

IMPROVING THE MENTAL HEALTH OF CHILDREN IN DIVORCE

By

**ALISON SPIRITO, ESQ., and
JOSEPH P. SPIRITO, JR., ESQ.**

Table of Contents

I.	THE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON CHILDREN’S MENTAL HEALTH	3002
II.	THE LIMITATIONS OF LITIGATION	3003
III.	HOW COLLABORATIVE PRACTICE AND MEDIATION REDUCE CONFLICT AND IMPROVE CHILDREN’S MENTAL HEALTH DURING AND AFTER DIVORCE	3004
	A. Collaborative Practice	3005
	1. The Child Specialist	3006
	2. The Mental Health Coaches	3007
	B. Mediation	3009
IV.	HOW “UNBUNDLED LEGAL SERVICES” PROVIDE FAMILIES WITH COST-EFFECTIVE ACCESS TO CONFLICT MANAGEMENT RESOURCES	3011
V.	ADDITIONAL WAYS TO ENGAGE PROFESSIONALS AND SUPPORT SERVICES TO RESOLVE CONFLICT	3012
VI.	GETTING TO THE GOAL: CO-PARENTING AND PARALLEL PARENTING	3012
VII.	CONCLUSION	3014

IMPROVING THE MENTAL HEALTH OF CHILDREN IN DIVORCE

By

ALISON SPIRITO, ESQ.,¹ and
JOSEPH P. SPIRITO, JR., ESQ.²

High-conflict behavior during divorce may have a more significant effect on children than divorce itself.¹ Children who witness their parents' high-conflict divorces suffer from preventable mental and emotional health problems at significantly higher rates than children from intact families or even divorced families where the parents exhibit low or no conflict.² While litigation often normalizes high conflict, collaborative practice and mediation consistently succeed in severing it from the divorce process by promoting consensual dispute resolution and drawing on the unique skills of child specialists and mental health professionals.

I. THE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH

Children of divorce are at least twice as likely to develop preventable mental health issues as children from continuously married families.³ Approximately 25 percent of children

¹Webb & Ousky, *The Collaborative Way to Divorce: The Revolutionary Method that Results in Less Stress, Lower Costs, and Happier Kids—Without Going to Court* (2007) p. xiii; Moskovich, *The Smart Divorce: Proven Strategies and Valuable Advice from 100 Top Divorce Lawyers, Financial Advisers, Counselors, and Other Experts* (2007) p. 37.

²Kelly & Emery, *Children's Adjustment Following Divorce: Risk and Resilience Perspectives* (2003) 52 *Family Relations* 352-362, 353 <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/227618429_Children's_Adjustment_Following_Divorce_Risk_and_Resilience_Perspectives> (as of Apr. 24, 2019).

³Kelly & Emery, *supra*, p. 355.

and young adults from divorced families have serious emotional or psychological problems, compared to approximately 10 percent of those from intact families.⁴ Divorce significantly increases the risk of “behavioral, internalizing, social and academic problems” as well as adjustment problems in children and adolescents.⁵

The greatest effects of divorce on children are seen in externalizing symptoms, including “conduct disorders, antisocial behaviors, and problems with authority figures and parents. Less robust differences are found with respect to depression, anxiety, and self-esteem.”⁶ However, even children who were doing well as adults believed they had been “permanently scarred” by their parents’ divorces.⁷ Children of divorce also experience high stress and loyalty conflicts when caught in the crossfire of their parents’ disputes.⁸

Because children of divorce are so much more likely to struggle with mental health issues, divorce systems that reduce family conflict and offer support to children are invaluable. The positive news is that parents can mitigate the above mental health risk factors by choosing the right divorce process for their families and keeping the divorce as amicable and low conflict as possible.

II. THE LIMITATIONS OF LITIGATION

Courts are ill-equipped to tackle the mental and emotional health concerns families face during divorce. Litigation is driven by conflict, “fails to take into account current understandings of how people are wired, what they need in times of change, what children need during and after divorce, and how families change and restructure.”⁹ Similarly, “because our legal system doesn’t offer an adequate framework for addressing issues of the heart, it tends to emphasize only the items or expenses that can be listed on a balance sheet.”¹⁰ Since

⁴**Tesler & Thompson**, *Collaborative Divorce: The Revolutionary New Way to Restructure Your Family, Resolve Legal Issues, and Move on with Your Life* (2006) p. 49.

