

Child Custody Evaluation

Focus:

Determining parenting capacities/liabilities, psychological and developmental needs of the children, and relationships between parents and children

Key Concept:

“Fit” with regard to the best interests of the children

Decision:

Most appropriate arrangement re legal custody, health/education/religion decision-making, and residential placement of children

Individuals Interviewed: Parents
Children
Each parent and children
Parents’ current partners
Grandparents, if actively involved with the children

References: Therapists
Friends
Family
Sitters
Teachers
Ministers
Physicians
Guardian ad Litem
Etc.

Individuals Tested: Parents
Children—optional
Parents’ current partners

Testing Used: Adults: Personality and Psychopathology
Intelligence
Parenting Capacity
Truthfulness/Defensiveness/Distortion

Children: Intelligence/Academic
Personality/Psychopathology
Perception of Parents

In Addition: Home Visit
Review of Police, Legal, Medical, Academic Records

Parental Fitness Evaluation (Visitation Evaluation)

Focus: Determining emotional status and parenting capacities/liabilities of one or both parents

Key Concepts: Prevention of psychological or physical harm, protection of children’s welfare

Decision: Safe and appropriate access to the children—degree of access and level of supervision

Individuals Interviewed: Parent or parents
Children
Parent(s) in question and children
Current partner of parent(s) in question
Grandparents

References: Therapists
Friends
Family
Sitters
Teachers
Ministers
Physicians
Guardian ad Litem
Etc.

Individuals Tested: Parent(s) in question

Testing Used: Personality and Psychopathology
Intelligence
Parenting Capacity
Child Abuse Potential
Truthfulness/Defensiveness/Distortion

In Addition: Home visit re parent(s) in question
Review of Police, Medical, Legal records re parent(s) in question

Sexual Abuse Evaluation*

Focus: Determining validity of allegation, identity of perpetrator(s), nature and extent of abuse, and emotional damage to victim(s)

Key Concepts: Truth, reliability, validity

Decisions: Termination of parental access to children; nature of treatment for victim(s) and perpetrator; reporting of perpetrator

Individuals Interviewed: Children, alone (multiple sessions, following protocol) and with each parent
Accused parent (multiple sessions)
Non-accused parent (multiple sessions)
Parents' current partners
Grandparents

References, including previous evaluators, physicians, and therapists of parents and children

Individuals Tested: Parents
Children

Testing Used:

Both Parents:	Personality and Psychopathology Child Abuse Potential Truthfulness/Defensiveness/Distortion
Accused Parent:	Lie Detection – polygraph, voice stress, linguistic content analysis of statement Sex Offender Inventory, such as Multiphasic Sex Inventory–II Structured Interviews/Risk Assessment Inventories – history of sexual abuse, history of sexual offending, antisocial traits, social skills, thinking errors, sexual fantasies, sexual arousal patterns, sexual boundaries Substance Abuse Screening Inventory Penile Plethysmograph (controversial)
Victim(s):	Structured Interview – memory, cognitive development, understanding truth and lies, language development, sexual knowledge, body terminology, good and bad touch, suggestibility Play Techniques Intelligence

In Addition: Review of medical and psychiatric treatment records re parents
Review of medical records of child
Review of legal records of parents and legal context and timing of allegations (and history of allegations)
Review of records pertaining to prior evaluation(s) of allegations
Assessment of nature, sequence, and circumstances of allegations
Analysis of children’s reporting style and accusing parent’s behavior in the children’s interviews

*some information drawn from Bow et al., Assessment of Sexual Abuse Allegations in Child Custody Cases, Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 2002, v. 33, n. 6, pp. 566-575.