

SHELY POLAK
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CURRICULUM VITAE

October 2025

DEGREES

2011- April 2017

Doctor of Philosophy

Factor Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto
Focus: Strained Parent Child Relationships and Reintegration
Therapy Post Separation and Divorce
Supervisor: Dr. Ramona Alaggia, Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work

2008-2010

Master of Social Work

Factor Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto
Special Interests: Children and Families, high conflict separation/divorce, family mediation

2002-2006

Honours Bachelor of Science (Psychology/Biology)

York University Faculty of Science

CERTIFICATIONS

2021

Negotiation and Leadership

Harvard Law School, Program on Negotiation

2012-present

Accredited Family Mediator

Ontario Association of Family Mediators (OAFM)

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers

New Brunswick Association of Social Workers (NBASW)

Ontario Association of Social Workers

Ontario Association of Family Mediators: Accredited Member

Association of Family and Conciliation Courts (AFCC) and AFCC Ontario Chapter

COMMUNITY/PROFESSIONAL INVOLVEMENT

• AFCC International Court Involved Therapy Guidelines Task Force Member	May 2025-present
• AFCC Co-Chair Professional Development Committee	May 2022-Present
• AFCC-O Parenting Plan Guidelines Task Force Member	Jan 2021-Jan 2022
• AFCC-Ontario Chapter Board of Directors –Past President	Oct 2021- Oct 2022
• AFCC-Ontario Chapter Board of Directors –President	Oct 2020- Oct 2021
• AFCC-Ontario Chapter Board of Directors-Executive	Oct 2015-Oct 2022
• AFCC-Ontario Chapter Board of Directors	Oct 2013- Oct 2022

SCHOLARSHIPS AND AWARDS

- Winner of the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts Ontario Nicholas Bala Award for Excellence in Children & Family Law (2016)
- Recipient of Ontario Graduate Scholarship (2012-2017).
- Recipient of School of Graduate Studies (SGS) Conference Grant (Winter/Spring 2013)
- Recipient of University of Toronto Graduate Award for the Doctoral program on the basis of high academic achievement (2011)
- Recipient of University of Toronto Graduate Award on the basis of high academic achievement (2009)
- Recipient of Factor-Inwentash entrance scholarship on the basis of high academic standing (2008)

CURRENT POSITIONS:

Clinic Director

Mackenzie Clinic: Family Counseling and Social Work Services

<http://mackenzieclinic.ca>

Dr. Polak is the director of a private practice offering clinical and forensic (court-involved) services for individuals, children, couples and families. Services include:

Parenting Plan Assessments:

- Parenting Plan Evaluations/Child Custody Evaluations (S.30 C.L.R.A)

Voice of the Child Reports

- Meet with children and provide their views and preferences for separated/divorced families.

Family Mediation & Parent Coordination

- Accredited Family Mediator (OAFM)
- Mediation/Arbitration services
- Parenting Coordination

Therapy:

- Individual (child, adolescent, adult)
- Coparent
- Family
- Reunification therapy for parent-child contact problems including intensive multi-day family intervention
- Therapeutic Access

Professional Consultation:

- Provide consultation to legal, mental health professionals, and community agencies on high conflict family matters involved in the court system.

Expert Services

- Provide expert opinions on parent-child contact problems; reintegration therapy; high conflict; parenting plan evaluations; impact of separation/divorce on children;

Teaching/Training:

- Conducting Parenting Plan Evaluations
- Parent-Child Contact Problems, Multi-Faceted Family Therapy Outpatient and Multi-Day Interventions
- Parent Coordination

Office of the Children's Lawyer, Ministry of the Attorney General,

Agent of the Children's Lawyer

March 2011-2024

- Conduct clinical custody/access investigations and write reports pursuant to S112 of the *Courts of Justice Act*
- Collaborate with legal counsel providing clinical formulations for legal positions pursuant to S.89 of the *Courts of Justice Act*

ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

University of Toronto, Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work

Affiliate Faculty- Sessional Instructor

- Cognitive behavioral theories and Clinical Social Work Practice **Jan-April 2024**

Affiliate Faculty- Sessional Instructor

- Cognitive behavioral theories and Clinical Social Work Practice **Jan-April 2022**

Affiliate Faculty- Sessional Instructor

- Social Work with Groups **Sept 2017- Dec 2021**

Course Instructor

- Theoretical Foundations of Social Work Sept. 2014- Jan 2017

CONTINUING EDUCATION APPOINTMENTS

University of Toronto, Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work **Jan 2019-Jan 2020**
Continuing Education

