

# Psychologists' Panel

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<b>Roles</b>	<b>Duties/Description</b>	<b>Qualifications</b>
<b>Therapeutic Interventionist</b>	Typically must attempt reunification between a parent and a resistant child.	Must be highly skilled and knowledgeable re: family dynamics, child development and conflict resolution.
<b>Parenting Conferences</b>	A brief conflict resolution process where the parents and child(ren) are interviewed	Knowledge of child development; mediation skills; family court processes; divorce dynamics.
<b>Custody Evaluation/LFA</b>	A prolonged/detailed process to determine custody, parenting time or other parenting issues	Must be highly skilled/knowledgeable re: child development, parenting competency; family court statutes and protocol and clear report writing skills.
<b>Parenting Coordinator</b>	Quasi-judicial officer: resolution of parenting issues; report writing	Must be highly skilled and knowledgeable of family court arbitration, report writing, child development.
<b>Clinical Supervision</b>	Supervise a parent with child(ren)	Knowledge of child development and detailed observation skills.
<b>Co-parenting Therapy</b>	Counseling high conflict parents individually and/or jointly	Knowledge of parenting skills, interpersonal dynamics, conflict resolution.

## **EVALUATIVE ROLES**

### **Independent Psychological or Psychiatric Evaluation**

Pursuant to Rule 63, the Court may order an individual to submit to psychological evaluation by a designated expert when the psychological or psychiatric condition of the individual is at issue. In cases involving medications and/or medical diseases, the Court may elect to appoint a psychiatrist to conduct such an evaluation.

### **Limited Family Assessment**

The Limited Family Assessment (LFA) is designed to address specific issues for which the court needs additional information. It is tailored to be a cost effective way to answer a limited number of issues. The court may only desire that the evaluator conducting a LFA focus on one portion of ARS 25-403.

By way of example, some questions that may prompt the need for an LFA could involve: assessing whether a parent has a substance abuse problem; which school placement or parenting time arrangement might best suit a child with special needs; evaluating the relationship between a parent (stepparent) and child; interviewing a teenager to assess his/her request for a specific parenting time arrangement.

With the LFA, psychological testing may or may not be a part of the evaluation process. The court may or may not want the evaluator to provide recommendations on parenting time.

### **Comprehensive Custody Evaluation**

This appointment is useful when parental conflict is high; serious allegations of parental fitness due to substance abuse, mental health issues, domestic violence and/or alienation appear; the child presents with a serious medical, behavioral, or developmental issue; or a parent is requesting to relocate. These evaluations are likely to involve broader and more in-depth assessment than is required in the LFA. As a result, it is likely to be more time consuming and expensive. Psychological testing is usually administered as part of the comprehensive evaluation. The court would typically accept parenting time recommendations from the evaluator.

## **HYBRID ROLES**

### **Parenting Conference**

The court-ordered Parenting Conference provides a brief, non-evaluative review which can result in an agreement between the parties and/or a useful summary of important

issues and considerations for the court. Providers are selected on a rotating basis from a list of vendors approved by Court Services. When the Court orders a Parenting Conference, the provider will contact the parents, give them the appropriate forms to complete, and schedule the meeting. The appointed provider will interview the parents to determine areas of agreement about the Parenting Plan, and may offer suggestions for resolving conflicts. Often the children are interviewed as well. Typically, the Conference takes only a few hours, and is often concluded in one day. When possible, the parties sign a "Full Agreement" or "Partial Agreement" about the Parenting Plan, which is forwarded to the Court for consideration in advance of a scheduled hearing. The provider also prepares a summary of the session for the Court. The Parenting Conference is especially useful when the parties have limited means, and in case of hardship can be conducted at a reduced cost, as determined by the Court.

### **Preliminary Screening**

The preliminary screening was conceived as a triage checklist to provide the Court with a summary of unresolved issues between parties. The checklist comprises a range of areas, e.g., domestic violence, child abuse, alcohol abuse, drug abuse, mental disorders, etc. This is not considered an abbreviated evaluation. The screening was designed to "rule out" areas of concern, list areas of consensus, and identifies issues requiring judicial determination. The preliminary screening function has been superseded by the current Parenting Conference mechanism.

### **Parenting Consultation**

This is a hybrid in which the provider spends 2-4 hours as an educator/consultant and helps relatively low-conflict parents figure out some or all of the parenting plan they want to use, or assists them with some other related matter, and may simply produce suggestions about the need for an LFA or a CCE if indicated.

### **Supervised Parenting Time**

There are occasions when a parent needs to have someone assist with parenting time. In some cases, a parent might not have seen a child for a length of time due to: military deployment, not having a valid driver's license or vehicle, having a physical ailment or medical condition, or needing help with caring for an infant or a child with special needs. With situations like these, having a third party available to monitor or assist a parent promotes ongoing contact between a parent and child that might not otherwise be possible. This basic type of supervision can be performed by a licensed behavioral health specialist, family member or friend. It does not require active intervention and discussion of a therapeutic issue, as would be the case if therapeutic supervision was needed.

