

WAC 246-924-445 Parenting evaluations—Standards. Psychologists may be called upon to evaluate members of a family to assist in determining an appropriate residential arrangement, parental duties, or parental relationship with respect to a minor child. These rules establish minimum standards for conducting parenting evaluations. The psychologist must perform the evaluation focusing on the best interest of the child. In the event that there is more than one child in the family, these rules apply to each child in the family.

(1) The psychologist shall assess relevant ethnic and cultural issues and shall consider the following factors:

(a) The relative strength, nature, and stability of the child's relationship with each parent;

(b) Which parent has taken greater responsibility for performing parenting functions relating to the daily needs of the child;

(c) Each parent's past and potential ability to perform parenting functions; and

(d) The emotional needs and developmental level of the child.

(2) The psychologist may consider the following:

(a) Any voluntary agreements of the parties;

(b) The child's relationship with siblings and with other significant adults, as well as the child's involvement with his or her physical surroundings, school, or other significant activities;

(c) The wishes of the parents and the wishes of a child who is sufficiently mature to express reasoned and independent preferences as to his or her residential schedule; and

(d) Each parent's employment schedule.

(3) In conducting parenting evaluations, the psychologist shall not discriminate based on age, gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic status, or any basis prohibited by law.

(4) The psychologist may make recommendations regarding the primary residential parent, shared residential time, decision-making authority or other variables involving more than one of the parties. If recommendations are made, the parenting evaluation must include an assessment of each of the relevant parties being considered and their ability to function as a parent.

(5) In reaching a conclusion or making a recommendation, the psychologist shall consider the existence of limiting factors as outlined in RCW 26.09.191. The psychologist shall be familiar with or obtain consultation regarding the psychological aspects of child abuse, domestic violence, substance abuse, and family conflict. Recommendations and conclusions, if any, reached in an evaluation must be based on information from more than one source and must be supported by the data collected. Sources of information may include:

(a) Face-to-face interviews with the parties;

(b) Collateral contact interviews;

(c) An opportunity for each party to express concerns or issues in writing;

(d) A review of pleadings;

(e) Written input from collateral sources;

(f) Written documentation from the parties;

(g) Direct observation of the parties with their children;

(h) Psychological testing of the parties and/or their children;

(i) A review of relevant records (e.g., school or counseling records, child protective services records, substance abuse evaluations);

- (j) Prior criminal convictions;
- (k) Current involvement of law enforcement; and
- (l) Face-to-face interviews with the children.

(6) If the psychologist uses psychological testing as part of the evaluation, the psychologist must interpret the test(s) consistent with current research or standards of practice.

(7) The psychologist shall not have provided therapeutic services to any party involved in the evaluation. Unless there are mitigating circumstances, the psychologist shall decline to perform a parenting evaluation. Providing service in a rural or underserved area with limited professional options is an example of a possible mitigating circumstance.

(8) The psychologist shall avoid multiple relationships when conducting parenting evaluations. If the previous or current relationship is substantially likely to impair objectivity, the psychologist shall decline the appointment or withdraw. The psychologist shall disclose multiple relationships to the parties or their legal representatives and document the disclosure in the client records.

(9) Relevant comments about a person not personally evaluated may be included if the report clearly identifies the source for the comment and states that the person to which the comment relates was not evaluated by the psychologist.

(10) Psychologists shall maintain a written record of the evaluation. At a minimum, the written record shall include the following:

(a) Court order or signed consent from all parties to conduct the evaluation;

(b) Written retainer agreement;

(c) Appropriate court order or signed authorizations for release of information;

(d) Documentation of dates of service, nature of service and fee charged;

(e) A copy of the evaluation report; and

(f) The information and sources used for the evaluation.

(11) The psychologist shall disclose the following specific information to the parties in writing at the outset of the evaluation assignment. All requests for records must be processed in accordance with chapter 70.02 RCW.

(a) The entity or individual that has requested the evaluation if it is done at the request of a third party;

(b) The entity or individual that is responsible for the bill;

(c) Fee structure;

(d) The entity, agency or individual that will receive the results or the report;

(e) Limits on confidentiality; and

(f) General procedures to be followed.

(12) The psychologist shall make available upon request to the clients or their counsel:

(a) The documents the psychologist relied upon during the evaluation process;

(b) The identity of collateral contacts;

(c) Notes taken during all interviews of the parties or collaterals;

(d) If, however, the psychologist believes that release of information provided by the child, may be harmful to the child, the psychologist may withhold those notes unless directed to do otherwise by the court. The psychologist shall document the reasons for withholding the information in the file;

(e) Dates of evaluation procedures and charges;

(f) All correspondence associated with the case;

(g) The psychologist shall not provide raw test data including test questions, answer sheets, profile scores, computer generated interpretations, or copyrighted materials to nonpsychologists. The psychologist may provide this information to another psychologist or another individual who is qualified to interpret it, with proper authorization from the client or the client's attorney. Protected test materials and raw data may be provided as directed by the court.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 18.83.050. WSR 07-12-090, § 246-924-445, filed 6/6/07, effective 7/7/07.]