Course Co-Director

- Foundations for Parenting Plan Evaluations (Custody Evaluations)

PREVIOUS PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Co-Founder and Team Member of *Families Moving Forward*
<http://familiesmovingforward.ca>

- Intensive family therapy for parent-child contact problems

Mediate 393, Ministry of the Attorney General

On/Off-Site Court Mediator **November 2012-Oct 2018**
• Family mediation for high conflict court docket cases at Ontario Superior Court of Justice and Ontario Court of Justice (311 Jarvis & 47 Sheppard).

Clinician at *The Clinic on Dupont* **June 2013 – Jan 2015**

- Provided psychological services and support

Overcoming Barriers High Conflict Divorce Camp **Vermont, USA**
Group Facilitator **July 2013, July 2014**

- Co-lead psycho-educational group for court mandated children and adolescents who resist/reject contact with a parent post-separation
- Involved in all family interventions and aftercare planning

Jewish Family and Child Services

Here-to-Help Program Facilitator **March 2008-January 2013**
• Lead group therapy program for children ages 4-14 who witnessed and/or were exposed to domestic violence.
• Lead group therapy program for women who were involved in abusive relationships
• Designed and prepared therapeutic activities to assist members' emotional growth and problem-solving skills.
• Developed assessments and recommendations

Ministry of the Attorney General, Office of the Children's Lawyer **April 2010-April 2011**
Regional Supervisor

- Responsible for evaluating intake files and assessing files requesting OCL involvement
- Conduct clinical investigations and write reports pursuant to S112 of the *Courts of Justice Act*
- Collaborate with legal counsel providing clinical formulations for legal positions pursuant to S.89 of the *Courts of Justice Act*

Jewish Family and Child

Facilitator of “Picking up the Pieces”

March 2009-June 2009

- Led therapy group for children aged 7-11 in dealing with feelings surrounding separation/divorce.

Toronto Rehab Institute, Rumsey Site

Neuro-Rehab Stroke Outpatient Unit - Student Internship

Jan 2009-June 2009

- Conducted individual counseling with stroke survivors to help treat emotional/behavioral changes and adjustment to life post-stroke.
- Conducted caregiver and couple counseling to discuss role changes, emotional/behavioral changes, coping to life with a disability, and self-care strategies.
- Developed psychosocial assessments, progress reports and discharge reports.
- Participated in weekly rounds, Inter-Professional Care Meetings, and Family Care Conferences

PUBLICATIONS:

PEER REVIEWED JOURNALS:

- Saini, M. **Polak, S.** & Dahya, R. (2025). A framework for trauma informed mediation: A heart and mind approach to conflict resolution. *The Cardozo Journal of Conflict Resolution*, In Press.
- Reyes-Crespo, S., Torres-Rodriguez, L., & **Polak, S.** (2024). A descriptive approach of parenting disputes between separated parents in Chile. *Revista Iberoamericana de Justicia Terapeutica*.
- **Polak, S.** Altobelli, T. & Popielarczyk, L. (2020). Responding to severe parent-child rejection cases without a parentectomy: A Blended Sequential Intervention model and the role of the courts. *Family Court Review*.
- **Polak, S.** (2020). Mental health professionals' practice of reintegration therapy for parent-child contact disputes post-separation: A phenomenological study. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*. DOI: 10.1080/10502556.2019.1699370
- **Polak, S.**, Bailey, R., & Bailey, E. (2019). Secondary traumatic stress in the courtroom: Suggestions for preventing vicarious trauma responses in judicial officers and court personnel. *NCJFCJ's Juvenile and Family Court Journal*. 70(2), 69-75.
- Saini, M. & **Polak, S.** (2018). The benefits, drawbacks and safety considerations in digital parent-child relationships: An exploratory survey of the views of legal and mental health professionals in family law. *Family Court Review*, 56(4), 597-606.
- **Polak, S.** & Saini, M. (2018). The complexity of families involved in high conflict disputes: A post-separation ecological transactional framework. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 59, 1-24, DOI: 10.1080/10502556.2018.1488114

