

Child Access Evaluations
by The Honorable Ruth A. Jakubowski
December 15, 2017

Please be advised that the Court has made two modifications in the processing of Child Access Evaluations. The first change is that an Intake appointment will be scheduled with the Family Support Services Office Manager approximately 30 days after the Scheduling Conference, so that parties can (1) sign releases of information for the Family Support Services Office to obtain necessary records (medical, substance abuse, therapy); (2) allow parties to bring in copies of evidence they would like to be considered by the Social Worker for the Evaluation; (3) be informed who their Social Worker will be, including a contact phone number; and (4) arrange an appointment date with the Social Worker for their individual interview. Prior to this change, the Social Worker would do most of these ministerial tasks at the initial meeting between the party and the Social Worker, which would occur much later in the process. The Court is making this change to expedite the entire process, ensure that there are no delays in obtaining necessary information and free up some of the Social Worker's time. The new procedure will also help the Court determine those cases where a party will not cooperate with the evaluation process much sooner, which will allow for more efficient scheduling of Child Access Evaluations.

Beginning on December 11, 2017, the Intake appointments will be scheduled at the time of the Scheduling Conference and parties will be provided a checklist that will indicate what information to bring to the Intake appointment. For those cases that have already been scheduled for a Child Access Evaluation in 2018, the Family Support Services Office will be sending out a letter to parties scheduling the Intake appointment. Attorneys are permitted to attend the Intake appointment, but there is no requirement that attorneys attend.

The second change regarding Child Access Evaluations has to do with the written report and the collateral documents, including interview notes, which are collected and used by the Social Worker to prepare the Child Access Evaluation report. Beginning December 11, 2017, the Court will only be sealing the Child Access Evaluation report in the court file, not the collateral documents. Those collateral documents will be stored at the Family Support Services Office as an Administrative Record of the Child Access Evaluation. Attorneys and parties in the case may view and take written notes regarding these documents by making an appointment with the Family Support Services Office, but photocopying any of the documents will be prohibited. If an attorney or party wishes to have a collateral document in the Administrative Record considered by the Judge at trial, the attorney or party will need to subpoena the Family Support Services Office and request that the Social Worker or the Coordinator appear and bring the specific document to the courtroom on the day of trial.