



CUSTODY & VISITATION-RELATED ASSESSMENTS: TRAINING GUIDELINES

The following training guidelines were established by the Administrative Office of the Courts pursuant to Maryland Rule 9-205.3(d)(2). Individuals who perform custody and visitation-related assessments must complete [a training program](#) that conforms with these guidelines.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK:

- Legal terms, standards, and concepts related to family law judicial process
- Relevant statutes, case law, and rules, including Rule 9-205.3
- Parenting plans
- Distinctions between clinical and forensic examinations
- Roles and perspectives of judges and attorneys

CHILD DEVELOPMENT:

- Basics of infant and child development, including critical periods of brain development
- Attachment and how it relates to developmentally appropriate access schedules
- Overview of normal and aberrant mental health functioning
- Impact of high conflict parental behavior on children and family
- Impact of separation and divorce on children

CUSTODY EVALUATION PROCESS:

- Interviews of children, parents, caregivers, and collaterals
- Parent-child observations
- Areas and modes of data collection
- Required and optional elements of custody evaluations and specific issue evaluations under Rule 9-205.3
- Psychological evaluations
- Cultural and diversity considerations
- Maintaining neutrality and addressing personal attitudes, values, implicit biases, and assumptions that may compromise neutrality and impact an evaluation. This includes those regarding race, nationality, disability, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, family structure, etc.
- The use of objective criteria when conducting an evaluation.
- Risks inherent in the role of custody evaluator and how best to manage them

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REPORTING TO COURT AND INVOLVEMENT IN COURT PROCEEDINGS:

- Written report structure and format for custody evaluations and specific issue evaluations
- Oral reporting
- Depositions
- Testimony

FAMILY VIOLENCE

- Intimate partner violence: Types (including physical abuse, sexual abuse, coercive control, financial abuse, and stalking/harassment); dynamics and long- and short-term effects on parenting and children; barriers to disclosure; initial screening; assessment protocols; indicators for protective safety recommendations; implications for child access
- Child abuse: Types (including physical, emotional, and child sexual abuse); barriers to disclosure; dynamics and effects; implications for child access; nature and role of child protective services investigations; role of child advocacy centers
- Screening for abuse, protective factors, available resources and tools, best practices

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES:

- Parental relocation
- Children and parents with disabilities: Best practices in utilizing evidence when making custody determinations, supports and services available to parents and children with disabilities, and the use of objective criteria in cases involving a parent with a disability
- LGBTQIA+ parents and children
- Mental health conditions: protocols for monitoring and treatment, and implications for child access
- Substance misuse: Protocols for monitoring and treatment, and implications for child access
- Parent-child contact failure