- Birnbaum, R., Bala, N., **Polak, S.** & Sohani, N. (2016). Shared parenting: Ontario case law and social science research. *Canadian Family Law Quarterly*, 35(2), 139-179.
- **Polak, S.** & Saini, M. (2015). Children Resisting Contact with a Parent Post Separation: Assessing this Phenomenon Using an Ecological Systems Framework. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, 56(3). 1-28.
- Saini, M., & **Polak, S.** (2014). The ecological validity of parent-child observations: A review of empirical evidence related to custody evaluations. *Journal of Child Custody*. 11(3), 181-201.
- Saini, M., Mishna, F., Barnes, J., **Polak, S.** (2013). Parenting Online: Virtual parenting time in the context of separation and divorce. *Journal of Child Custody* 10(2), 120-140

BOOK CHAPTERS:

- **Polak, S. (2026).** Goodbye for Now. A protocol for severe parent-child contact problems. Forthcoming. Routledge Publications.
- Bala, N., Fidler, B. & **Polak, S.** (2026). Parental Alienation- Junk Science or Child Abuse? A Question for Psychologists of Law Makers. Forthcoming 2026. Routledge Publications.
- Mintz, J., Saini, M., & **Polak, S.** (2019). *The power of group dynamics: Strategies for supporting children and adolescents in groups post separation and divorce*. In L. Greenberg, B. Fidler & M. Saini (Eds.), Evidence-Informed Interventions for Court Involved Families: Promoting Coping and Healthy Child Development. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Deutsch, R., Fidler, B., & **Polak, S.** (2019). *Interventions with children who resist-refuse contact with a parent*. In L. Greenberg, B. Fidler & M. Saini (Eds.), Evidence-Informed Interventions for Court Involved Families: Promoting Coping and Healthy Child Development. New York: Oxford University Press.
- **Polak, S.** & Moran, J. (2016). *The current status of outpatient and residential approaches to parent-child contact problems*. In A. Judge, R. Deutsch (Eds.), Family Based Interventions for Children's Resistance, Rejection, Alienation: Overcoming Barriers and Other Clinical Approaches. New York: Oxford Press.

JUSTICE CANADA REPORTS:

- Saini, M., Redmond, M., **Polak, S.**, Yadeta, E. (2010). Prevalence of high conflict separation and divorce and associated factors: A multi-method approach to map the evidence. *Department of Justice Canada*

PROFESSIONAL TRAINING

- **Polak, S. (June 2023).** Terapia de revinculacion en casos de Resistencia/Rechazo. Barcelona, Spain.
- Fidler, B.J. & **Polak, S.** (April, 2023). Children Resisting Post-Separation Contact: Concepts, Controversies, Assessment, and Intervention. Toronto: ON (3-day workshop)
- Fidler, B.J. & **Polak, S.** Foundations of Parenting Coordination: Research and Practice. March 2023. Toronto: ON (4-day workshop)
- Carter, D., Deutsch, R., **Polak, S.** & Sullivan, M. (2022). Fundamental of Parenting Coordination. Fundamentals of Parenting Coordination. AFCC International (virtual), December 2022

- Fidler, B.J. & **Polak, S.** (2022). Children Resisting Post-Separation Contact: Concepts, Controversies, Assessment, and Intervention. Toronto: ON (3-day workshop)
- Fidler, B.J. & **Polak, S.** Foundations of Parenting Coordination: Research and Practice. February 2022. Toronto: ON (4-day workshop)
- **Polak, S.** (2021). Voice of the Child. Fundamental of Parenting Coordination. *AFCC (virtual), December 2021.*
- **Polak, S.** (2021). Virtual Services. Fundamentals of Parenting Coordination. AFCC (virtual), December 2021
- Deutch, R., Drozd, L., Sullivan, M. **Polak, S.** Fidler, B. Ward, P. (2021): Overcoming Resist Refuse Dynamics. William James College, Boston, MA.
- Fidler, B.J. & **Polak, S.** (2021). Children Resisting Post-Separation Contact: Concepts, Controversies, Assessment, and Intervention. Toronto: ON (2-day workshop)
- Fidler, B.J. & **Polak, S.** Foundations of Parenting Coordination: Research and Practice. April 2021. Toronto: ON (3-day workshop)
- Fidler, B.J. & **Polak, S.** (2019). Children Resisting Post-Separation Contact: Concepts, Controversies, Assessment and Intervention. Toronto: ON (2-day workshop)
- Fidler, B.J. & **Polak, S.** Foundations of Parenting Coordination: Research and Practice. March 28-30, 2019. Toronto: ON (3-day workshop)
- **Polak, S.** (2017). *S.112 Reports and S.89 Investigations in the Context of Parent-Child Contact Problems. What's an OCL Clinician to do?* Ministry of the Attorney General, Office of the Children's Lawyer. November 3, 2017. Toronto, ON
- **Polak, S.** & Bala, N. (2017). Children Resisting Contact: What's a Judge to Do? *Ontario Court of Justice Judicial Development Institute.* January 12, 2017. Toronto, ON.
- **Polak, S.** (2014). *Impact of Separation and Divorce on Children.* Royal St. George's College, Toronto, Canada.
- **Polak, S** (2012). Guest speaker for "Issues in Domestic Violence," Riverdale Mediation: Toronto, ON.

