



Stefan C. Dombrowski, Ph.D.

Steps in a Child Custody/Parenting Evaluation

This outline provides an expanded description of what happens during a parenting evaluation, as described in the Agreement to Parenting Evaluation. The purpose of this document is to help you understand the process from start to finish so that you can prepare and participate effectively. The evaluation follows a clear, structured procedure designed to promote fairness, neutrality, and accuracy, always focusing on the best interests of your child(ren).

The evaluator will not discuss details of your case outside of formal interview settings. If you recall additional information between meetings, you may send it in writing—either by email or letter. You are welcome to share relevant updates or documents at any point during the process in this way.

Before the Evaluation Begins

1. Both parents must agree to the evaluation. A court order is required to start the process. Each attorney should also provide the evaluator, in writing, the purpose of the evaluation, concerns related to the children's care, and contact information.
2. The total anticipated evaluation fee is collected before the evaluation begins. The first installment of \$12,000 is due before the evaluation begins. This is known as a retainer and could change depending upon the complexity of the situation.
3. Once both payments are received and the evaluator has the court order and attorney letters, each party will receive the disclosure forms and *Parenting History Survey*.
4. Please review the disclosure documents carefully with your attorney so you understand the procedures, expectations, and timelines before signing.
5. The evaluation is typically completed within 90 days after both parents have had their first appointments. The clock starts once each parent's initial interview takes place.

Preparing for the First Interview

1. The first individual meeting lasts up to four hours and will be scheduled on separate days for each parent to minimize stress.
2. Bring any written materials about your concerns, including legal documents or reports. Focus on documents from people who have directly observed parenting or concerning behaviors. Highlight key sections and explain their importance.

At the First Interview

1. You will review and sign the Agreement to Parenting Evaluation. Discuss any questions with your attorney beforehand. If you choose not to sign, the evaluator must stop the interview and notify the court and attorneys.
2. After signing the agreement, psychological testing will occur.
3. A detailed interview will follow to gather background information and specific concerns.
4. You will sign release forms allowing the evaluator to contact individuals with firsthand knowledge about parenting or other relevant issues.
5. If you want non-professional witnesses to provide input, they must submit a signed declaration under penalty of perjury describing what they observed. Your attorney can provide the format.
6. Bring supporting records such as police reports, court files, medical or school reports, or psychological records. Highlight key passages and note their significance. Some agencies may send records directly. Each parent has two weeks to ensure delivery; otherwise, attorneys and possibly the court will be notified.
7. Each parent must sign permissions allowing the evaluator to speak with professionals whose records are submitted.
8. At the end of the first meeting--and if applicable--you will receive allegation forms - describing specific concerns. Each form should include three examples. The evaluator will show you how to complete one. All forms must be returned within a week.
9. Before leaving, you will schedule a parent-child observation session lasting about one hour.
10. If you have a new partner involved with your children, that person may also participate in portions of testing or interviews. The evaluator will notify you if applicable.

Parent-Child Interaction

1. Parent-child sessions are scheduled separately for each parent to reduce stress.
2. After this observation, you will schedule a final follow-up interview with the evaluator.

Review of Records and Collateral Interviews

1. The evaluator will examine all records provided by both parents.
2. Individuals connected to your family will be interviewed. Delays will be reported to both attorneys and will extend the report competition timeline.

Closing and Final Interviews

1. The evaluator does not ask children to choose where they want to live to protect them from guilt or pressure. Older children may share opinions in a respectful, age-appropriate way.
2. Child interviews occur privately, typically one hour before a parent's final meeting, to ensure comfort and confidentiality.
3. If a parent's new partner is involved in the children's lives, they may be interviewed as well.
4. The final interview for each parent includes clarifying missing details.

Attorney and Guardian ad Litem Meeting

1. After the report is finalized, the evaluator meets with the attorneys and guardian ad litem (if one is appointed) to review the conclusions. Parents do not attend unless they are self-represented.
2. Each attorney may ask questions and receives a copy of the final evaluation report.

If the Case Proceeds to Trial

1. If the evaluator testifies as an expert witness during a deposition or trial, an additional retainer will be required as outlined in the Fee Agreement and Agreement to Parenting Evaluation.

This process is designed to ensure an impartial, well-documented evaluation that protects the rights of both parents while focusing on the best interests of the children. Clear communication, timely cooperation, and thorough documentation from parents and collateral contacts help the process move smoothly and fairly for everyone involved.