

Forensic Assessments/Psychological Evaluation Expectations of the Process

First and foremost, forensic assessments conducted through Cognitive Forensic Alliance, PLLC are conducted with the highest regard for the ethical standards for licensed psychologists and the ethical standards for forensic psychologists. Such ethical standards specify that we may not conduct an evaluation for a family that any of us have seen in a therapeutic context previously. Similarly, we are not able to provide psychological services for any member of a family that has previously had an evaluation conducted through our firm. Finally, if anyone assigned to your case knows or has worked with a member of your family, either personally or professionally, we cannot take your case. If we encounter one of these conflicts of interests, Cognitive Forensic Alliance, PLLC is happy to provide you with a referral. It is important that examinees know that their evaluation is conducted as objectively as possible.

Because most people have not been involved in a forensic assessment, it is important to outline what is to be expected in the process, as it can be a very stressful one. So that you know something more about the examiner professionally, please review a copy of the examiner's biographical sketch listed online. Knowing more about the examiner and examiner's qualifications may decrease some of your anxiety. In addition, while we cannot provide therapy for you, do not be reluctant to get therapy elsewhere during the examination because you fear that being in therapy may reflect badly on you. Cognitive Forensic Alliance, PLLC does not hold that opinion of therapy. If you are feeling the weight of the current situation, we strongly advise you to get some therapeutic assistance for yourself. If you take care of yourself, you will be better able to cope with the pressures of the situation.

Sometimes it is very tempting to try to control the process or the outcome of this examination. However, it is in your best interest to be yourself and do not attempt to do this. There are multiple factors that can impact the extent to which you are viewed as being open and honest during the evaluation and it is important you not do anything that might compromise this view of you. The examiner is very likely to form at least some impressions about you and to interpret some of your psychological test results in a way that you may find painful to hear and that you may think are inaccurate—as they may well be – as science is only able to provide predictions up to a certain point. There are at least four general aspects of this process that you may find upsetting and painful: 1) re-living the original events as part of the examination process, 2) being asked about very personal and private aspects of your life, 3) hearing the results of the examination—some of which are very likely to be negative, and 4) having other people be informed about very personal aspects of your life in a very public forum (i.e., the legal process) as part of the examiner's report, deposition, and testimony. This is another reason why obtaining therapeutic assistance on your own is a good idea so you will have support in this process. Try your best to keep in mind that ultimately, the process is to figure out what is in the best interest of your children, regardless of how you and your ex-partner may feel about each other.

In some ways, the work can be likened to detective work. There are several things that need to happen in order to do this. The bulleted list below outlines this process:

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- You will complete paperwork pertaining to your life history, releases of information, and consent to participate in the evaluation. This will be sent to you within the first week after the order has been presented to Cognitive Forensic Alliance, PLLC. Completing this paperwork on your own time decreases the time spent in the office.
- Once your paperwork is complete, and you have paid for your evaluation, you will meet with Michael Decker, M.S., LPC for your first interview. It is good to reserve about two to three hours for this, though future appointments can be made if needed for this purpose. This is your time to tell the evaluator your story and point of view of the situation.
- Once releases of information are gathered, Cognitive Forensic Alliance, PLLC will send for relevant records pertaining to the health, mental health, or other aspects of your life and provide this to the collateral specialist. Similarly, collateral contacts may be contacted. These are names and numbers of people that you and the other parent have given us that you think might provide us insight into your case. Typically names of coworkers, neighbors, day care workers, teachers, therapists, grandparents, and even friends are provided. Often, you will have given your attorney a similar list. This is dependent on the scope of the evaluation, which varies across examinee and may not be required of your specific case. When such collateral contacts are needed, preference is usually given to professionals (therapists, teachers, etc) and people that have witnessed events or have had direct contact with both you and the other parent of your children. Character witnesses are rarely ever needed or requested, nor are people who have only gotten their information from you.
- Following your first appointment, you will make another appointment with our psychological testing specialist who will administer a battery of psychological tests. These tests attempt to summarize your cognitive and emotional functioning. Any questions you may have about these tests are gladly answered by myself or the psychological testing specialist in order to make you more comfortable with the process. They are in question and answer format and fairly straightforward tests (no electric shock or anything like that!). Only tests that have been validated for these purposes and accepted by the psychological community are used.
- At this point, we will have received releases, talked to collateral informants, reviewed documents, completed the interviews and interpreted the testing results. At this point, a review of your case will occur in an effort to try and identify the main guiding issues driving the conflict in the family. At this point, there may be issues that require additional research, and a Cognitive Forensic Alliance, PLLC professional will conduct the research and write a detailed literature review on topics relevant to your case. Once this meeting is completed, you will meet again with your Michael Decker, M.S., LPC who may ask you a number of questions that came up in the evaluation process that are in need of clarification. You may also be asked to complete a few additional tests or provide some additional collateral data.
- Subsequent to these events, Cognitive Forensic Alliance, PLLC will meet again to select the best recommendations relevant to your case. Michael Decker, M.S., LPC will use