ACADEMIC PRESENTATIONS

- Carter, D. Burns, A., **Polak, S.** & Mizzoni, S. (2025). Guiding Families Through the Storm: The Shepherd's Role in Parenting Coordination. New Orleans, USA.
- Marshall, R., **Polak, S.** & McCall, S. (2025). The Impact of Misinformation and How to Respond. New Orleans, USA.
- **Polak, S.** (September 2024). Opening Doors: Practical Approaches to Parent-Child Contact Problems. **Keynote Speaker.** Milwaukee, Wisconsin. US.
- **Polak, S.** McCaul, S. & Zalev, M. (2024). *The voice of the child: What it is? How is it applied.* Boston, MA. Association of Family and Conciliation Courts.
- **Polak, S.** (2024). The polarization of parent-child contact problems in family law cases. What do we do now? **Keynote speaker. Boston, MA.** AFCC MA Chapter Conference.
- Greenberg, L., Moran, J. & **Polak, S.** (2023). Parent-Child Contact Disruption in Multi-Problem Families: What do we know? What can we do? Virtual, November 2023.
- Deutsch, R., Braunstein, L. & **Polak, S.** (2023). *Kayden's Law: REFRAMED.* Los Angeles, California, AFCC.
- Wittmann, J.P., Davis, F., **Polak, S.**, Greenberg, L. (2023). *Ethics Bootcamp: Difficult questions for mental health professionals.* Los Angeles, CA: AFCC.

- **Polak, S. & Saini, M.** (April 2023). Virtual Parent Child Relationships: Emerging Trends in Parenting Plan Disputes Post Covid-19. *Interdisciplinary Forum on Mental Health and Family Law*. New York, NY.
- **Polak, S.**, Popielarczyk, L. & Long, J. (2022). Untangling the Web of High Conflict Family Law Cases. *Law Society of Ontario*
- **Polak, S.** (August 2022). A Closer look into PCCP. Missouri Bar, Continuing Legal Education.
- **Polak, S. (Keynote Speaker; August 2022).** PCCP? RRD? Whatever the nomenclature, what's a lawyer and a judge to do? Missouri Bar, Continuing Legal Education.
- Burns, A., & **Polak, S.** & Sullivan, M. (2022). Pivoting Parenting Coordination to the Virtual World. Chicago: Illinois.
- **Polak, S.** (2021). *Best Practices/Tips in an Online World with respect to S.30 Assessments and VOC reports. The Six-Minute Family Law Lawyer*, Law Society of Ontario (virtual presentation)
- Clay, P., Audet, J. Senson, P. **Polak, S.** & Hansen, H. Panel Presentation: Resist Refuse Dynamics in Custody/Access Cases. October 16, 2020: Toronto (virtual presentation)
- Deutsch, R., Harland, A. & **Polak, S.** (2019) Evidenced Informed Interventions for Parent-Child Contact Problems from US, Canada, Australia. *Association of Family and Conciliation Courts*, June 2019, Toronto: ON.
- **Polak, S.**, Saini, M. & Bailey, R. Common Elements for Treating Parent-Child Contact Problems: In Search for Practice Guidelines. November 2-4, 2018. Denver, Colorado: USA.
- Judge, A. **Polak, S.** & Garber, B. (2018). “Me? Why do I need help?” Engaging favored parents in treatment of parent-child contact problems. *Association of Family and Conciliation Courts*, June 6-9, 2018, Washington: USA
- **Polak, S.** (2018). *Unpacking S.30 Assessments and Parent Coordination*. Advanced Family Law. Faculty of Law, University of Toronto.
- **Polak, S.** (2017). *Developing Parenting Plans*. Family Mediation: Theory and Practice. University of Toronto, Canada.
- **Polak, S. & Saini, M.** (2016). Family Mediation in Social Work Education: Using Simulation to Develop Clinical Skills and Competencies. *Council of Social Work Education, November 3-6, 2016, Atlanta: USA*.
- **Polak, S.**, Birnbaum, R. & Finlyason, A. (2016). Same Sex Parenting: The experiences of professionals involved with parents navigating the family justice process. *Association of Family and Conciliation Courts, June 1-4 2016, Seattle: USA*.
- **Polak, S.**, Hon. John R. Harper, Mamo, A. (2014). *Children’s Justice Resource Center: Promoting an Early Intervention Initiative*. *Association of Family and Conciliation Courts, May 28-31st, 2014, Toronto: ON*
- **Polak, S.** (2014). *Developing Parenting Plans*. Family Mediation: Theory and Practice. University of Toronto, Canada.
- **Polak, S.**, Fidler, B., & Popielarczyk, L. (2013). *Children resisting parental contact post-separation*. Los Angeles, CA: AFCC Conference May 28-June 1, 2013.
- **Polak, S.** (2013). *Working With High Conflict Couples*. Guest speaker for “Advanced Social Work Practice with Couples”. University of Toronto. Canada.

