

What Parents Need to Do

The participation and cooperation of the parents throughout the Issue Focused Evaluation process is essential. It is very important that a commitment be made to cooperate with the Family Services in the following ways:

1. Keep scheduled appointments and arrive on time for all meetings.
2. Do not bring your children to appointments that are scheduled for you.
3. Fill out the Issue Focused Evaluation Questionnaire completely and accurately before the first appointment and bring it with you to the first appointment.
4. Sign the necessary Authorization for Release of Information forms and bring all requested information to appointments.
5. Make the children available, both at home and at the Family Services Office, if requested by the FRC.
6. If your children are going to be interviewed, explain to them that the FRC wants to meet them, but let them know that they will not be asked to choose between their parents.

For additional information, contact your local Court Support Services Division - Family Services Office. Contact information is available at the Superior Court – Court Service Center.

Connecticut Judicial Branch

Court Support Services Division Family Services



Issue Focused Evaluation

For more information, you may go to the
Judicial Branch website at:
www.jud.ct.gov



JDP-FM-214, New 9/10

Introduction

Raising children is not easy. However, caring for children when parents are no longer together can be even more difficult. Although parents may try to work out their differences regarding the care of their children, visitation schedules, or parenting responsibilities, this is not always possible. In some instances, the Court's involvement is needed to help make the final decisions. Family Services offers the Issue Focused Evaluation (IFE) as a way of helping parents solve a specific concern through an evaluation that limits the extent and time the family is involved in the process.

For many parents, the evaluation process becomes a learning experience that helps them settle their differences without the need for a court hearing. This resolution also works towards the development of a healthy parenting arrangement that contributes to the positive growth and development of the children.

What to Expect

To take part in an Issue Focused Evaluation you must be referred from the Family Court. The Judge will enter an order defining the concern that will be evaluated and/or the limits of what will be dealt with in the process. Because the the evaluation is

limited, our involvement in the matter will be brief.

Shortly after the court referral, the case will be assigned to a Family Relations Counselor (FRC). A letter from the FRC will be sent scheduling the first appointment. In most cases, the first meeting is held with the parents together. This gives both parents a chance to share their concerns and proposals with the FRC and each other. NOTE: If you have safety concerns about meeting with your child's other parent, you should contact your FRC when you get the appointment letter to talk about those concerns.

The FRC's role in this process is to explore and assess the concerns of each parent and to make recommendations about a parenting plan that will benefit the children. To do this, the FRC will gather information from both parents and contact professionals involved with the family (such as teachers, doctors, therapists, and others) The IFE is not confidential, which means that this information will be shared with the parents, the attorneys, and Guardians Ad Litem (GAL) involved in the matter, and the Court.

So that information can be shared between the professional providers and Family Services, Authorization for Release of Information forms must be signed. If either party has copies of records/reports they may also submitted to the FRC. However, the person who wrote the record/report must be available

to the FRC during the evaluation process to answer any questions the FRC may have about the report/record.

During the course of the IFE, the counselor may schedule additional individual appointments with one or both of the parents. Arrangements may also be made to meet with the children at one or both of the parents' homes and/or the Family Services Office. This part of the evaluation process will be decided by the FRC based on the issue that was referred.

At the time the counselor's work in the IFE is done, a final conference will be held with the parents and the attorneys/GALs in the case. When it is not possible to meet together, other arrangements will be made.

The final conference is when the FRC will share relevant information gathered during the IFE, present an assessment of the referred issue, and provide a recommended plan to resolve the matter. A written report summarizing the information shared in the final conference will also be handed out in this meeting and given to the Court.

If this information and report does not help the parents come to an agreement, the matter will most likely go to trial. At that time, the FRC's recommendations and report may be used as evidence and the counselor may testify.