

GUIDELINES FOR THE CONDUCTING OF PARENTING CAPACITY ASSESSMENTS

WATERMAN & ASSOCIATES

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The Psychologists at Waterman & Associates have adopted the following guidelines when providing Parenting Capacity Assessments. Our guidelines have been adopted based on modifications to the Custody and Access Standard that was adopted by the College of Psychologists of BC in 1998. That Standard was replaced by the College of Psychologists on January 1, 2003 with Practice Advisory #3 which was related to assessments in the area of Custody & Access, Access & Parenting Capacity. The assessments conducted by the Psychologists at Waterman & Associates are consistent with the Code of Conduct established by the College of Psychologists of BC.

A Psychologist practicing in the area of Parenting Capacity Assessments will often be called upon to testify as an expert witness. This means that the Psychologist is recognized as having relevant expertise due to training and practice that is not otherwise available to the Court. The Psychologist is therefore permitted to provide opinions to the Court beyond factual observations. Consequently, the Psychologist must possess current scientific knowledge and expertise in areas relevant to Parenting Capacity Assessments.

A Psychologist practicing in the area of Parenting Capacity will have knowledge and assessment skills relevant to children's growth and development, personality, cognitive ability, social and physical skill development, attachment and separation processes, family dynamics, systems theory, and parenting skills; adult development, adult psychopathology, adult cognitive assessment; domestic violence, child abuse, victimization, trauma, substance abuse, and factors affecting parental impairment and parent-child relationships; relevant legislation in the jurisdiction in which the Psychologist practices; and factors that the court may consider in reaching a decision regarding parenting capacity and the range of possible decisions of the Court is able to make.

In most instances, the Parenting Capacity Assessment is prepared for the purpose of assisting the Court or officers of the Court in determining living arrangements for a child or children. The child/children's best interest and well-being are the paramount consideration in the conduct of the assessment by the Psychologist. The primary focus of a Parenting Capacity Assessment must be on evaluating the fit between parenting ability and the psychological and developmental needs of the child/children.

When conducting the assessment, the Psychologist will ensure that any procedure used with one parent or parenting figure will also be used with the other parent or other parenting figures. In all cases, the Psychologist must strive to ensure that a fair and balanced assessment is done and parallel procedures are used if more than one parental figure is involved. If this is not possible,

the Psychologist will provide a valid rationale for not using parallel procedures and discuss the implications of this decision in terms of the conclusions and recommendations.

The Psychologist will provide an assessment report that is complete with regard to relevant and substantial facts. Any omissions that may be relevant to the parenting capacity issues or could alter the hypotheses, assumptions, conclusions or recommendations will be noted and explained within the report. Conclusions and recommendations will be based upon multi-method multi-trait assessment procedures.

We recognize that Parenting Capacity Assessments differ in significant ways from Custody and Access assessments. The information outlined is applicable to Parenting Capacity Assessments in which one parent, both parents, or parental figures who are not the biological parents of the child/children are being evaluated to potentially parent the child/children. The following differences are recognized when conducting Parenting Capacity Assessments as compared to Custody and Access Assessments:

- i) It is recognized that in most Parenting Capacity Assessments there has been a great deal of material put before the Court by various individuals which is available to the parties involved. Therefore, it is not considered necessary to include a complete clinical history of the parent being assessed. However, it is expected that the psychologist will outline specific strengths and weaknesses for each parental individual assessed based on the reviewed information including file information, information from legal and other documents, and information from the potential parent as well as other sources of information.
- ii) Similarly, it is not necessary to summarize the file information and information from legal and other documents before the Court. However, it is expected that significant documents (e.g., Risk Assessments) will be listed. The psychologist is expected to review and be aware of the information available.
- iii) When assessing one biological parent/parental figure, it is not necessary to interview the other biological parent/parental figure. However, if such a person has information relevant to the other person being assessed, it is expected that such information would be obtained by the psychologist if possible.
- iv) It is expected that the referral agent (e.g., Ministry of Children and Family Development, etc) will provide a list of questions that it wants the assessing psychologist to address. The Psychologist is not required to provide any recommendations beyond responding to the questions raised by the referring agent. However, the Psychologist may provide other specific recommendations based on the assessment process. If the Psychologist during the course of the assessment identifies an area or concern that is considered significant, the Psychologist is expected to clarify the importance of that area within the assessment process.

When conducting a Parenting Capacity Assessment, the Psychologist will address the following areas in the report:

- Reason for the assessment including any questions or particular areas of concern identified by the referring agent(s).
- Qualifications of the Psychologist.
- Statement of limitations which refers to the length of time testing results are considered valid and any other limitations relative to the assessment and its findings.
- Review of legal or other documents provided relevant to the reason(s) for the referral.
- The dates of all clinical interviews and collateral interviews.
- Clinical histories of the parents or parental figures –including relevant family of origin information; personal history of the parent including education, relationship(s) and other relevant information; and her/his history related to the other parent(s).
- Psychological test results for each parent or parental figure including descriptions of the test instruments.
- Assessment of the child/children including formal psychological testing if indicated including information regarding the child’s development as well as any special needs that have been identified during the course of the assessment or by other professionals.
- An assessment of each parent-child/children interaction and relationship relevant to the referral questions.
- Collateral information which may include relevant sources of information such as parenting references for each of the parents/parenting figures; educational information related to the children; medical or other professional information related to the child/children or parents; information from other family members as requested or considered relevant; information from parties who have knowledge of either or both parents and their parenting abilities based on personal experience; and any other information relevant to the child/children’s needs or the parents’ ability to care for the child/children.
- Conclusions must follow directly from the information obtained during the course of the assessment.
- Recommendations will follow logically and consistently from the information obtained during the course of the assessment and the conclusions determined by the Psychologist.
- A Curriculum Vitae/Resume for the Psychologist will be attached to the report.