- Saini, M. & **Polak, S.** (2012). *Youth experiences of virtual visitation with parents after separation and/or divorce*. AFCC Conference, Chicago, USA.
- Saini, M. & **Polak, S.** (2010). *Prevalence of high conflict separation and divorce and associated factors: A multi-method approach to map the evidence*. Presentation to Justice Canada, Ottawa, ON.

PROFESSIONAL WEBINARS:

- Sudano, A. **Polak, S.** Austin, R., Zaccour, S. Paulseth, D. (2025). 311 Open Bar Series.
- **Polak, S.** (2024). Is New York's Proposed Kyra's Law Part of a National Trend. (October 2024). Family Court Mental Health Services, Grand Round. New York, NY.
- **Polak, S.** Salem, P., Ajoku, C. Saposnek, D., Stansbury, C. & Schepard, A. (2024). Child Custody Drama Then & Now: AFCC takes on Kramer vs Kramer and Marriage Story. Wisconsin, Chapter.
- **Polak, S.**, & Braunstein, L. (2024). Is New York's proposed Kyra's Law part of a national trend? *NYS Interdisciplinary forum on Mental Health and Family Law*. New York, NY.
- **Polak, S.**, Zanuso, L., & Bikel, L. (2023). Mesa Online. Dialogo con Expertas. Santiago de Chile, Chile. May 12, 2023.
- Himel, J., **Polak, S** & Kerr, M. (2022). *A Mediative Approach to Adult Children of Divorce*. Association of Family and Conciliation Courts, Ontario Chapter.
- Moderator: **Polak, S.** Presenters: Dr. Barbara Fidler, Jared Norton & Elizabeth Hyde. *Parenting Coordinators Panel: Process updates, scope of work, arbitral powers and best practices*. Family Dispute Resolution Institute of Ontario (2022).
- Moderators: Justice A. Himel & **Polak, S.** Presenters: Bala, N. Franks, A., Kerr, M., Medheker, A. *Divorce Act and CLRA Legislative Changes*. York Region Law Association and AFCC-). April 8, 2021.
- J. Himel, **Polak, S.** & Kerr, M. (2020). Responses to Difficult Client Positions. Association of Family and Conciliation Courts & York Region Law Association. December 2020.
- **Polak, S** & Popielarczyk, L. (2020). Responding to Severe Parent-Child Contact Problems without a Parentectomy. *Association of Family and Conciliation Courts, Special Webinar Series*, July 7, 2020.
- Clay, P., Kerr, M., Himel, A. & **Polak, S.** (2020). Pandexit and Family Justice: Transitioning Out of the Crisis. AFCC Ontario special COVID webinar series, May 7, 2020.

LEGAL CITATIONS

Bevan (Varcoe) v. Varcoe, 2021 ONSC 831
 MC v. MAC, 2019 ONSC 6769
 M.A. v. N.M., 2017 ONSC 2112
 H.B. v. M.B., 2018 ONCJ 916

QUALIFIED AS EXPERT

Ontario
 New Brunswick
 Saskatchewan

Massachusetts
New York

MISCELLANEOUS

- **Languages:** Bilingual Spanish and English fluency in Hebrew.