⁵**Kelly & Emery**, *supra*, p. 355.

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷**Tesler & Thomson**, *supra*, p. 49.

⁸**Kelly & Emery**, *supra*, p. 353.

⁹**Tesler**, *supra*, p. 29.

¹⁰**Webb**, *supra*, p. 43.

many negative emotions are never properly addressed during a litigated divorce, feelings of “disappointment, sadness, and betrayal” remain.¹¹ “Left unattended, these feelings can magnify to the point where they pose serious impediments to reaching a settlement or maintaining a durable (manageable) agreement in the years after divorce.”¹²

Notably, because litigation publicizes private family matters, the exposure creates even more unnecessary stress and conflict. In most states, anyone can watch hearings and trials, courthouse records are posted online, and anyone can access court files by going to a courthouse.¹³ “All the personal dirty laundry and detailed financial data that were ever before the judge remain on the public record—information that none of us would want our neighbors, our children, or identity thieves to have access to.”¹⁴

In contrast, collaborative divorces are mostly off the record and “lawyers can ensure only the bare minimum that law requires to process the legal divorce goes into the court file.”¹⁵ Mediation privileges and confidentiality laws prevent private information discussed during mediation from being part of the public record. Protecting children’s privacy and their exposure to parental conflict during divorce, including the “embarrassing accusations and counteraccusations leveled along the way,”¹⁶ is crucial to minimizing harm caused by the divorce. Fortunately, collaborative practice and mediation are systemically better able to address families’ mental and emotional health issues as well as their privacy interests in divorce.

III. HOW COLLABORATIVE PRACTICE AND MEDIATION REDUCE CONFLICT AND IMPROVE CHILDREN’S MENTAL HEALTH DURING AND AFTER DIVORCE

The collaborative practice and mediation processes empower families to be autonomous decision makers and highlight the unique perspectives and services that child specialists and mental health professionals can offer families during divorce. These holistic divorce models

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³Tesler, *supra*, p. 31.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶*Ibid.*

consider mental and emotional health issues that may be hindering case resolution. Collaborative practice and mediation not only help parents manage their divorces more efficiently, but also teach them tools for long-lasting communication with each other and their children.

A. Collaborative Practice

The collaborative method, pioneered by Stuart Webb in 1991,¹⁷ is at the cutting edge of modern divorces. The International Academy of Collaborative Professionals (IACP) has quickly grown in popularity over the last 20 years from the modest group of 50 members it had in 2000.¹⁸ Collaborative practice is a form of alternative dispute resolution, or as many in the family law community prefer to call it, “consensual dispute resolution,” because collaborative practice is far more desirable than the word “alternative” insinuates.¹⁹ Collaborative practice should be the first choice for many divorcing parents because it addresses far more than just the legal forces at play during divorces. Similarly, many collaborative professionals prefer to call this divorce model “collaborative practice” rather than “collaborative law,” because the mental health coaches, child specialists, and other team members may all have critical roles in this divorce model.

A “fully staffed” collaborative team consists of the two parties, their respective collaborative lawyers, two mental health professionals working as coaches, a child specialist, and a neutral financial consultant.²⁰ Each member of the team contributes expertise as necessary to meet the parties’ needs and resolve the case as efficiently as possible. The team commits to resolving the dispute outside the court system, and the parties sign a participation agreement that requires team members to withdraw if a dispute cannot be settled without going to court.²¹ Collaborative divorce is highly successful; less than 10 percent of collaborative

¹⁷Moskovitch, *supra*, p. 51.

¹⁸Cameron, *The Growing ADR Community: Adapting for Culture, Language, and Families Around the Globe* (Spring 2010) 11:1 Collaborative Review: Journal of the International Academy of Collaborative Professionals 1.

¹⁹Kuroda, *Consensual Dispute Resolution – Making Life Easier for Judges and Attorneys in Family Law Symposium Reference Book* (Frank edit., 2017), p. 2006.

²⁰Tesler, *supra*, p. 41.

