



# Ellis Evaluation & Consulting Services

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## FULL CUSTODY EVALUATION

Dear Family Law Attorney,

This letter outlines the procedures for comprehensive psychological custody evaluations in my office. (See attached checklist.)

### **Fees**

I require a deposit of \$7,500 for comprehensive evaluations. My hourly rate to conduct evaluations is \$300. When the deposit is used up, usually at the time the interviews are completed, I will ask for a second deposit before going forward to review materials and write the report. The balance due is payable in the form of a cashier's check before the report is released.

### **Stipulation and Order**

I require the parties and attorneys to sign a stipulation, which then becomes an order of the court, covering issues concerning my fee arrangements, release of confidentiality, immunity, and calling the evaluator as a witness. I can provide a sample stipulation or will also agree to use other stipulations that cover the above issues. There is a due date for receipt of an order naming the evaluator or the conformed stipulation three weeks (21 days) prior to the date of the first appointments so the evaluator can file form FL-326 with the court; if receipt is past the due date, the first day of evaluation sessions may be rescheduled.

### **Scheduling Appointments**

Once the deposit and stipulation/order are received, my office will call the parties to set up their appointments. It is more efficient for the parties to schedule directly with us than for us to schedule through attorneys' offices. Please instruct them to phone my staff at 424-206-6124.

### **Informed Consent**

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

### **Materials Submitted**

The parties will bring the original and two copies of both the Detailed History Questionnaire and the Collateral Contact List to their first appointment. The evaluator will give the two copies to the other party, usually at the end of the day. The parties are responsible for providing to their attorneys copies of these forms from both parties.

The parties and attorneys may submit any ancillary materials they wish as long as the other party and the other party's counsel is provided copies. Our office is not responsible for ensuring ancillary materials are provided to the other party's counsel during the evaluation. Any materials submitted will be reviewed. Only submit copies of materials that do not need to be returned. Please be aware that review of lengthy documents may substantially increase the cost of the evaluation.

### **Communication with Attorneys**

Any oral discussion of case content with attorneys will be done in the form of a conference call. However, I will discuss procedures (e.g., when report is to be released, arrangement of fees) with attorneys' offices separately.

### **Length of Evaluation Process and Scheduling**

My goal is to finish the evaluation within sixteen weeks of the first appointment. In order to do this, the parties must make themselves available to come to appointments according to a particular schedule.

Although I understand that there are situations in which delays are unavoidable, I ask that you please help your clients understand the importance of adhering to the schedule. Reasons for parties not making themselves available for the schedule of appointment times will be reported to the court.

### **Referrals for Evaluation Procedures**

I use some self-report psychological testing for all evaluations. When there are concerns about parents' psychological functioning, I may conduct more extensive testing or refer to another psychologist, with that psychologist making his or her own arrangements for fees and payment. Home visits may be done because of either party's request or because of my decision that information is needed. A colleague may do the home visits and write a separate report, with payment for that report collected through my office.

### **Reporting of Results**

Usually I provide a detailed report with information collected, analysis of results and recommendations. Reports are released on the same day to the court and both attorneys. When the parties agree, in lieu of me writing a detailed report, I will give an oral presentation to the parties and their attorneys, that includes information about the procedures, analyses, conclusions, and recommendations. This oral presentation session lasts approximately four (4) hours. The parties would be required to hire a court reporter for the presentation and the reporter's transcript of my oral report will serve as the written report for the evaluation.

### **Testimony**

If I am asked to testify in a deposition or court appearance, I expect a subpoena that makes it clear whether the file or my testimony alone is required. I ask that you make arrangements at least fifteen court days in advance with my office and schedule me to appear for a given day or half-day. I do not make arrangements to be "on call." My witness fee is payable in the form of a cashier's check one week prior to the appearance. No fees will be refunded for cancellations made less than 48 hours before the scheduled appearance.

I testify as the court's expert and remain neutral. All communication with attorneys prior to a court hearing about the case will be done in the form of a conference call, except for communication strictly concerning arrangements for testimony.

**Security Issues**

If there is a restraining order(s) in place at the time of the evaluation, please notify my office promptly so I can make appropriate modifications regarding procedures that may bring the parties into contact with one another. Also please notify me if either parent has a concern about possession of guns, fears of child abduction, or any other concerns that may require extra attention to security.

**Court Dates**

Attorneys are responsible for informing me of the court date for which the report is needed. If I cannot complete the report within the time frame of the given court date, I will contact the attorneys with an expected date of completion.

Please phone my office if you have further questions.

Sincerely,

Mesha Ellis, Ph.D.

## Checklist For Starting A Custody Evaluation With Ellis Evaluation & Consulting Services

### To schedule an appointment, please provide:

- Key contact information
- Initial deposit
- Stipulation signed by both parties and both attorneys

Then I will assign a date for the initial day of appointments.

### Complete the Custody Evaluation Questionnaire:

- You may complete it by hand or you can type it.
- If you want to type it, you can ask my staff to send a Word version.
- If you type it, please use double spacing and at least 12-point font.
- Please limit your responses to the space provided. For any one question, try not to add more than one page beyond the space provided.
- All materials must be letter-size.
- Please staple or clip the questionnaires and attachments. Do not put them in binders. Manila or accordion folders are good.

### Bring to the initial appointment the original and two copies of:

- The Custody Evaluation Questionnaire
- The Potential Collateral Contact List
- Other materials requested in the questionnaire attached at the end.

(The two copies are for the other parent and their attorney. Make two extra copies for yourself and your attorney.)

### Be ready to sign at the initial appointment:

- The Informed Consent Form
- The Custody Release of Information Form

### Filing other materials:

- All other materials ('ancillary materials') should be copied to the other party and your attorney (with an extra copy for the other attorney).
- This should be done as soon as possible and no later than six weeks after the initial appointment.

### Further deposit requests:

- Expect at least one-two further deposit requests. Delay in payment of deposit requests could prolong the evaluation.
- All fees must be paid before the report is released.