

Hot Topics in Family Court: The Latest Science on Substance Use, Intimate Partner Violence, Developmentally Sensitive Parenting Plans, and Emerging Issues



This interdisciplinary session, featuring a family court judge and a forensic psychologist, examines some of the most pressing issues in family court through a neuroscience-informed lens. The program will address substance use, resist/refuse dynamics, and intimate partner violence (IPV), focusing on how advances in brain and behavioral science can inform more accurate judicial decision-making. Presenters will explore common misconceptions about addiction and offer practical strategies for crafting court orders and parenting plans that better align with the realities of recovery. The session will also examine resist/refuse cases through developmental and trauma-informed frameworks, highlighting the risks of oversimplified interpretations of children’s behavior. The program will further address IPV, including coercive control and trauma, and how these dynamics affect both adult and child functioning in ways that are often misunderstood in court. Building on these topics, presenters will outline principles for developmentally sensitive parenting plans that reflect children’s capacities and the ongoing maturation of children and adolescents. The session will conclude with a discussion of emerging issues shaping family court practice. Throughout, the emphasis will be on translating science into practical tools that judges can apply in real time to enhance the best interests of children and improve long-term family stability.

Speakers:



Hon. Lee Peterson

The Honorable Lee M. Peterson is First Justice of the Norfolk County Probate and Family Court a District One Co- Director for the National Association of Women Judges. Prior to becoming a judge, Judge Peterson was an attorney at McCarter & English, LLP from 2005 until 2016. Prior to entering private practice, Judge Peterson worked as an Assistant Judicial Case Manager, Probation Officer and Caseworker for the Department of Children and Families. Judge Peterson has presented various family, trust and estate topics for the Boston Bar Association, Massachusetts Continuing Legal Education, Social Law Library, Massachusetts Inns of Court, and at various law schools and bench bar meetings. She has served on the Rule 3:03 Committee, Committee on the Rules of Civil Procedure, Commission on Judicial Conduct, the Probate and Family Court’s Rules Committee, the Probate and Family Court’s Diversity Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Committee, Writing Support Committee and serves as a mentor for newly appointed Justices. She has a Bachelor’s Degree from Boston College and a Master’s Degree in

Social Work from Simmons College School of Social Work, law degree from Suffolk University Law School, where she pursued a Civil Litigation Concentration and graduated *summa sum laude*, with distinction.



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Dr. Stephanie Tabashneck is a forensic psychologist and attorney based in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She serves as a Senior Fellow in Law and Applied Neuroscience at the Center for Law, Brain and Behavior at Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Law School. Dr. Tabashneck writes and lectures nationally on the neuroscience of adolescence and addiction, with a focus on their application in legal decision-making. She is the creator of the [CLBB NeuroLaw Library](#), an open-access library that translates neuroscience into practical tools for judges, attorneys, policymakers, and individuals impacted by the legal system.