

FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGY ASSOCIATES
EXPERT SERVICES TO THE LEGAL AND SECURITY COMMUNITIES
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LICENSED PSYCHOLOGISTS

Evaluations Regarding Custody and Parenting: Services and Limitations

We are psychologists, with certain specific areas of training and expertise that apply to the evaluation of parenting skills and optimum custody/residential arrangements. We are not investigators, and we are not the ultimate decision-makers.

We offer two services in an effort to aid the Court in making a determination with regard to parenting arrangements in the best interests of children (and these must be Court-ordered):

- Individual Parental Fitness Evaluations – psychological evaluations of one or both parents with respect to their mental health, parenting assets, and parenting liabilities. These Fitness evaluations do not result in recommendations to the Court about custody, residency, or visitation arrangements.
- Co-Parenting Evaluations – custody evaluations which offer parents the opportunity to negotiate an arrangement once feedback from the evaluation process is made available to them (prior to the Co-Parenting Report's release to the Court). These Co-Parenting evaluations result in a presentation (first to the parents) of the pros and cons of certain options for the Court to consider, and recommendations regarding custody and visitation may be offered.

Our evaluations are meant to be one source of information for the Court to consider in crafting a parenting arrangement that is in the best interests of the children, and it is assumed the Court will gather and use additional sources of information in making its decision. This additional information can come from attorneys, the children's Guardian Ad Litem, witnesses, the parents themselves, doctors and medical records, Court records and police reports, child abuse investigations, polygraph experts, and others.

Accordingly, as psychologists, we will not investigate, analyze, or evaluate:

- Police records and criminal charges
- Medical records (other than mental health)
- Truthfulness of the parents or witnesses
- Court documents unrelated to parenting
- Telephone records
- Business or financial records
- Sexual abuse or other child abuse allegations

We will take into consideration findings and conclusions from other experts, such as attorneys, physicians, polygraphers, accountants, and child abuse investigators.

The Process

Parental Fitness Evaluations will involve interviewing the parents, psychological testing of the parents, interviewing current and prior therapists of the parents, interviewing the children (optional, depending on age), interviewing the attorneys and the GAL, and interviewing personal and professional references.

Co-Parenting Evaluations will involve interviewing the parents, interviewing the grandparents and the parents' significant others, interviewing the children, and observing each parent interacting with the children. These evaluations will involve home visits and/or psychological testing of the parents and children if the need is indicated. Current and prior therapists of the parents and children will be interviewed, and the children's teachers, counselors, and doctors will be contacted. The attorneys and the GAL will be interviewed, as will personal and professional references.

As psychologists, we will discuss with the parents:

- The methods of the evaluation
- The form of the report, where the results will go, and limits on confidentiality
- Retainer and payment details
- How consent to the evaluation can be terminated
- How termination of the evaluation may affect future evaluations
- Permission for the evaluator to contact references
- The parents' rights to consult their attorneys
- Possible emotional harms that could come from participation in the evaluation
- The role of the evaluator – for whom the evaluator is working
- Ethical and professional standards of practice the evaluator subscribes to

Each parent's attorney should cover with their client:

- The purpose of the evaluation
- The potential uses of information from the evaluation
- Whether the information/findings, recommendations from this evaluation will be used in Court
- How this information might help or hurt the case
- The possible legal consequences of choosing not to participate in this evaluation or of choosing to terminate it prematurely
- Who will be privy to the results of this evaluation
- Whether opposing counsel or the other parent will see this evaluation's results; Whether the results will become public
- Whether the parent will receive feedback about or have access to the report
- Who will have control over the evaluation's data
- The legal role of the evaluator; Whether the evaluator will be deposed or appear in Court

Please sign below to indicate you understand the scope and limitations of our evaluations as described above:

NAME _____

DATE _____

WITNESS _____