**Parenting Evaluators Comparison Template**



If you are involved in a custody dispute, the court may order you and the opposing party to participate in evaluations of your parenting. The court orders parenting evaluations in order to gather information about what is in the best interests of your children. Most people are not familiar with the various types of professionals who conduct parenting evaluations and how they differ, so we created the comparison chart below.

*It can be challenging to understand the differences between types of parenting evaluators, so it is really important that we now have this chart.*

- A legal aid professional

Review each piece of the table below and ensure the info provided is accurate for your jurisdiction or edit as needed.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Insert your county Parenting Evaluators Comparison Chart | | | | |
| Category | **Family Law Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs)** | **Family Court Services**  **(FCS)** | **Guardians ad Litem (GALs)** | **Private Parenting Evaluators** |
| Purpose | To investigate and report on the best interests of the child(ren) | | | |
| What they do | The scope of the evaluation is determined by the court. Generally, they investigate the parties and the children. They then recommend to the court what type of custody and visitation arrangements they think would be the best for the children. They can also recommend assessment or treatment for addiction, MH, or DV issues, as well as parenting education. | | | |
| How they get involved | One of the involved parties can request that the court make an appointment or the court can appoint if there is a need. CASA and FCS both have limited capacity and are not able to serve everyone. | | | |
| Category | **CASAs** | **FCS** | **GALs** | **Private** |
| How specific evaluator  is selected | CASA program selects the advocate. A party may request a review of the appointed advocate by the program. | FCS Program Manager and Assistant Manager assign cases based on staff workloads and/or area of expertise. | The court selects 3 GALs from County registry based on skills or their order on the list. Parties may each opt to remove 1 name from the list of 3. Court makes final choice. | Parties can jointly or each select own evaluator. |
| Education | No educational requirements;  They are volunteers. | Most staff have a master’s degree in Social Work or related field. FCS prefers staff to have 3-5 years of clinical experience and exposure to court system. | Graduate degree in law, social work, psychology, nursing, counseling, medicine or equivalent field *plus* State certification or licensure in their respective pro-fession, if applicable, *plus* 2 years’ experience for MD’s/ doctorate or 5 years for masters level in providing counseling / psycho-therapy to children, adolescents, and/or families.  Attorneys must be state bar members in good standing and have 5 years of law practice with at least ½ of that in family law or dependency. | Psychiatrist, psychologistmarriage/ family therapist, or clinical social worker |
| Category | **CASAs** | **FCS** | **GALs** | **Private** |
| General  Training | Must undergo State 21-hour training and 10 hours of continuing education each year. | Trains staff for 3-4 months in risk assessments, evaluations, and mediation. They provide staff ongoing training. | Statewide mandatory 3-day training.  Court may mandate additional training. | No training required. |
| DV Training | Two hours included in mandatory training | Provided in-house as part of their training | Two hours included in mandatory 3-day training | None required |
| Supervision | Supervised by masters level social workers | Program Manager and Assistant Manager review reports and supervise staff. | None  They are expected to comply with ethical standards for their profession. | |
| Role in MH Evaluations | They may review counseling or treatment records. | They gather info from MH providers, if any.  They refer out if a MH evaluation is needed. | They may gather info from MH providers, if any. They can recommend an evaluation be done.  Depending on their profession, some can conduct a MH evaluation. | |
| Cost | Depending on income, $300-$600 program fee may apply | Both parents pay.  Sliding scale ranges = $203-$4,000. | One or both parents pay.  Retainer fees generally range from $500-$5000.  Final costs may be tens of thousands. | |
| Confidenti­ality/Files | **There is no confidentiality or privilege between the party and the evaluator.**  Parties can generally review their files with possible exceptions (e.g., some records may be sealed). | | | |
| Category | **CASAs** | **FCS** | **GALs** | **Private** |
| Grievance contact info | Insert grievance contact info | Insert grievance contact info | Insert grievance contact info  Can also contact their licensing board or professional organization | Contact licensing board or professional organization for their specific profession |
| More info | Insert website | Insert website | Insert website | Insert website |
| Other | Family Law CASAs are different from Dependency CASAs (gov’t-funded evaluators for CPS/dependen-cy cases) | FCS can request interpreters. | May contact court to request copy of GAL’s application and training certificates. | If evaluator is hired by only one party, that person being evaluated could opt not to submit the report to the court. |

Inclusion in this handout is not an endorsement. We encourage you to evaluate if the services and the provider are right for you, if you have a choice. If you do have a choice, you may want to discuss your options with a domestic violence advocate. The content of this handout is current as of the time of publication, but may have since changed.

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This tool was adapted from the Domestic Violence and Mental Health

Collaboration Project’s Family Law Toolkit for Survivors.

The original version of this tool can be found at

<http://endgv.org/toolkits/family-law-toolkit-for-domestic-violence-survivors/>.

