

Donald LaFave Mediation & Counseling, LLC

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Dear

I have been requested to conduct a court ordered physical placement study regarding you and your family. The purpose of this letter is to share with you information about the procedures involved in a child custody evaluation.

The main consideration in a custody evaluation is to assess the individual and family factors that affect the best interests of the child. In a child custody evaluation, the child's interests and well-being are paramount. Parents competing for custody may have legitimate concerns, but the child's best interests must prevail.

In considering the best interests of the children, the evaluator focuses on the parental capacity of the litigants in relationship to the social and developmental needs of each child. The values of the parents regarding parenting, ability to plan for the child's future needs, capacity to provide a stable and loving home, and any potential for inappropriate behavior or misconduct that might negatively impact the child are also considered.

The role the evaluator is that of a neutral professional expert. Evaluators serve impartially and never act as an advocate for one parent over the other. In a balanced and impartial manner, the evaluator informs and advises the court and the parents of the relevant factors pertaining to the physical placement of their children.

My role is to investigate and assess the relevant issues concerning the children's welfare using a number of methods. I will gather information and provide the results, along with my conclusions and recommendations, to the judge in your case. The goal of the custody evaluation is to provide the court with information about each parent's contribution to the physical, emotional, and social development of the children, and to make recommendations to the court on what physical placement arrangements are in the children's best interests.

There is no client privilege and confidentiality involved in a custody evaluation. The rules of protecting confidentiality as in healthcare and mental healthcare settings do not apply. An Informed Consent form, which is enclosed, describes the limitations of confidentiality in a child custody evaluation.

I make a special effort to put children at ease and to minimize disruption in their lives from the evaluation. You may prepare the

children by informing them they will be meeting with a social worker who is trying to help their mother and father make a good plan of care for them. You may say the social worker helps mothers and fathers make decisions about how to take care of children when they do not live together anymore. You can say that I will talk to the children alone about how they think and feel about things in their family. You may also say that I will need to talk to them about their thoughts and feelings about their lives so I can help you with decisions.

Do Not tell your children that I will be deciding what parent they will live with primarily. This is not only inaccurate, but places an unnecessary burden on the children and forces them to choose what parent they wish to live with. Do NOT say anything to the children in preparation of what you want them to tell me, as this is frequently detected and is not in the best interests of the children nor the parents best interest to do so.

By now the fees and payment for the custody evaluation have been discussed with you and your attorney. My office will probably schedule a number of appointments with you prior to our first meeting. It is very important that you try to make yourself and your children available for appointments as early as possible and avoid cancellations, because rescheduling may cause a serious delay.

Your cooperation is necessary in providing information about you and your family in a timely manner. You can prepare for the custody evaluation by organizing information and written materials. To facilitate the process, you are asked to:

- Read and sign the enclosed Informed Consent form and return it to me as soon as possible.
- Complete the enclosed Social History Information questionnaire, so I may have it at our first appointment. Please make sure to provide complete names, addresses, zip codes, and phone numbers of all persons you list on the form. It is important that you fully complete the Social History Information sheet.
- Provide me with a copy of your children's most recent report cards, the court orders for custody, and restraining orders, if any. If there has been involvement by the Human Services Department or law enforcement authorities, or if there have been any criminal hearings, or any psychiatric hospitalizations, please arrange with your attorney to obtain those records and provide them to me.

In many cases, parents have information from other professionals (physicians, teachers, mental health practitioners, law enforcement, etc.) that they believe is important to their case. You probably will be asked to sign releases of information to permit me to obtain information from these professionals.

If you are remarried, or have a significant other who spends significant time with the children, I will want to meet with the person. If there are issues raised during the evaluation process pertaining to another person's interaction with the children, I will also want to see that person.

I will contact third party references, people who know you as a parent. You have been provided with a Social History Questionnaire which lets you organize contact information about references. I may add more people to the list of people to contact.

The end result of the evaluation process is the reporting of results. In many cases, I will give an oral presentation to the parents and their attorneys of the results from interviews and other means. In addition, a written report will be released to the court. The report will discuss the conclusions reached as a result of the evaluation, the basis for the conclusion, along with detailed recommendations.

If you have any questions about the evaluation process, feel free to share them with me at your initial appointment.

Sincerely,

Donald E. LaFave, Social Worker
Donald LaFave Mediation & Counseling, LLC.

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