Many psychologists fear forensic work because they do not like being cross-examined or being the subject of client complaints or malpractice suits. Yet many came to realize the importance of getting involved.

Lawyers connect with psychologists

AT A SEASIDE CONFERENCE on family law, two professions that perhaps do not understand each other as well as they should had a chance to get acquainted and find common ground.

THE GROUP THERAPY was free, as were many legal tips at the Hilton Sandestin in Destin, Fla., recently. During this past Memorial Day weekend, an incredible event took place there. More than 300 family law practitioners gathered for the annual Family Law Institute and were joined by more than 150 psychologists from the Georgia Psychological Association for a joint continuing education event.

Issues important to lawyers and psychologists were discussed from the podium as well as at the beach.

The formal program included a mock trial showing how psychologists and lawyers interact in custody trial situations. The informal program was the mingling time during two cocktail hours, group dinners and time spent chatting under umbrellas on the beach.

The program came together after two years of planning by a blue-ribbon panel of lawyers and psychologists organized by attorney Shiel Edlin and psychologist Nancy McGarrah. Renowned psychologist Joan Kelly from California was the keynote speaker. She discussed issues such as "parental alienation," shedding light on the deep roots of many psychological issues that arise in custody disputes.

Aside from the education, side benefits included the opportunity for psychologists and lawyers to really get to know each other. Psychologists gained a glimpse of lawyers as people, beach-walkers and comedians, while lawyers got the chance to see psychologists in the same way. It was a disarming weekend for two professions that perhaps do not understand each other as well as they should.

Forensic work troubling but crucial

It was also clear that many psychologists fear forensic work because they do not like being cross-examined or being the subject of client complaints or malpractice suits. Yet many came to realize the importance of getting involved.

The real focus of the weekend's events was to help lawyers and psychologists feel more comfortable with each other, understand each other's lingo and learn how the two professions can better mutually assist families in crisis. That goal was certainly achieved on a macro and micro scale.

We should all be able to spend three days a year at the beach with some of the best psychologists in Georgia. Aside from the obvious therapeutic benefits, the two disciplines learned about each other and many connections—necessary connections—were made.

Perhaps the high point of the event came during the "hot topics" session when attorney Marvin L. Solomiany, who was speaking on "When should a lawyer refer a client to a psychologist?" answered that question by saying: "As soon as they walk in your door."