

Custody Evaluation FAQ

Essential Questions & Answers for Parents

Custody Evaluation: Frequently Asked Questions

What is a custody evaluation?

A custody evaluation is an assessment by a trained professional to determine what parenting arrangement is in the child's best interest. It includes interviews, observations, and review of records.

Who orders a custody evaluation?

Typically, a family court judge orders an evaluation during a custody dispute, though parents can sometimes agree to one.

What is the purpose of the evaluation?

To provide the court with an objective recommendation about custody and parenting time based on the child's best interests.

Who participates in the evaluation?

Both parents, the child (if age-appropriate), and sometimes other significant caregivers. Teachers, doctors, or therapists may also provide input.

What happens during the process?

- Interviews with parents
- Interviews with the child
- Observation of parent-child interaction
- Possible home visits
- Review of school, medical, and CPS records
- Collateral contacts with professionals
- Psychological testing (in some cases)

How long does it take?

Several weeks to several months, depending on case complexity and scheduling.

What questions will the evaluator ask?

Topics include:

- Your relationship with your child
- Daily routines

- Co-parenting and communication
- Concerns about the other parent
- Household stability and safety

Will my child be interviewed?

Yes, in an age-appropriate way to understand their perspective and needs.

Can I talk to my child about it?

Explain simply, but do not coach or influence responses. Reassure them it's about their well-being.

Do evaluators make the final decision?

No. The evaluator recommends; the judge decides.

Is it confidential?

No. Findings and recommendations are shared with the court and both parties.

Can I refuse to participate?

If court-ordered, refusal may negatively affect your case.

How should I prepare?

- Be honest and cooperative
- Focus on your child's needs
- Provide requested documents
- Maintain stability and consistency

What do evaluators look for in home visits?

A safe, clean, and child-friendly environment, and healthy parent-child interactions—not perfection.

How much does it cost?

Costs range from \$1,500 to \$10,000+ depending on location and complexity.

Will psychological testing be required?

Sometimes, if there are concerns about mental health or parenting capacity.

What if I disagree with the recommendation?

You can challenge it in court or request clarification. Additional evaluations require good cause.

Tip: Always keep the child's best interests as the priority throughout the process.