

Forensic Psychology Associates, Inc.

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CO-PARENTING EVALUATIONS A New Approach to Child Custody Evaluations

Co-parenting evaluations are very much like traditional child custody/residence evaluations, except that the emphasis is on helping the parents develop and accept a shared child care arrangement with information and professional assistance from their forensic psychologist. The presumption is that the parents will share decisions, responsibilities, and residential time according to an arrangement they jointly create after receiving their psychologist's professional assessment and guidance.

ASSESSMENT, FEEDBACK, AND NEGOTIATION

Phase One is the Assessment, consisting of

- each parent's completion of a paper-pencil family information survey
- initial telephone consultations with each parent's attorney and the Guardian Ad Litem
- an initial three-hour interview with each parent
- a two-hour followup interview with each parent
- a 90-minute interview with the children and each parent
- a one-hour interview with each step-parent or new partner
- telephone interviews with relevant therapists and physicians

- telephone interviews with the children's teachers and counselors
- telephone interviews with grandparents
- telephone interviews with three personal references for each parent
- home visits and psychological testing if home adequacy or mental health/competency issues are raised

Phase Two is the Feedback, consisting of a one-hour meeting with each parent. In this session, the psychologist will

- present the results and conclusions of the assessment
- preview recommendations that would be made in a report to the Court
- remind each parent of the research on divorce, the damaging effects of conflict, the importance of co-parenting, the realities and limitations of the Court process, and the needs of the children
- prepare each parent for constructive negotiation and co-parenting planning with the other parent
- help each parent craft a realistic proposal for a co-parenting arrangement

Phase Three is the Negotiation, consisting of one or two one-hour joint meetings with the parents together with an independent professional (not their evaluating psychologist). The purpose is to negotiate a childcare/residence arrangement for the next six to twelve months, as well as an agreed-upon method for resolving disputes that might arise. **If there is an agreement**, the negotiator communicates it to the psychologist, and the psychologist submits to the Court a brief outline of the arrangement and dispute-resolution agreement. Other than this communication of successful results from the negotiator to the psychologist, everything that transpires in negotiation is confidential and will not be shared with the psychologist or in Court.

If negotiation is not successful, or if either parent chooses not to participate in the negotiation, a report is issued to the Court based solely on the assessment completed in Phase One. This report includes recommendations regarding custody and residence.

