

IT'S FALL, Y'ALL!

It looks like mother nature didn't forget about us! After too many false autumns and 90-degree days, a cold breeze is finally sneaking in and with it, hues of orange, red, and brown are blanketing our lawns and sidewalks.

It is hard not to compare the changing seasons outside to the changing seasons in our own lives. Though stress and anxiety may come—no more long days or summer barbecues—it is helpful to remember that not all change is loss. It may take time to realize, but so much of change is gain.

Hikes and camping trips, warm meals, and pumpkin patches are just a snippet of the joy of fall.



This reminder is especially important for many Nashville families who are enjoying Fall Break this coming week. The time you get with your kids is precious. Before you know it, this season of life will change right before your eyes.

Through the long days, exhaustion, and stress come moments of joy and the chance to give your children the childhood memories they deserve. Most often it is in the unplanned small moments that the best memories are made.

Let this beloved Gilmore Girls quote be a calming reminder that we should take a moment to appreciate the beautiful change around us: "Breathe in, folks. Smells like fall."

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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AWARENESS MONTH

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month. Our Court hears cases involving domestic violence regularly. We are reflecting on the ways our Court helps victims of domestic violence and ways we can push for change within the legal system.

An integral function of our Court is the Order of Protection (OP) docket, heard by Special Master Dana Ballinger. Orders of Protection, according to Special Master Ballinger, "are powerful civil orders giving victims of domestic violence, stalking or sexual assault protection from further abuse from their abusers." A strength of these orders is that they "give instant protection." However, there are still barriers for people to get the help they need.



S.M. Dana Ballinger

Many victims of domestic violence are unable to receive protection due to a lack of "knowledge of the system or of the existence of an Order of Protection, threats of negative consequences for the victim from the abuser for following through... [and a] lack of resources regarding housing and financial support if an Order of Protection is sought," according to Special Master Ballinger. "There are many perceived and real obstacles in the eyes of some domestic abuse victims, both procedurally and personally." There are resources, however, so that victims do not have to remain in abusive cycles nor walk through the protection process by themselves. The Family Safety Center and AGAPE have advocates who assist in the process of filing an Order of Protection, "offering information and support for the victims that might otherwise not be available if going through the process alone."

"I think we are just starting to brush the surface of issues and barriers in domestic violence cases with these new changes we are implementing; however, I have big visions of continued improvements by partnering with other professionals in the industry to expand upon resources and assistance for not only domestic violence victims, but their children and families. Programs for children of parents involved in domestic violence relationships which offer group and individual counseling, homework assistance and opportunities for physical activity and art or music instruction—even life coaching—in an environment outside of the volatile home might sound unreasonable, but I believe it can be achieved through courts like ours who are not afraid to do something different in an effort to effectuate real change."

--S.M. Dana Ballinger

BULLYING PREVENTION MONTH



Our mission to raise awareness continues. October is also Bullying Prevention Month, another opportunity to reflect on the people in our communities who cannot speak up for themselves. This issue is especially relevant as we continue our conversation about the impact of high conflict divorce on children. There is a strong correlation between a high conflict household and bullying. Not only does bullying have both short- and long-term impacts, similar to those children experience in a high conflict divorce, but the two often go hand in hand.

A “harsh family environment,” according to the National Library of Medicine, can affect a child’s ability to cope with stress. Some children may internalize the conflict while others may externalize it. A study in the Journal of Youth and Adolescence showed that, “children who bully others are more likely to come from family environments characterized by less cohesion, expressiveness, organization, control, and social orientation.” This behavior is likely a result of externalizing the inner conflict they feel at home and can lead these children to bully others. On the other hand, some children may internalize the conflict, pushing them further into isolation. When a child does not feel safe enough to express and share their feelings with a trusted adult in their life, it can result in bullying--either as the perpetrator or the victim. A child’s relationship with their parent(s) matters. It impacts their decision making, emotional regulation, and relational skills.

To support Bullying Prevention Month and bullying prevention every month, it is crucial that we discuss the correlation of a tumultuous home life, especially due to a high conflict divorce, with instances of bullying. The role we play in the lives of families in Davidson County should not be taken for granted. Bullying is a multi-faceted problem with many causes and effects. We must play our part in creating safety for children and be part of the solution not the problem.

CHILDREN IN THE CROSSFIRE RECAP



Thank you to everyone who participated in last week's Children in the Crossfire Symposium! A special thank you to Trevecca, Collaborative Divorce Nashville, and the Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee for making the event possible.

The event illuminated the necessity for legal and mental health professionals to work together. The first of many conversations, we are energized as we strive towards solutions to improve the experience and long-term outcomes for children caught in the crossfire. **Some highlights include:**

- Expansion of beliefs about different professions who are involved in these cases.
- Greater understanding of legitimate and long-term affects of high conflict divorces and custody cases on children, especially as they age.
- Highlighting the needs of children in these cases: they just want closure and to feel safe.
- Empowerment as Middle Tennessee practitioners to collaborate and change our patterns and system.

"Do you want your child to have a divorce-centered childhood or a child-centered divorce?"

CHAMBER RULES

We are updating our Chamber Rules! Come January 2026, the new set of rules will be in effect. In the upcoming weeks, we will send out the updated version so attorneys and litigants may familiarize themselves with the rules ahead of their implementation.

ADOPTION WEEK WITH FOURTH CIRCUIT

Celebrate Adoption week with the Fourth Circuit Court this November! We are pleased to host a two day "Adoption 101" CLE on November 18th and 19th. This CLE is perfect for anyone who would like to learn the basics of working adoption and termination of parental rights cases in Tennessee. 10.5 CLE credits pending approval. Following the CLE, participants and attorneys who represent adoption cases are invited to "Home for the Holidays," a celebration on November 20th of the hard work of these attorneys and the joy of family. **Registration will be released next week, be on the lookout!**

CALENDAR

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				23		

OCTOBER

10/2: Special Master's Case Management Docket at 9 a.m. Via Zoom, No Pro Se Docket

10/3: Children in the Crossfire, No Motion Docket

10/23: Judge Williams' Status Conference Docket at 1 p.m. in Person or Via Zoom

S M T W Th F S

				6	7	
		11				
	18	19	20			
			27	28		

NOVEMBER

11/6: Special Master's Case Management Docket at 9 a.m. Via Zoom, No Pro Se Docket

11/7: No Motion Docket, Office Open

11/11: Court Closed for Veteran's Day

11/18 + 19: Two-Day Adoption CLE

11/20: Home for the Holidays

11/27 + 28: Court Closed for Thanksgiving

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@JudgeStephanieJWilliams



Judge Stephanie J. Williams

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