threatening as landing on an alien planet. The language is foreign. Social expectations are bizarre. And mandates to jump through hoops appear unexpectedly without rhyme or reason. A desperate parent's desperate wish to care for his or her child can easily be lost amidst alien processes that can inadvertently intensify conflict, exacerbate stress, and impair the very outcomes that they intend to protect. It is within this context that Advance Orientation programming emerges not as a luxury or auxiliary tool, but as a necessary core component of the family law system.

Advance orientation programming is inexpensive to create. It can be made universally available to consumers and accessible 24/7/365. It can be presented in a way and by professionals with whom consumers identify and in a manner that is readily understood. This is what DEFUSEdivorce.com has accomplished and now makes available to divorcing and custody-litigating parents.

This chapter has introduced and conceptualized Advance Orientation as an empirically grounded intervention with the potential to improve outcomes for families and professionals alike. Drawing on over fifty years of hard science spanning many and diverse fields, Advance Orientation programming ordered by the court, required by providers, referred by allies and

passed on among parents by word-of-mouth promises to promote more efficient, effective, and ultimately child-centered family law proceedings.

In the same way that divorce causes stress within families, change causes stress among professionals. It's easy to fall into the comfortable rut of routine, resisting change on the basis of little more than momentum. As of this writing, Advance Orientation remains unfortunately underutilized in family law. The cost of *not* orienting parents in terms of dollars spent, anxiety endured, recidivist litigation and appeals is already high. Breaking out of our ruts to add AO programming to our professional routines is a low-cost, high yield change. If we are to genuinely serve children's needs and realize the full potential of programs like those now hosted at DEFUSEdivorce.com, stakeholders across the family law ecosystem must act. Researchers must continue to test its efficacy across service domains. Courts and policymakers must be willing to adopt and mandate its use. Practitioners must recognize Advance Orientation not as an add-on but as an essential part of ethical, informed, and client-centered service delivery. And parents, the most important stakeholders, must be given tools not just to survive the legal process, but to understand and navigate it with clarity, dignity, and resilience.

We believe that Advance Orientation offers a necessary paradigm shift in family law. AO programming has the power to realign the family law system with its central mission, that is, to understand and serve the best interests of children. As such, it is imperative that as a field committed to the needs of children we adopt Advance Orientation as a foundational part of a more compassionate and effective family law system.

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