²¹Webb, *supra*, p. 6.

cases end in an impasse requiring the parties to hire separate attorneys and professionals for trial.²²

1. *The Child Specialist*

The child specialist is a “licensed mental health professional with particular training and experience in family systems, child development, and the needs of children during and after divorce.”²³ The specialist brings children’s perspectives to bear on the parenting plans and gives them an opportunity to express themselves without feeling divided loyalty to their parents. The specialist is an advocate for the children, works directly with them, and makes recommendations to parents regarding the child’s development and parenting plan.²⁴ Child specialists give children a voice so their input can be valued.²⁵ Typically, the specialist will begin by meeting with both parents to hear their perspectives and then meet with the children, unless the children are too young.²⁶ When discussing parenting plans in collaborative divorce, child specialists often prefer to use vocabulary like “parenting time” over legal designations like “custody,” emphasizing that it’s “family time, not a legal event.”²⁷ After the child specialist gathers information from the children, the specialist may debrief the team in a five-way meeting with the two spouses and two mental health coaches.²⁸

The child specialist in the collaborative process is in a better position to safeguard the interests of children than a child custody evaluator sometimes employed in court proceedings to make recommendations to judges regarding custodial arrangements. The custody evaluator’s role is limited to “evaluation and recommendations.”²⁹ Evaluators observe

²²*Id.* at p. 7.

²³*Id.* at p. 90.

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶Tesler, *supra*, p. 131.

²⁷Nason, *Collaborative divorce can ease emotional, economic stress* (2014) <<https://www.cnbc.com/2014/05/01/collaborative-divorce-can-ease-emotional-economic-stress.html>> (as of Apr. 24, 2019).

²⁸Tesler, *supra*, p. 131.

²⁹Ross, *Collaborative Divorce: An Interdisciplinary Model* (October 2000) 2:2 *The Collaborative Quarterly* 15.

children “like judges at an Olympic ice skating event,” but do not form relationships with them.³⁰

In contrast, the child specialist in the collaborative process will “assess the child, support the child in expressing his or her feelings and reactions to the divorce and other family issues,” and harness the information to help parents understand their child.³¹ The child specialist’s goals are “support and education.”³² Child specialists are in a unique position to give feedback to parents and the collaborative team to provide for the best interests of the children³³ and act as consultants and helpers.³⁴ They can devote more time to focusing on the children and working with the collaborative team, rather than preparing for depositions, cross-examination, tests, and interviews that may be necessary in litigation.³⁵ Moreover, unlike the child custody evaluator, the child specialist does not formulate an official written report that can be read by the children and potentially cause emotional harm now or in the future.³⁶

2. *The Mental Health Coaches*

In addition to addressing children’s mental health directly, focusing on the mental health of parents can improve the way they work together and interact with their children. The mental health coaches have specialized “training and experience in communication skills, family dynamics, and issues relating to healthy recovery from separation and divorce.”³⁷ They provide “emotional encouragement, teach stress management and communication skills, explore parenting concerns, and help ensure that both partners’ needs, concerns, and feelings are understood and expressed in constructive ways.”³⁸ Coaches help parents discuss co-parenting concerns.³⁹ They are proactive and stay in regular contact with

³⁰Kuroda, *supra*, p. 2015.

³¹Ross, *supra*, p. 15.

³²*Ibid.*

³³*Ibid.*

³⁴Kuroda, *supra*, p. 2015.

³⁵*Ibid.*

³⁶*Ibid.*

³⁷Tesler, *supra*, p. 43.

³⁸*Ibid.*

³⁹*Id.* at p. 44.

parents during divorce to help manage and prevent problems before they can interfere with issue resolution and settlement.⁴⁰ By including mental health professionals and a child specialist on a collaborative team, the team is able to divide the workload by individualized skillset. It allows the lawyers to focus on the law and negotiating settlements.⁴¹

The mental health professionals and child specialists are not psychotherapists. They do not deal with “extreme emotional disturbances,” but rather focus on “divorce-related changes and challenges.”⁴² They address the divorce grief that many parents face while uncoupling. The work of the mental health professionals and child specialists is confidential and ends with the collaborative divorce process.⁴³ They do not testify in any court proceedings subsequently brought if the collaborative process dissolves.⁴⁴

The structure of the collaborative team is flexible and can be adjusted to suit the parties’ needs. While flexibility is one of collaborative family law’s greatest advantages, the child specialist is often the first team member to get cut. Parents too-often decide to work in a lawyer-only model or include one neutral mental health coach or two coaches, but overlook the importance of the child specialist.⁴⁵ The decision to include a child specialist in the collaborative process is important as the specialist offers parents a neutral perspective on their children’s needs and delivers invaluable insight as an advocate for the children.

