



Wynns Family Psychology Custody/Divorce FAQ's

At Wynns Family Psychology, we offer a “menu” of services for parents going through a divorce, separation, or custody dispute. Parents are often confused about what services they need. Do they need therapy, testing, or a custody evaluation? Here are some FAQ's that can help guide you through some common questions. *Keep in mind, most parents find that scheduling the parent consultation is a valuable first step in determining what services are the best fit to meet your family's needs.

1) What is the difference between a therapist and a custody evaluator?

The role of the evaluator in a child custody dispute is different from that of a therapist in a traditional, clinical setting. It is important to keep these roles separate. Trying to be both the therapist and forensic evaluator for the same children or family is inappropriate and will complicate both the therapy and the evaluation.

Therapists are advocates or agents for children and ideally are partners with parents or guardians in the therapeutic alliance. However, the aim of the forensic evaluation is not to relieve suffering or to treat, but to provide objective information and informed opinions to help the court (or parents with their attorneys) make a custody decision. To put it more simply, in therapy, you feel “warm and fuzzy” because the therapist is there to help you and your children feel better. In a custody evaluation, the evaluator has to ask a lot of tough questions and refrain from giving advice during the evaluation. When you receive the report from a custody evaluation, you should see the evaluator was very neutral in assessing the strengths and weaknesses of both parents, and provided thorough recommendations to help your family determine an appropriate visitation and custody parenting plan.

2) How long does therapy last versus a custody evaluation? What is the difference in cost?

While therapy can last anywhere from a few months to years, a custody evaluation has a distinct beginning and end, and can range from a few weeks (for a brief consultation) to six months (for a more comprehensive evaluation). Therapy services range from \$120

- \$215/hour. Custody consultations are \$275/hour or have flat fees associated with full evaluations (see our separate fees and evaluations document).

3) My spouse and I get along fairly well. We just need an outside opinion on what visitation/custody arrangement is best for the kids. Do we need a big, long expensive evaluation?

No. One of the benefits of our services is that they are customizable to meet the needs of your family. Our custody services range from informal, (geared towards fairly collaborative and cooperative parents) to formal and extensive. We find many families don't need a formal custody evaluation requiring months of time and thousands of dollars. Many couples want to "cut to the chase" and get feedback about the relevant issues affecting the child, recommendations for a parenting plan or visitation schedule, or answers to specific questions ("What is appropriate for my child to call the new step-mother?") We like to sort through the mess that often accompanies a divorce and focus on the most salient issues for the children. However, when families need an extensive evaluation, we are able to provide a thorough report with recommendations in a very timely manner. In fact, many parents tell us other evaluators quote them months and months of time, whereas we can get results in weeks.

4) If you're seeing my child as a therapist, and we end up going to court for custody, can you testify for us?

We frequently go to court to testify as an expert witness for therapy and custody cases. We are comfortable testifying in court and providing a "voice" for the child(ren) and educating the court about what is in the best interest of the child. We can testify to very specific questions (e.g., what school system appears to be a better fit for the child, how much time is appropriate for a child to visit a parent out of state, how do the children appear to be functioning in the current arrangement) or more broad developmental issues relevant to custody or visitation questions. *Note: There are obvious concerns to maintaining confidentiality if a therapist goes to court to testify. It is important to clarify before court which issues we will be able to testify to, and determine ways to maintain the therapeutic alliance. Fee: \$350/hour. We require ½ of the hourly estimate to hold the date for settlement conferences, depositions, or testimony, with the balance due 72 hours prior to the date. Minimum estimate is 5 hours to include drive time, prep time, and court time = \$1750 (\$875 to hold the date).

5) Can we have our child see you in therapy for now, but if things get ugly, can you perform a custody evaluation for us later?

Psychologists have specific ethical guidelines with respect to avoiding multiple relationships with a family. This means we generally avoid conducting a child custody evaluation in a case in which we served in a therapeutic role for the child or his or her immediate family. Therapeutic contact with the child or involved participants following

a child custody evaluation is also undertaken with caution, and generally avoided (unless ordered by the court and agreed upon by both parents).

6) We're still not sure how you can best help us. Can you talk to our attorney?

We are happy to talk to your attorney (with the proper release) to discuss our services in more detail. We also often work with attorneys as "neutral" experts to try and help parents collaborate on a parenting plan or make a joint decision with respect to the child.

7) As a part of our custody dispute, I've been ordered to have a psychological evaluation. Can you help with that?

Many times one parent has raised concerns about the other parent's mental health. We can provide comprehensive psychological evaluations and provide an assessment of the parent's mental health and parenting fitness.

8) We've been told we need co-parenting therapy. What's that?

Co-parenting therapy is when parents have a history of high conflict and disagreement over making decisions for the child(ren). There is also often a history of very poor or tense communication between parents. As the therapist, we take the approach to provide parents strategies to form a healthy "working relationship" which is always in the best interest of the kids. We can help weigh in on topics of debate, and provide helpful tools for collaboration and cooperation.

9) What is reunification therapy?

This has become a common therapy we offer at WFP. This therapy is helpful when there is a rift or broken bond in the parent-child relationship (often due to parental alienation, parental gate-keeping, abuse, or inconsistent visitation). We often have one parent who is out of state, and implement technology like Skype to bring the parties together for therapy sessions. The goal is to help reestablish a healthy bond between parent and child again, and possibly supervise phone calls, Skype or visitation between parent and child.

10) What if my ex won't participate?

While we much prefer and recommend that both parents participate in services, especially custody-related, we are able to provide recommendations and feedback to one parent if one parent refuses to participate. We simply can't provide a specific custody plan having only talked to one parent. However, we are still able to provide opinions and recommendations on the one parent's parenting, the child's adjustment,

and general custody/visitation recommendations that are appropriate given the child's age/special needs etc.

11) **Is this confidential?**

While all therapy services are confidential, custody consultations and custody evaluations have limits to confidentiality (if they are court ordered, or parents wish the report to be released to attorneys). Also please understand **there is NO confidentiality between parents**. In order to cross check facts, we need to be able to question your ex about issues you've raised and vice versa.

12) **Why choose Wynns Family Psychology?**

We are unique in that we are child psychologists and have specialization in child custody/divorce issues (many custody evaluators don't see children in their regular practice!) We have a way of making kids relax and enjoy their time in our office. And we often receive feedback from parents that they are pleasantly surprised how neutral we are (we always say we are not on "team mom" or "team dad" – we are on team "kid(s)"!) We are passionate about our work and find nothing more rewarding than bringing peace and resolution to a stressful, difficult custody/divorce situation. We frequently attend continuing education conferences on custody and divorce so that are up to speed on the most cutting edge approaches to tackling relevant topics. Still not sure what you need? Call or email us to schedule your initial consultation (\$275/hour). For more information, visit wynnsfamilypsychology.com
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