*Guest Appearance by the Family Court Commissioner*

Kathy Beeksma, UW-Extension Ashland County

At the beginning of each co-parenting class I have a court official attend; this may be the Circuit Court Judge or the Family Court Commissioner.  Each one has their own points to highlight.  In general, they talk of the importance of parents working together either on their own or in mediation to come up with a plan for their children.  They highlight how parents know their children better than any judge would if left to make a decision.  Additionally, they emphasize how differences in parenting styles/methods may seem ‘big’ to parents, but when seen by an outsider- specifically, a court official- those differences are details that will most likely not impact the final outcome.  Additionally, they talk about how the class is important to help their children through this difficult change; that this is a result of adult decisions and so children do not have control.

I plan to make a video of the court officials discussing these issues, and then play the video at the class (rather than having them attend). This addresses two concerns.  First, it frees up the officials’ time.  Second, one of the officials worries about the parents’ perception of bias (this is not shared by any others, but it is a major concern for this individual).