While hiring a fully staffed collaborative team may be expensive, the process is often much less expensive than litigation because the team works together to get to the root of underlying emotional and mental health issues hindering resolution. A 2010 survey conducted by the IACP found that the average collaborative case ranges from \$17,800 (no children) to \$25,600 (cases with children subject to the legal process).⁴⁶ Several financial advisors interviewed by CNBC “suggested litigation may cost three times or more than the collaborative

⁴⁰*Id.* at p. 45.

⁴¹**Webb**, *supra*, p. 89.

⁴²**Tesler**, *supra*, p. 132.

⁴³*Ibid.*

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

⁴⁵**Hansen et al.**, *The Child Specialist Role in Client Choice of Process: Focusing on the Children and Enhancing Value* (Spring 2013) 13:1 *The Collaborative Review* 13.

⁴⁶**Nason**, *supra*, *Collaborative divorce can ease emotional, economic stress.*

option.”⁴⁷ Additionally, by investing in child specialists and mental health coaches at the beginning of the divorce process, parents are able to save on voluntary or court-ordered therapy costs later, which are often required in order to repair fractured relationships. Collaborative practice is preventative care.

B. Mediation

Mediation has “traditional roots” in family law,⁴⁸ and has a promising ability to reduce conflict and improve family relationships. Mediation is a process by which the divorcing parties use a neutral third party to help them reach an agreement. An average of just five hours of custody mediation “led to significant and positive effects on parent-child and parent-parent relationships 12 years later, including more sustained contact between fathers and children, compared with those in the litigation sample.”⁴⁹

Mediation is flexible, cost-efficient, and mindful of the needs of individual families. When mediators work with divorcing families, they encourage parties to address the mental health and emotional issues that are acting as barriers to resolving specific legal problems.

Parties who choose mediation as their divorce model should consider hiring a mental health professional to facilitate family communications. Mental health mediators recognize the similarity of values between the fields of divorce mediation and mental health in that they “both provide an opportunity for change and growth; both support the values of autonomy, self-determination, and empowerment.”⁵⁰ Mental health mediators are often successful peacemakers because they “bring to the mediation process an understanding of families and the dynamics of family conflict” as well as children’s needs in divorce.⁵¹ However, the role of the mediator is different from the role of therapist. “The mediator addresses psychological conflicts only as they present an impediment to the resolution of topical issues, such as property division, plans for the children, and financial support.”⁵²

⁴⁷*Ibid.*

⁴⁸Folberg, *Resolving Disputes: Theory, Practice, and Law* (2005) pp. 413-14.

⁴⁹Kelly & Emery, *supra*, p. 360.

⁵⁰Folberg & Milne, *Divorce Mediation: Theory and Practice* (1988) p. 385.

⁵¹*Id.* at p. 388.

⁵²*Ibid.*

Focusing on conflicts only as they specifically hinder resolution allows mediators to tackle problems efficiently and help families reach their goals.

In addition to the success that mediation has had as a preferred substitute to the court system, court-ordered mediation before hearings on custody and visitation disputes has proven to be a successful complement to litigation as well. Mandatory court-connected mediation offers an opportunity to expand participation in the mediation process and provides parties free or low-cost exposure to an entirely new dispute resolution process. A 2004 report published by the Judicial Council of California on court-connected mediation demonstrates “positive impacts on settlements and trial rate, disposition time, satisfaction and costs.”⁵³ “In the San Diego and Los Angeles programs, the incidence of trial was 24 to 30 percent lower among cases in the mediation program group than those in the control group.”⁵⁴

The goal of mandatory mediation is to disrupt “the escalating cycle of conflict that so often perpetuates custody disputes and to shield children from the traumatizing consequences of repeated parental conflict over their care.”⁵⁵ The authority of the courthouse setting and law requiring the parties to participate helps parents confront their issues.⁵⁶ Court-mandated mediation draws “upon the principles and techniques of voluntary and non-court-related mediation” but can differ in significant ways.⁵⁷ For example, in family disputes in California, mandatory mediation is applied only over custody and post-separation access to children.⁵⁸ Parents are required to participate and the mediator “actively advocates a resolution that benefits the children involved.”⁵⁹ These mediators “employ strategic counseling tactics to release parental impasses and free people to move toward finding resolutions.”⁶⁰

⁵³Folberg, *Resolving Disputes*, *supra*, p. 11.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*

⁵⁵Folberg, *Divorce Mediation*, *supra*, p. 207.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*

