

*The Irish Forum for Child and Adolescent Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy
& The Irish Forum for Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy Present*

Children of Divorce:

**Working Psychodynamically with the Child, the Family and the Family Law Courts
A Half-Day Clinical Seminar with Caoimhe Nic Dhomhnaill**

Caoimhe Nic Dhomhnaill is a clinical psychologist who has specialised in the areas of child and adolescent psychology and psychotherapy. She is a registered member of the Psychological Society of Ireland and the Irish Forum for Child and Adolescent Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy. She worked in child guidance settings from 1980 to 1997, at the Mater Child Guidance Clinic and later at Lucena Clinic. Since 1997 she has continued this work in private practice seeing children, adolescents and their families. She provides custody and access assessments and reports to the District, Circuit and High Courts and has a particular interest in the practical application of psychodynamic and psychoanalytic principles in this setting.

**With contributions from professionals working in the areas of
psychoanalytic psychotherapy, psychology, family therapy, mediation,
social work, and family and childcare law**

Noreen Bracken (child and
adolescent psychoanalytic psychotherapy)

Jim Sheehan
(social work, family therapy)

Brian Smith (psychology, family
therapy, family mediation)

Tabitha Wood
(family and childcare law)

Saturday 26 February 2011, 2.00 pm-5.00 pm

Clarion Hotel, International Financial Services Centre (IFSC), Dublin 1

For further information and to register contact Ann Daly: amdps@indigo.ie

Early registration is advised as places are limited

<http://www.ifpp.org>

SEMINAR DESCRIPTION

This half-day clinical seminar will begin with a paper presented by **Caoimhe Nic Dhomhnaill** entitled 'Applying Psychodynamic Theory and Practice to Custody and Access Proceedings in the Family Circuit Court'. As a consultant to the family law courts, Caoimhe endeavours to describe and unravel the unconscious processes for the child and family as they interface with the legal system. The value of psychoanalytic theory as a map which illuminates the territory will be explored with particular attention to concepts of ambivalence, the oedipal triangle and projective identification. Caoimhe's paper will be followed by a panel of brief, informal responses given by professionals working in the areas of psychoanalytic psychotherapy, psychology, family therapy, mediation, social work, and family and childcare law: **Noreen Bracken, Jim Sheehan, Brian Smith and Tabitha Wood**. After which, there will be time for discussion with delegates. This seminar will be of interest to psychoanalysts, psychotherapists, psychologists, counsellors, psychiatrists, social workers and members of the legal profession.

SPEAKER

Caoimhe Nic Dhomhnaill is a clinical psychologist who has specialised in the areas of child and adolescent psychology and psychotherapy. She is a registered member of the Psychological Society of Ireland and the Irish Forum for Child and Adolescent Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy. She worked in child guidance settings from 1980 to 1997, at the Mater Child Guidance Clinic and later at Lucena Clinic. Since 1997 she has continued this work in private practice seeing children, adolescents and their families. She provides custody and access assessments and reports to the District, Circuit and High Courts and has a particular interest in the practical application of psychodynamic and psychoanalytic principles in this setting.

TITLE AND ABSTRACT OF PAPER

'Applying Psychodynamic Theory and Practice to Custody and Access Proceedings in the Family Circuit Court'

This paper explores the challenge and opportunity that working psychodynamically with the family circuit court offers. With a background as a child psychologist and psychotherapist, working in the traditional setting of child guidance for twenty-five years, I had the luxury of working with fellow psychologists and psychotherapists who generally shared my theoretical orientation and world view. The challenge has been to move from this into a world somewhat alien to me and to interpret psychodynamic constructs in a meaningful way for the court, the court's legal advisors and their clients.

In particular this paper begins to address the practical relevance of constructs such as the Oedipus Complex, identification, attachment and separation anxiety in settings where families are at the point of breakdown and the legal profession are inviting recommendations in relation to the best interests of children. The paramount consideration is the child's welfare and recommendations must be guided by the particulars of a given case coupled with the guiding principles of one's theoretical base. One hopes that psychodynamic theory guides in a manner that is in the best interests of the child.

There is an emerging pool of psychological knowledge in the family court and lawyers are often very willing to think psychodynamically about clients, their families and about how the legal process gets steered by hostile projections from clients. Terms such as projection, transference and countertransference are not in the vernacular language of the family court but lawyers do appreciate psychodynamic interpretations of events that otherwise confuse and perplex them. Highlighting concepts such as projective identification can help a lawyer understand why he/she has suddenly lost a grip on logic and gets drawn into the borderline state of her client.