this meeting to write his summary and recommendations for the court. Such reports tend to be lengthy and include as much of the information provided by each party as relevant to determine recommendations. Reports may also provide several pages of recommendations depending on the outcome of your evaluation. Such recommendations might address areas like appropriate therapeutic interventions. It will be up to the judge or the mediator which of the recommendations will be ordered or left up to each party to implement on this or her own.

- If you have been ordered to do a custody evaluation, several additional steps will be added to the process. For example, Michael Decker, M.S., LPC will conduct home visits for each household the children reside, may include any step-parents or paramours in the evaluation process (including psychological testing), and will interview and test the children if they are of the age to process such interaction. She/he may also observe each parent with the child(ren) in various contexts.

There will be time during the evaluation where you may hear little from our office. During these times your team is likely focusing on making collateral calls, reviewing documents, interpreting test results or writing the report. The process can take as little as a month to up to 6 months from the time the first appointment is made, depending on the questions that need to be answered and the amount of documents to be reviewed. We encourage you to provide information to us in a timely manner and make your appointments as soon as possible in order to minimize delays. Michael Decker, M.S., LPC's work will be supervised by Alissa Sherry, Ph.D. as part of her role at Legal Consensus, PLLC and as required of the Texas Family Code Section 107.104 (b)(1)(B) and 107.104 (b)(2). She will have access to your file in order to fulfill her duty, but is bound by the same rules of confidentiality as Mr. Michael Decker. If you ever have any questions about Mr. Decker's work or Dr. Sherry's role, you can reach her at 512-791-4800 or asherry@legalconsensus.com.

As may be apparent, these policies, procedures, and contracts are intentionally designed to allow the examiner to be as legally, professionally, and financially independent of you as possible. In this way the examiner maintains his/her personal integrity and you potentially have a witness that has credibility with the court. If you are seeking an expert who is willing to agree to be an advocate for you or for your position before he or she objectively reviews the case materials and thoroughly examines you, then please reconsider using our services. We know this may sound ominous, but we feel it is better that you know "up front" what it is that you are getting into—especially the risks. We do our best to provide you an independent, neutral, objective examination. This is quite different from your discussing problems with a therapist who is trying to help you. The forensic expert's task is to help the court and not your individual cause or legal position.

You may decide after reading these forms and considering these policies that you do not want to be evaluated or do not want to be examined by Cognitive Forensic Alliance, PLLC. If you feel that way, please tell us and please tell your attorney. We are happy to find you a referral if possible. Thank you for your interest in Cognitive Forensic Alliance, PLLC and please do not hesitate to ask any additional questions that might come to mind. We understand this is a difficult time for your family and this is a stressful process. If there is anything we can do to make this more comfortable for you, please do not hesitate to let us know.

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We look forward to proceeding with you on this examination.

Sincerely,

Michael Decker M.S., LPC
CEO-Cognitive Forensic Alliance, PLLC
Licensed Professional Counselor

Please sign here indicating you have read this document:

Printed Name

Signature

Date