⁵⁷*Ibid.*

⁵⁸*Ibid.*

⁵⁹*Ibid.*

⁶⁰*Ibid.*

When California adopted mandatory mediation in custody disputes in 1981,⁶¹ mediators were able to work with one or two families per day, parties were sometimes able to “walk in” on the day of the hearing, and could schedule an appointment to be held within two weeks.⁶² Today, the courts’ mediation services are overburdened. Mediators are often pushed to oversee four cases per day, parties sometimes have to wait months to get appointments, and settlement rates have decreased significantly.⁶³ Because court-connected mediation services are overloaded, some courts only provide one- or two-hour sessions, which often do not allow enough time to accomplish mediation objectives.⁶⁴ Increasing the number of hours each mediator can work with the parties and expanding the process to last more than one session (if needed to reach an agreement) would improve these court-ordered services.

IV. HOW “UNBUNDLED LEGAL SERVICES” PROVIDE FAMILIES WITH COST-EFFECTIVE ACCESS TO CONFLICT MANAGEMENT RESOURCES

“Unbundled legal services,” also known as limited scope representation, is “an attorney-client relationship in which the client is in charge of selecting one or several discrete lawyering tasks contained within the traditional, full service legal services package.”⁶⁵ Unbundling is more affordable because there are no high retainers (clients pay as they go), and the total bills are less expensive because less work results in lower fees.⁶⁶

Unbundling can be a great service to divorcing parents because it allows them to hire lawyers for specific issues within their cases, such as to resolve child custody/visitation matters or support issues.⁶⁷ Through unbundling, parents can identify areas where they feel they need the most help in managing their divorce conflict and hire lawyers to help facilitate those matters. Some examples of “unbundling” legal tasks in child custody and visitation matters include assisting clients in determining how parenting decisions will be made, pointing out

⁶¹Kuroda, *supra*, p. 2009.

⁶²Kuroda, *supra*, p. 2010.

⁶³*Ibid.*

⁶⁴Folberg, *Resolving Disputes, supra*, p. 450.

⁶⁵Mosten and Scully, *Unbundled Legal Services: A Family Lawyer’s Guide* (ABA Family Law Section 2017), p. 1.

⁶⁶*Id.* at p. 9.

⁶⁷Mosten and Scully, *supra*, p. 209.

books, websites, films, classes, therapy, and other resources to improve parenting and life for their children, helping clients develop parenting plans, and coaching clients as to how to approach the other parent to resolve parenting issues and how best to keep co-parenting communications productive.⁶⁸

V. ADDITIONAL WAYS TO ENGAGE PROFESSIONALS AND SUPPORT SERVICES TO RESOLVE CONFLICT

Even if parents do not choose collaborative practice or mediation as their divorce model, they may still wish to explore options that reduce conflict in divorce and offer mental health support for their children. Many experts provide support to divorcing families, including minor's counsel, custody evaluators, co-parenting counselors, parenting coordinators, parenting mediators, and marriage and family therapists.

Further, online services and applications like OurFamilyWizard® and coParenter use technology to help parents communicate. OurFamilyWizard® is an application that parents use to share schedules and communicate about custody arrangements, their children's schooling and activities, and keep a record of communication to maintain accountability and civility.⁶⁹ coParenter is a "management and mediation platform that helps separating, divorced, and never-married parents save money, stay out of court, and make better parenting decisions for their kids." One of the most innovative features the platform offers is having licensed mediators on demand to assist parents in resolving disputes. Rather than wait for an appointment with a mediator, parents have access to instant online mediators to help them work out their disagreements as quickly as possible.⁷⁰ These tools help parents improve their communication with each other and their children and help them attain and sustain low-conflict.

VI. GETTING TO THE GOAL: CO-PARENTING AND PARALLEL PARENTING

All of the above-mentioned ways to reduce conflict help parents reach their goals to co-parent and parallel parent. The terms co-parenting and parallel parenting describe the parenting

⁶⁸Mosten and Scully, *supra*, p. 212.

⁶⁹OurFamilyWizard®, *Mental Health*, <https://www.ourfamilywizard.com/pro/mental-health>.

⁷⁰coParenter, <https://www.coparenter.com/>.

styles of parents that are not in a marriage, cohabitation, or romantic relationship with each other. So what's the difference between co-parenting and parallel parenting?

