

TEN COMMANDMENTS FOR A BEST INTEREST ATTORNEY¹

1. Read the Statute, Family Law Article Section 1-202; read the Rule, MD Rule 9-205.1, and read the Appendix: Maryland Guidelines for Practice for Court-Appointed Lawyers Representing Children in Cases Involving Child Custody or Child Access (which appears immediately following MD Rule 9-210).
2. Read and understand the Order appointing you. If the Order needs to be revised or clarified, file a Motion with the Court—do not communicate with the Court *ex parte*.
3. Obtain written permission from counsel before speaking to their clients.
4. If a party is self-represented, communicate with them only in writing.
5. *Never* bring a child to Court unless prior arrangements have been made with the Court.
6. Know the law (Marshall v. Stefanides, Shapiro v. Shapiro, Wagner v. Wagner, Ross v. Pick and Boswell v. Boswell) and the Court's likes and dislikes if you are asking the Court to interview the child.
7. Communicate with your client effectively. If necessary, take classes or read materials regarding stages of child development, use of appropriate language and interviewing techniques.
8. Communicate with collaterals/neutrals such as Day Care Providers, Teachers, Coaches, Doctors, Therapists, Friends, etc.
9. Prepare your case for trial, especially if one or more of the parties are self-represented.
10. Work closely with the health professional involved in your case. Establish a network of professionals (medical, mental health, education, etc) with whom you may communicate with regarding any issues in your case.

¹ Originally prepared by Kevin G. Hessler, Esquire and Donna E. Van Scoy, Esquire