

# What You Should Know About Custody & Parenting Time Evaluations



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A custody/parenting time evaluation **is not therapeutic** and is not necessarily in the best interests of you, your children, or the functioning of your family. Its purpose is to assist litigation and judicial decision-making.

Custody/parenting time evaluations require investigating personal thoughts, feelings, and actions of both you and your children. **The process is not confidential.** Once this information is obtained and a report is written, your control over how it will be used is lost. The report is released to the judge, the attorneys, and possibly other parties involved.

Custody/parenting time evaluations can be **lengthy and expensive.** They can dramatically delay the time parents choose to reach agreements and they can divert money that can be used for crucial family expenses.

A custody/parenting time evaluation does not in any way guarantee an end to your conflict. **It can cause further conflict** which may result in further harm to children. The evaluation may encourage parents to amplify their negative feelings about the other party and forget the good in each other.

There is a chance that a custody/parenting time evaluation or a judge's decision based on it, may not be as beneficial as agreements reached by parents. **A judge can only make decisions based on parents' conflict and factual information provided by other sources;** whereas parents can actually create better choices by ending conflict.

These reasons are why a custody/parenting time evaluation should be used only in those rare cases in which parents are unable to develop their own parenting time plan. Evaluations should be limited to cases of serious allegations such as domestic abuse, substance abuse, and mental illness. They **should never be used as a means to try to identify the "better parent"**.

**Most of the cases we see do not involve "unfit" parents.** They involve angry, hurt, but "good enough" parents. None of these parents will be disappearing from their children's lives, nor relieved of the responsibility of raising their children. What they require is precisely the opposite of what custody/ parenting time evaluations provide; they require assistance in making a child-focused transition from an intimate spousal relationship to a non-intimate cooperative parenting relationship.

**Please talk to your Family Court Specialist about options designed to help families in conflict, not do more harm.**

Adapted from the Professionals Corner, "Custody Evaluations: The Overlooked Harm to Clients, Children, and Families", Charles A. & Barbara W. Asher, January 2007, UpToParents.org