

# CORNERSTONE

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## Custody Evaluation Informed Consent For Stepparents

### Introduction:

The term "stepparent" often describes individuals who are in a marital relationship with a biological parent of children. For the purpose of this evaluation, however, a person who either resides in the biological parent's home as a partner, or a person who is engaged to be married to the biological parent are considered to be in a stepparent role.

Thus, regardless of the specifics of your perceived title, if you meet the above criteria, from this point forward in this document you will be referred to as the "stepparent."

A custody evaluation is a court-ordered process, in which your partner/significant other was ordered by a judge to participate. You, as a stepparent, are not directly ordered by the judge to participate, but must be willing to go through the process in order for the evaluator to comprehensively complete his evaluation and report.

This document is specific to your role as a stepparent. To fully inform yourself about the complete custody evaluation you can read the informed consent document that the biological parent reviewed and signed.

Carefully read the entire document and write your initials in the space to the left of each of the items to document that you have read, understood, and agree to the conditions of the evaluation. In addition, please date and sign where indicated. Signing this document indicates that you understand the evaluation procedures and agree to participate as specified by the conditions set forth in these documents.

\_\_\_\_ 1. This is an agreement between Kathy Edwards, JD, LCP., from here on out referred to as the evaluator, and \_\_\_\_\_, stepparent, for the evaluator to render the professional services designated below in the case of \_\_\_\_\_ vs. \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_ 2. For all individuals interviewed, including stepparents, there is no such thing as privileged communication for information obtained during evaluations in custody litigation. This means that the evaluator has a duty to report to the court all information that he discovers during the course of this assessment, whether the participant wants the information disclosed or not.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Even though there is a lack of confidentiality in custody evaluations, steps are taken in an attempt to maintain stepparents privacy. This evaluator does not share information collected during this evaluation process, outside of what is in the final report, without specific written consent of the parties. However, since information is in a report that is released to the respective attorneys, who will likely give that report to their clients, it is possible that other people could share private information about you.
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Psychological Testing: You must consent to take psychological tests as part of your custody evaluation. Testing is done at the evaluator's office and can take two to three hours based on reading speed. You need to come to the testing appointment unaccompanied and you are not allowed to talk to others or use your phone during the session. Your results from this testing will be interpreted and included in the final report. Sometimes embarrassing information can come out in the testing interpretation. You may also believe that the testing interpretation is not accurate in how you see yourself. However, no custody decisions will be made solely from the psychological testing data. This information is only used to supplement the other data collection in this evaluation.
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. If you have been in counseling at any time during the last five years, these records must be released to the evaluator for review. Please complete a **Release of Confidential Records and Information** form for each counselor. Please provide this signed release at the onset of the evaluation with your, completed initial paperwork.
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. All interviews are audio recorded. These recordings are done to provide an accurate account of what occurred during the interviews. This provides a level of accountability for both the evaluator and participants.
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Custody evaluations often involve difficult questions about sensitive information. At times, this process can feel invasive and bring about negative feelings. This process is not intended to be personal attacks, but rather attempts to understand the relevant information pertaining to what is in the best interests of the children.
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Since the primary focus of these custody evaluations is on the biological parents and their children, sometimes very little information in the report is relevant to the stepparents. Stepparents could possibly feel that they participated in interviews and testing, yet were not adequately represented in the body of the report. This is done intentionally to keep the focus of the report on the parents who are the direct participants in the current litigation.
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. I have read the above, and I agree to participate with the custody evaluation under these conditions.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Stepparent Signature / Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Evaluator Signature / Date