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PARENTING EVALUATION IN A LEGAL SETTING

The steps of the evaluation that you will be asked to follow are described below so that you will know exactly what will happen. This step-by-step plan will help Dr. Cole make fair recommendations about the best interests of your child(ren).

Please feel free to provide any information about your case between meetings with Dr. Cole. Always write down what you want Dr. Cole to know and e-mail or mail the information to his office. All e-mails are shared with all involved parties in order to promote openness and fairness during the evaluation process.

BEFORE THE EVALUATION BEGINS

1. Each parent must agree to the evaluation. There must be a court order directing Dr. Cole to conduct the evaluation and a letter from your lawyer that includes the following information (your lawyer will tell you about this):
 - a. The purposes for this evaluation.
 - b. Your concerns about the current care of your children.
 - c. Your address, a phone number and an email address.
 - d. Your net worth and net annual income so that a sliding fee can be set.
2. There is an evaluation fee based on a sliding scale, which is based on the incomes of both parents. After the court order and the letter from the lawyers about the issues in the case are received by Dr. Cole, the disclosure/evaluation agreement documents are reviewed and the **Parenting History Survey** (PHS) is filled out and returned to Dr. Cole.
3. A final evaluation report should be completed in about 8 weeks. The eight weeks time clock starts when Dr. Cole receives the **PHS back from both parents**. The

first interview appointment will be made when Dr. Cole gets back all these forms.

PREPARING FOR THE FIRST INTERVIEW

The first appointment with you will take about 4 hours. To lessen stress, your appointment will be set for a different day than the other parent's appointment. Step 5 describes what you will need in order to prepare for this appointment.

4. At the first appointment, you should bring anything written about concerns. **Please *STAR* or highlight the parts of the PHS and other legal papers that you think are important.** In the legal papers, please jot down some hand written notes that show why you think the starred or highlighted section is important. **Only include records from people who have directly witnessed poor parenting behavior or other upsetting actions that may not be good for your children.**

AT THE FIRST INTERVIEW

5. During the first meeting you will sign the **Agreement to Parenting Evaluation**. Please make sure that you discuss the evaluation agreement with your lawyer before you come to the first meeting. If you do not sign the agreement, the interview will stop. Dr. Cole must tell the judge and both lawyers about this delay in the form of a declaration. They will then decide if the evaluation should go on.
6. During the next part of the first meeting you will take a test called the MMPI-2. This will happen in the office. The MMPI-2 is the most commonly used psychological test.
7. After the MMPI-2 comes a very detailed interview.
8. After the detailed interview, you will sign releases of information. These give Dr. Cole permission to talk to people who may have seen the other parent's parenting or your parenting firsthand or who have first hand thoughts about other concerns.

9. If you would like Dr. Cole to talk to someone involved with your family who is not a professional, that person must give Dr. Cole a legal statement, called a “declaration.” The declaration must be a detailed statement from witnesses about parenting actions or other actions that concern you about the care of your children. Your lawyer can show you a declaration form so that you can go get the declarations from witnesses.
10. Both parents will also bring records to the first interview. These records could be from: police evaluation reports, criminal evaluation reports, juvenile court records, mental health records, medical records, school attendance and evaluation report cards, standardized testing records, social services agency records, and psychological and educational testing evaluation reports, etc. **Please *STAR* or highlight the parts of the records that you think are important. Also, please write a brief note in the margin about why you think each part is important.** Each parent must give Dr. Cole permission to talk with the professionals who have control over these records. The parents must ask each professional or agency to mail the full records directly to Dr. Cole. Both parents will have two weeks to get all of the records. If Dr. Cole does not get these records, both lawyers will learn about this delay. Then, if either parent still fails to get the records, the evaluation stops. The judge will be told, and the evaluation will not continue until the records are sent.
11. At the end of the first interview, you will get “allegation forms” to take home. Please fill out one of these forms for each concern about your children. **Each concern should include three examples on three separate forms.** Dr. Cole will use one of your concerns to show you how to fill out these forms. You will have one week to return them. If either parent is slow in completing the forms, both lawyers will be told. Then, if either parent still does not get the forms back to Dr. Cole, the judge will be told. The evaluation will not continue until the forms are returned.
12. At the end of the interview, you will schedule a time when Dr. Cole can watch you and your children playing or talking together, depending on the ages of your children. Dr. Cole will ask you to come to the office “ready to play with your children” or “ready to talk with your children” for about an hour.
13. If you have a new partner (boyfriend or girlfriend) who is involved with the children, she or he must also take the MMPI-2 and may be interviewed. Dr. Cole will let you know when this will occur.

14. The report of the first interview with you will be sent to you so that you can correct or add information for that part of the report. Also, once you return the allegation forms, they will be written up as part of the evaluation report. Dr. Cole will send these back to you so that you can add information that might be used.

YOUR CHILDREN AND YOU TOGETHER

15. The play time or time to talk with your children will occur on separate days with each parent to lessen stress on everyone.
16. At the end of the parent–child observation session, you will schedule a final interview with Dr. Cole.
17. Dr. Cole will write a first draft of the evaluation report before professionals or other people are contacted or any records are reviewed. This draft will include Dr. Cole’s first thoughts about the concerns of both parties. This is done so that Dr. Cole’s thoughts are formed just from contact with your family before other people’s thoughts and opinions are shared with him. Dr. Cole wants you to feel the evaluation process is fair.

REVIEW OF RECORDS AND INTERVIEWS WITH OTHERS

18. Dr. Cole will review all records given by the parents and attorneys.
19. Other people will be interviewed. A written summary of the interviews will be sent to each person interviewed so that they can make corrections or add information that might be used. If any person delays being interviewed, Dr. Cole will tell both lawyers about this delay.

CLOSING INTERVIEWS

20. Dr. Cole will not usually talk with young children. He will not ask children about where they want to live or when or if they want to visit their parents. This is to protect the child from feeling guilty about what happens. Children should not feel caught in the middle of any parent fight.

21. Sometimes teenagers could be interviewed individually. This happens the hour before the last interview with one of the parents. This helps your child to avoid being blamed or feeling bad for the results of the evaluation.
22. If a parent has a new partner (spouse, boyfriend or girlfriend) who is involved with the children, that new person will be interviewed an hour before the last interview of their partner.
23. The last interview will be done in two parts. The first part is to clear up any details that are missing. The second part will let each parent know about the results of the evaluation that are about them. The parent can talk about these results with Dr. Cole so that the parent is not surprised by the results and has a chance to understand the results. Dr. Cole will not come to a result or finding about allegations unless several facts from different sources support that result or finding. There must be multiple sources of confirmation concerning any allegation.

LAWYER MEETING

24. At a meeting with the lawyers and the guardian ad litem, (if one is appointed), Dr. Cole will go over the final evaluation report. The parents do not attend this meeting. The lawyers of both parents must attend for the meeting to take place.
25. Each lawyer can ask questions about the evaluation report. Both lawyers will get a copy of the final report.

IF A TRIAL IS GOING TO OCCUR

Please be aware that if Dr. Cole is to be called as an expert witness during a deposition or trial, because the two lawyers in your case cannot work out a settlement, then an advance fee will be required. This is described in the Agreement to Parenting Evaluation document.