## **Court-Appointed Advisor**

Rule 10(c) may be applied to appoint a mental health professional as a Court-Appointed Advisor to a matter. There are circumstances when the Court is seeking the expertise of a professional to investigate, monitor, assess, and/or manage an ongoing case or to address a specific issue presented in the case. These are cases in which the appointment of an evaluator (custody or Rule 63), Parenting Coordinator, Therapeutic Interventionist, Court-ordered therapist, mediator, etc. is not suitable.

Examples where a Rule 10 (c) appointment could be appropriate are as follows:

- There may be complex matters requiring specialized knowledge and/or expertise, as in cases where multiple professionals from different disciplines must be coordinated over the course of the Court-ordered treatment or intervention.
- Cases requiring essentially on-going monitoring as the litigant(s) undergoes treatment in which compliance is a primary factor in the parenting time schedule and/or the advancing of the parenting time schedule.
- To investigate the causes for the successive unfounded child abuse allegations in a particular matter.
- In cases where there is a need for an ongoing advisor to the Court regarding case disposition or implementation of a transitional case plan adopted by the Court. For example, a matter requiring successive case recommendations over the course of time, including the choice of counseling versus TI, followed by changes in supervised parenting time as TI/counseling progresses, followed by timing of the start of unsupervised parenting time, followed by advancement of parenting time schedule pursuant to the Court's Order.
- To conduct on-site safety assessment of the home.

## **ADR ROLES**

### **Parenting Coordinator**

Pursuant to Rule 74, A.R.F.L.P., the Court may appoint a neutral to assist parties in resolving, typically, post-dissolution parenting disagreements. In some cases, a Parenting Coordinator appointment may be apropos during the *pendente lite* phase following entry of temporary orders to assist parties in the conduct of their temporary parenting plan. The Parenting Coordinator mechanism is a form of ADR in which parties may present disagreements to the Court-appointed neutral in order to explore options

available to resolve the issue(s) at hand. Ideally, a consensus might be reached as the Parenting Coordinator provides parties with information to allow parties to make informed decisions. However, if parties do not reach consensus, the Parenting Coordinator may submit recommendations to the Court. In its discretion, the Court may adopt, amend or reject the Parenting Coordinator recommendations and issue an interim Order accordingly. Parties have ten (10) days in which to file a written objection. If neither party objects, the Court's interim Order becomes permanent. If either party objects, the Court may set a hearing.

Parties should be advised that the Parenting Coordinator forum is for the purpose of addressing parenting and child-related concerns. Substantial changes in parenting time, legal custody, and financial matters are beyond the authority of the Parenting Coordinator. The Parenting Coordinator may recommend that the Court take further action as to issues that could give rise to substantial changes in the overall parenting plan.

### **Mediation**

Pursuant to Rule 66 B.4, "mediation" means a voluntary confidential process in which parties enter into one or more private discussions with a neutral third party to resolve the dispute. Mediation can be conducted by a conciliation court counselor, a mediator assigned by the court from a court roster of mediators, or a private mediator retained by parties.

## **THERAPEUTIC ROLES**

### **Therapeutic Intervention**

Unlike all other roles identified above, rather than describing a situation and making recommendations about how to improve situations, therapeutic interventions are intended to create desired change in individuals and families. The different sub-roles with the Therapeutic Intervention category, generally define who is to be involved in the process.

Per the standard appointment order, these services usually lead to treatment updates every ninety days of treatment. The judge should expect discussion of treatment goals, progress towards those goals, recommendations for associated services should there be any, as well as a general idea of what remains to be addressed therapeutically.

The length of time of these services varies. The most important variable in progress is the motivation of the participants. Also important is the complexity of the issue(s). Costs also vary depending on the motivation of the participants and complexity of the

role. Typically, treatment can be completed in as little as three sessions and as much as more than a year.

### **Family Counseling**

Family counseling is appropriate with complex family dynamics. If the judge seeks changes within multiple individuals (e.g. parents learning to work with a child to learn better parenting techniques or multiple children working with parents to accept a divorce).

### **Co-Parenting Counseling**

Co-parent counseling is focused on treating both parents (or in some cases, including Step-parents). The typical treatment goals include cooperation and communication to be more effective co-parents.

### **Individual Counseling**

Individual counseling is appropriate when there is one family member who appears to need change. Examples include a parent needing to overcome a drug or alcohol problem, a parent working on anger behavior issues, a parent with sexual addiction concerns, one parent who is unable to effectively share joint custody due to poor communication skills, a child who is depressed due to the divorce, etc.

### **Reunification**

Reunification treatment is focused on a distressed relationship between a child and parent. The child typically resists contact with the parent as a result. The detachment might exist due to another parent discouraging the relationship, the parent's past inappropriate behaviors, or simply the lack of contact (e.g. a parent who has not seen a child in ten years). A typical goal of this treatment includes the child feeling physically and psychologically safe with the parent.

### **Therapeutic Supervised Visitation**

Therapeutic supervision is a hybrid between supervised visits and reunification therapy. The presumption is that the child can generally be comfortable with the parent, but there are problems within a parent-child relationship that if not for an intervention, the problems will continue and likely become exacerbated. The therapist observes the parent-child interaction during sessions and if a therapeutic issue arises, the professional can intervene and work with the parent and child to discuss the therapeutic issue.