Finally, I will address ways of moving forward with the legal profession in a collaborative manner that serves children, parents and families.

RESPONDENTS

Noreen Bracken is a child and adolescent psychoanalytic psychotherapist. She is currently employed in a child and adolescent mental health service where she has been working as a child psychotherapist for the past eleven years. In the course of her work she has worked with children, adolescents and their families who have experienced separation where custody and access are related issues. Noreen currently teaches on the MSc in Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy at Trinity College Dublin as an infant observation seminar leader.

Jim Sheehan is a social worker and family therapist who teaches and trains mental health professionals in family therapy in Dublin and Oslo. He has assisted the Irish family courts in child and family disputes over the past thirty years. He is Director of Family Therapy Training at the Mater Hospital and Professor of Family Therapy and Systemic Practice at the Diakonhjemmet, University College Oslo.

Brian Smith is a psychologist, family therapist and family mediator. As a therapist based in Dublin, he works mainly with families, while much of his private practice is with parenting issues associated with separation and family crisis. Over the past fifteen years he has acted

as a family court appointee in custody and child protection proceedings. Recently he is focusing more on non-adversarial alternatives of consultancy, mediation and collaborative practice, the latter in partnership with the legal profession.

Tabitha Wood is a barrister who specialises in areas of family and childcare law.

SCHEDULE

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| 13.00-13.30 | Registration |
| 14.00-14.10 | Welcome and opening remarks by Aoife Twohig (Chairperson, IFCAPP) and Chairperson (IFPP) |
| 14.10-14.15 | Introduction to Caoimhe Nic Dhomhnaill (IFCAPP) by Fran Burns (IFCAPP) |
| 14.15-15.00 | Caoimhe Nic Dhomhnaill , 'Applying Psychodynamic Theory and Practice to Custody and Access Proceedings in the Family Circuit Court' |
| 15.00-15.15 | Questions chaired by Fran Burns |
| 15.15-15.30 | Tea and coffee break |
| 15.30-16.15 | Responses to Caoimhe Nic Dhomhnaill by Noreen Bracken (IFCAPP), Jim Sheehan (social worker, family therapist), Brian Smith (psychologist, family therapist, family mediator) and Tabitha Wood (barrister) |
| 16.15-17.00 | Discussion with Delegates chaired by Fran Burns |
| 17.00 | Thanks and closing remarks by Fran Burns |

VENUE

This seminar takes place in the Clarion Hotel, International Financial Services Centre (IFSC), Dublin 1. Delegates can download directions to the venue at the following site: <http://www.clarionhotelifsc.com/contact-us/location/> Car-parking facilities are available, for which delegates must pay by the hour: <http://www.clarionhotelifsc.com/contact-us/>

RECOMMENDED READING

There is no required reading to attend this seminar however Caoimhe Nic Dhomhnaill has suggested the following chapter for people who would like to read something before or after the event: Roger Kennedy, 'Conclusions' in *Psychotherapists as Expert Witnesses: Families at Breaking Point* (London: Karnac 2005), pp. 211-226. This reading is available as a pdf file from Ann Daly: amdps@indigo.ie

TEA AND COFFEE

Complimentary tea and coffee will be available at the break.

SOCIAL EVENING

Delegates are invited to continue the conversation in the bar of the Clarion Hotel afterwards.

REGISTRATION

To register, delegates should contact Ann Daly: amdps@indigo.ie The registration fee for the event is €20/€10 (students/unwaged). Cheques, postal orders or bank drafts should be made payable to 'The Irish Forum for Child and Adolescent Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy' and posted to Ann Daly, 'Children of Divorce Seminar', The Irish Forum for Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy, 73 Quinn's Road, Shankill, County Dublin. Payment of the registration fee secures a place at the seminar. Include your name and email address as receipt of payment will be confirmed by email. **Please note: there are a limited number of places available so early registration is advised.** The closing date for the receipt of payment is **Monday 14 February**.

ORGANISERS

This event is jointly organised by the Irish Forum for Child and Adolescent Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy (IFCAPP) and the Irish Forum for Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy (IFPP). Further information about the members of the IFCAPP can be found on the website for the Irish Council for Psychotherapy: <http://www.psychotherapy-ireland.com> Further information about the IFPP can be found here: <http://www.ifpp.org>

UPCOMING EVENTS

Further information about this and other upcoming events organised by the IFCAPP and the IFPP can be found at <http://www.ifpp.org>