Co-parents maintain equal and equivalent roles in their children's upbringing, communicate frequently, make shared decisions, cooperate with each other, and accommodate each other and their children for their children's benefit.⁷¹ Co-parents keep boundaries with each other by focusing less on sharing personal information and more on sharing information about their children.⁷² Co-parenting allows children to feel comfortable spending time with both parents, knowing that their needs will be considered in making parenting decisions, and reduces loyalty conflicts.⁷³ Some parents can achieve this peak level of communication success.

Others parents, especially those that are still struggling to reduce conflict, might make it their goal to achieve parallel parenting. Parallel parenting is when parents are committed to making responsible decisions for their children, but "decide on the logistics of day to day parenting separately."⁷⁴ "Parallel parenting allows parents to remain disengaged with one another while remaining close to their children."⁷⁵ Parallel parents have little direct contact with each other so they can avoid conflict. They communicate using the following guidelines: communications need to be non-personal and business-like in nature and relate to information relevant to the children's well-being, parents never use their children as messengers, schedules are shared by calendar or in writing, and any changes to schedules are made by written agreement.⁷⁶

Collaborative practice and mediation can help parents reduce conflict and achieve the parenting goals that are in the best interests of their families. Further, seeking professional advice and using online services to resolve specific issues and facilitate productive communication behaviors allows families to defuse conflict.

⁷¹ **Gaspard**, *What's the Difference Between Co-Parenting and Parallel Parenting?* (last update August 18, 2017) <https://www.divorcemag.com/blog/difference-between-co-parenting-and-parallel-parenting/>.

⁷²*Ibid.*

⁷³*Ibid.*

⁷⁴**Gaspard**, *supra*.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*

⁷⁶*Ibid.*

VII. CONCLUSION

In 1850, Abraham Lincoln prepared notes for a law lecture where he gave his audience the following advice: “Discourage litigation. Persuade your neighbors to compromise whenever you can. Point out to them how the nominal winner is often a real loser—in fees, expenses, and waste of time. As a peacemaker the lawyer has a superior opportunity of being a good man. There will still be business enough.”⁷⁷ President Lincoln’s words are still true today, but there is much more at stake in family court than “fees, expenses, and waste of time.” Parents are struggling to keep their families and relationships intact as well as protect their children from the psychological harm that is more likely to result from high conflict divorce. Collaborative family law and mediation can provide the support that parents need to better communicate with each other and maintain strong relationships with their children while investing in their children’s mental health during the divorce process and beyond.

⁷⁷Ambrogi, *Abraham Lincoln’s Notes for a Law Lecture* (2004) <<https://www.lawsitesblog.com/2004/06/abraham-lincolns-notes-for-law-lecture.html>> (as of Apr. 24, 2019).

ENDNOTES

- 1 Alison Spirito represents clients in family law and estate planning and administration matters. Before graduating from USC Gould School of Law in May 2017, Alison was a judicial extern in family court for the Honorable B. Scott Silverman, a summer associate at Lewis Brisbois Bisgaard & Smith, and a law clerk at McGaughey & Spirito. Alison currently volunteers at LACBA's Domestic Violence Project, where she drafts declarations for victims of domestic violence seeking temporary restraining orders. Alison serves on the board of directors of USC's Young Alumni Council and is co-chair of the South Bay Bar Association's family law section.

<https://www.mcgs-law.com/attorneys/alison-spirito>

116 Avenue I
Redondo Beach, CA 90277
310.465.1000

alison@mcgs-law.com
www.mcgs-law.com

- 2 Joe Spirito has been practicing family law for over 35 years and is a founding partner of McGaughey & Spirito, which was formed in 1990. He is the immediate past Chair of LACBA's Family Law Section, co-founder and past president of the collaborative divorce group, A Better Divorce, past president of Los Angeles Collaborative Family Law Association, and former president and board member of the South Bay Bar Association. Joe was honored as the South Bay Bar Association's 2018 Lawyer of the Year. Joe currently serves on the Board of LevittQuinn, a nonprofit family law center in Los Angeles. Joe has served as a Judge Pro Tem, minor's counsel, and mediator in the LASC family law departments. He has lectured in collaborative practice and mediation at Loyola Law School, UCLA, and USC. Joe has been selected to the *Southern California Super Lawyers* list (2005 to present) and *The Best Lawyers in America* list (2013 to present) for the practice area of Family Law.

<https://www.mcgs-law.com/attorneys/joseph-p-spirito-ir>

116 Avenue I
Redondo Beach, CA 90277
310.465.1000

joe@mcgs-law.com
www.mcgs-law.com