

2025 CONFERENCE KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Keynotes: Barbara Fraser and Katherine Burke

Conflict in relationships and the emotional processes at play in families when family law is involved: how BFST thinking and clinical practice is a good fit

Murray Bowen identified predictable mechanisms used by all families to adapt to and manage the tension and anxiety that comes with being human and living in a range of active and alive systems.

This presentation explores the practice area of family assessment and clinical therapy within the family law system in Australia and explores the opportunities within BFST to navigate the intense emotional forces.

The presenters propose that BFST assists the professional to conceptualise and act in ways that addresses family functioning detrimental to children and provides parents with the opportunity for change and growth during extremely challenging conditions.

The presenters explore the application of BFST's focus on the self of the practitioner in family law related work and the opportunities that applying BFST generate in navigating the intense emotional forces that are predictable as families engage with the family law system.

The effort to articulate professional thinking as it relates to defining and intervening with problematic relationship patterns, will be explored throughout, providing conference participants with the opportunity to consider their role and responsibilities as it relates to families intersecting with the family law system.

Case presentations will identify how structured and emotionally containing interventions assist parents to assume the crucial higher ground in their functioning and to move beyond the victim/perpetrator narratives in relation to family violence. Child focussed conversations between children and their parents, as well as between parents are facilitated using fact finding questions and thought provoking discussions about family of origin, extended family and significant others [as well as significant professionals] who might be triangled in to defuse/escalate the emotional intensity.

**Speaker Bio:**

Barbara is a senior psychologist and family consultant in the family law field with a long history in family therapy practice, research and education. She has experience in forensic assessment of families in family law, and particular expertise in providing Court ordered therapy for high conflict families where children are estranged from parents following acrimonious separations.

Barbara has developed an approach to working with families in the family law field that draws particularly on BFST and attachment theory, and that focusses on discouraging cutoff, supporting the emotional maturity of parents and repairing the deep woundedness experienced by families when chronic anxiety threatens to overwhelm their functioning.

Barbara is a passionate advocate for the therapist's ongoing work with differentiation and the therapeutic self as the source of clinical neutrality with compassion, processes crucial for clinicians working in the high intensity field of family law.

**Speaker Bio:**

Katherine began her social work career working regionally in a generalist counselling setting. Katherine worked with people across the lifespan dealing with a range of life struggles. This work provided the foundation for Katherine's career long pursuit to understand the role that the family emotional process, the broader environment and experiences of structural and systemic oppression all play in a person's presenting struggles.

Over the 15 years Katherine has worked as a counsellor and therapist, Katherine has worked in the specialty areas of perinatal and infant mental health, family inclusive therapeutic work in the child protection sector and working with families impacted by domestic, family and sexual violence. Katherine has also worked with people committed to breaking generational family patterns through a focus on couple work or work within their family. Katherine currently works with people struggling with parenting, post separation challenges, grief and loss, and people impacted by abuse of all forms (including child sexual abuse and domestic and family violence).

Katherine's ongoing commitment to finding a way of thinking that could be applied to the diverse range of human experiences led her into the Family Systems Institute (FSI) training programs.