



Court Ordered Evaluations: Expectations for Attorneys and Their Clients

Most of the questions attorneys and their clients have regarding the goals and expectations in a child custody evaluation or a psychological evaluation of a child or adult are addressed in the initial paperwork for the parties to sign that is provided before the evaluation begins. Parties are given the opportunity to review the initial paperwork with their attorneys prior to signing. Dr. Fletcher reviews the policy and procedures at length at the first interview to make sure there is an understanding of what is expected and what will occur in the course of the evaluation.

We are frequently asked how quickly Dr. Fletcher can schedule the initial interviews for an evaluation and complete the process. That depends on many factors, including the time it takes for the following steps:

- **The signed court order needs to be provided to Dr. Fletcher by the attorneys before any information is sent to the parties.** The court order must be received from the attorneys, not the parties, to ensure that everyone is aware of what has been initially provided. Dr. Fletcher will review the court order to make sure the expectations are clearly outlined regarding the court's expectations. If there is something that is unclear, she will contact the attorneys for further clarification.
- **The parties will then need to contact Dr. Fletcher's office.** They are asked to contact Dr. Fletcher's office manager by phone (972 612-1188) to provide preliminary information.
- **The initial paperwork, outlining policies and procedures, is sent to the parties and the initial retainer is requested.** After reviewing the court order, Dr. Fletcher's office manager will send the initial paperwork to the parties by email and request the retainer for services to begin. The amount of the initial retainer is only decided after Dr. Fletcher reviews the court order. We do not take credit or debit cards so the retainer will need to be provided by a cashier's check, cash, or electronic payment through the parties' online bill pay from their bank or through an electronic payment service such as Venmo or Zelle Pay.
- **No appointments are offered until the signed intake paperwork is returned by the parties and the initial retainers are collected.** Typically, it is not Dr. Fletcher's schedule that delays the process. The sooner Dr. Fletcher can receive the signed initial paperwork and the full retainer, the sooner interviews can be scheduled. Initial interviews are not scheduled in advance.

We appreciate the support of the attorneys to assist the parties in returning the paperwork and providing the retainer in a timely manner.

Dr. Fletcher can provide a sample court order or talk with both attorneys about the case prior to the referral to assist in the opportunity for greater success for the parties. No specific information about a case should be provided by one attorney without the other attorney being involved in the communication.

Dr. Fletcher does not consult with either party to be evaluated prior to receiving the court order or prior to the initial interviews. Any questions before the referral is made need to be communicated through the attorneys, without discussing the actual case, to assist in protecting the integrity of Dr. Fletcher's role.

What generally happens once the evaluation begins:

- **Interview Appointments:** Dr. Fletcher typically begins the process by conducting interviews with the person/child being evaluated.
- **Consultation with Other Professionals and Collateral Interviews:** After the evaluation begins, Dr. Fletcher will request the names of potential collaterals relevant to the evaluation process. Collaterals may include mental health providers, physicians, and other professional and personal resources who can provide relevant information. Dr. Fletcher provides more information about collaterals in the initial interview.
- **Psychological Testing:** Dr. Fletcher will likely conduct psychological testing as part of the evaluation. She does not identify what specific tests will be provided prior to beginning the evaluation process.
- **Documents for Review:** Dr. Fletcher will request that documents be provided for her review as part of the evaluation. Documents must be provided in an electronic format and can be provided by the attorneys and the parties. A deadline for the receipt of documents will be set once the evaluation begins.
- **Written Report:** Dr. Fletcher will submit a written report to the attorneys or to both the attorneys and the court if directed by the court. Dr. Fletcher does not provide the written report or review the results with the parties. Interim opinions, conclusions, or recommendations are not provided prior to the completion of the evaluation.

If the person being evaluated is a child:

- **Parent Interviews:** Both parents are interviewed individually before the child is seen unless it is determined to be different prior to the beginning of the evaluation.
- **The Child's Interview:** The child is interviewed individually and possibly in the presence of one or both parents.

Dr. Fletcher considers the specific questions to be answered in the scope of her role as the evaluator to determine the specifics of what is involved in each evaluation.