

Dear Family Law Attorney and Parties to the Evaluation,

This letter outlines the administrative procedures we use for a brief, focused evaluation of custody issues. This type of evaluation is designed to provide rapid recommendations about specific issues in dispute. In addition to this letter, you should read our stipulation, which provides further information.

In most cases, rapid reporting of results and containment of costs is a major goal. The parties and attorneys can help accomplish this by working with our office on forms, fees, and scheduling and careful preparation of materials for the day of the evaluation.

Fees

We charge \$2000 for professional time and \$500 for an administrative fee, payable by cashier's check prior to the scheduling of the evaluation.

Stipulation and Order

We ask that the parties and attorneys sign a stipulation, which then becomes an order of the court, covering issues concerning fee arrangements, release of confidentiality, immunity, and calling the evaluator as a witness. We can provide a sample stipulation or will also agree to use other stipulations that cover the above issues.

Scheduling Appointments

Normally all procedures for the brief, focused evaluation take place on one day, so that the results can be promptly reported to the court. Once the fee and stipulation are received, our office will call the attorneys and parties to schedule a day for the evaluation. The parties, the children at issue, significant others and any other members of both parties households must be available for meetings on the day of the evaluation.

Informed Consent

During the first evaluation appointment, we ask parties to sign an Informed Consent regarding evaluation procedures, which we also discuss in person. The parties and their attorneys are provided with the Informed Consent in advance, for their review.

Conference with Attorneys Regarding Focus of Evaluation

The evaluator must have a conference call with the attorneys prior to meeting with the parties in order to clarify the focus of the evaluation. A brief evaluation does not aim at long-term custody recommendations where there are complex issues. It is usually appropriate for making recommendations about limited, temporary orders in complex cases or for providing the court with specific information. For some families with lower conflict and less complex issues, a brief evaluation may be appropriate for making recommendations about custody based on children's developmental needs.

If there is an order or a request from a judicial officer regarding the focus, that order or request should be provided to us prior to the conference call. In the phone conference, the attorneys will present their understanding of issues and the evaluator will state his or her understanding of the focus of the evaluation.

Preparation of Children for the Evaluation

Parties should inform children in advance that both households are going to see a psychologist (a person who helps people with feelings and how to get along together). The children should be told that the psychologist is going to try to help their mother and father make a good plan for taking care of them, that they will be seen both with their father and their mother, and that the psychologist will see them alone to talk about how they think and feel about things in their family. The parent who has custody of the children the night before the evaluation should bring them to the sessions. For small children, parents should make arrangements to have an adult who can care for the children in the waiting room if the evaluator wants to see the parents together.

Written Materials and other Information for Evaluation

The parties will be sent questionnaires and forms to complete and bring to the session. We request copies of children's most current report cards and the parties' DMV records.

No extensive review of ancillary materials is possible due to time constraints. Any other materials the parties or attorneys believe are pertinent must be brought that day and will be reviewed with the parties during their sessions. Do not submit original materials.

All materials, including questionnaires and forms should be copied and sent to the party's attorney, who will copy and forward them to the other attorney, prior to the sessions.

It may be possible to do a limited number of collateral telephone interviews during the day of the evaluation. If there are particular people whom the parties wish to provide input into the evaluation, the parties should inform those people in advance and have them available by phone on the day of the evaluation.

Reporting of Results

Normally we will provide a short written report, which gives the focus of the evaluation, pertinent results, and recommendations, and do a telephone conference with the attorneys within two (2) weeks of the evaluation interviews. The telephone conference may also include the parties and/or the judicial officer in the case. Instead of a telephone conference, there may be a one-hour session with the evaluator to present results to the attorneys and parties. The choice of feedback mechanism will depend on when the results are needed.

Limitations of Brief Evaluation

Although this type of evaluation usually provides meaningful information to the court, it is possible that a brief evaluation will not be sufficient to provide answers about the focused issues or the types of recommendations requested. The report of results will include the need for further evaluation if necessary. Information from the brief evaluation is available for any further comprehensive evaluation, by agreement of the parties and attorneys.

Sincerely,

Mary Elizabeth Lund, Ph.D.
Angus M. Strachan, Ph.D.

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