

**CHILD CUSTODY MEDIATION: TECHNIQUES FOR COUNSELORS, ATTORNEYS, AND PARENTS.** By Florence Bienenfeld, PhD. Palo Alto, CA: Science and Behavior Books, 1983. xvi + 192 pp. \$12.95.

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Child custody determination has troubled sensitive individuals since the days of King Solomon. The twentieth century brought the matter to an issue of debate in the courts. The current high rate of divorce and the social climate that espouses sexual equality have resulted in a backlog of child custody disputes, the determination of which is viewed by jurists as the ugliest litigation there is. Judges, attorneys, and mental health professionals have supported mediation as an alternative to litigation in these disputes. This new profession is fertile soil for a myriad of techniques and approaches. The purpose of Bienenfeld's book is to describe her individual technique. She provides useful guidelines to those legal and mental health professionals wishing to establish a similar practice.

In her introduction, the author defines mediation as a cooperative process in which disputants work together "to reach a mutually agreeable settlement" that focuses on their children's needs. In so doing she may go too far in portraying the contrasting adversarial process as negative and suggesting a broad effectiveness of mediation.

Although the presentation of her technique requires a rather dry and somewhat repetitive list of steps, goals, objectives, and so on, the author brings the words to life through anecdotal accounts scattered throughout the text and through more detailed case studies at the end of the book. She emphasizes the educational role of the mediator, helping parents become aware of their children's experiences, teaching them techniques of cooperative negotiation, and preparing them for future problems. She focuses again and again on serving the best interests of the child.

Dr. Bienenfeld offers time frames and interview outlines that should be useful for planning and implementing a mediation program. Her details could prove invaluable to the legally trained reader who may be inexperienced at interviewing children. She even offers specific quotes for broaching sensitive issues in the mediation process and model agreements to help in wording the final product. A chapter devoted to "Handling Special Situations" oversimplifies the real, unique experience. The results Dr. Bienenfeld claims are impressive. While most programs have not reported higher than 50 percent effectiveness, she reports completing agreements in 71 percent of 677 families. However, the text leaves this reviewer wondering how she serves as counselor, educator, and finally mediator within the "2 to 3½ hour" sessions she describes. A list of Conciliation Courts and Family Court Services is included. □