

Child Custody Evaluation

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A child custody evaluation can be ordered by a court if you are involved in a custody dispute with your spouse. The custody evaluation can be required in an initial custody case or in a subsequent case if one of the parents requests that the issue of custody be modified. If you are seeking primary custody of your child, you'll want to know the guidelines for the child custody evaluation that you will have to undergo. To some extent, these guidelines vary from state to state, so you will need to discuss the child custody evaluation process with your attorney or your state family court.

In general, a child custody evaluation involves a series of meetings between the parents and children and a professional who will assess the custody issue. Sometimes that professional is a psychologist. Sometimes it is a professional with an Masters and sometimes a Doctorate degree. In some states the professional simply investigates and reports the details of the investigation to the court. In other states, the professional doing the child custody evaluation actually gives the court a recommendation as to how custody should be determined.

The manner in which a child custody evaluation is used by a court can also vary from state to state. In some states, the judges put a higher priority on the wishes of the children and that issue is addressed in the custody evaluation. In some of those states, the child's wishes are considered if the child has attained a certain age. In Illinois, the child's wishes is a key factor. In other states, it is only one factor or not a factor at all. In Alabama, a child's desire is not considered as a reliable factor in determining custody, so the factors to be given priority over the child's wishes in the child custody evaluation are more focused on the well being and safety of the child.

A child custody evaluation can involve an investigation into moral habits and issues such as alcohol or drug use, church affiliation and family support system. Other issues that can and often are reviewed in a custody evaluation include factors that are unrelated to moral habits, but which are more focused on the determining which parent can satisfy the child's needs, include the ability to provide an appropriate home, school support, and so forth.

A child custody evaluation can take months to conclude. The investigation aspects can include a review of any existing counseling records for the family, either or both parents, or the children, any mental health records for any of those parties, any criminal records, school records for the children, and one or more interviews with each parent and child and any other individual that the court deems appropriate. For example, if a companion or significant other is living with a parent, that person could have an impact on the day to day lives of the children. The court may want that person included in the child custody evaluation. Some of the evaluation interviews are conducted individually, and some are conducted with parent and children together. That format is dictated by the professional conducting the custody evaluation.

If you are involved in a custody dispute and you will be involved in a child custody evaluation, speak with your attorney about the process that you and your children will be subjected to. Be prepared and open and provide all of the information that is requested of you. Most of all, find out what you are able to say to the children to prepare them for the interviews that they will have to attend. Attorney Jean Mahserjian is the author of numerous websites and books devoted to helping consumers through the process of separation and divorce. To download **free** excerpts from her family law books, visit: [Divorce and Child Custody](#)