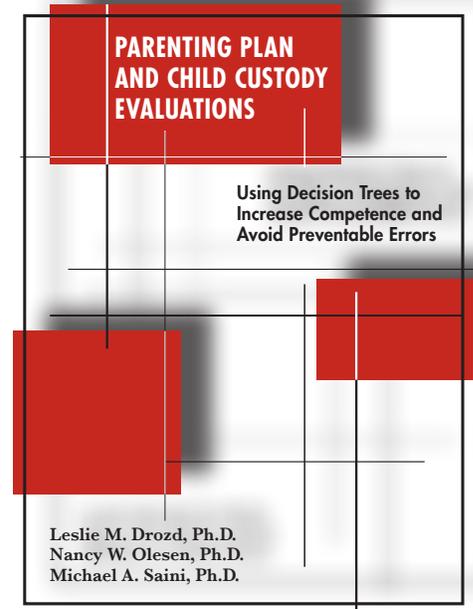


Parenting Plan & Child Custody Evaluations

Using Decision Trees to Increase Evaluator Competence & Avoid Preventable Errors

Leslie M. Drozd, PhD, Nancy W. Olesen, PhD, & Michael A. Saini, PhD



Reviews of the book:

"If the parenting plan evaluator uses the scientific method described by these authors, s/he will make judges, attorneys and parents (if not happy) satisfied that the analysis of all the data produced by the parents and their counsel was thoughtful and thorough and transparent. In addition, it will assist the evaluator in confronting his/her own biases and short cut thinking. It is not just the evaluator who can benefit from this process: judges and lawyers should consider consciously adopting this method to better their own decision making."

-Marjorie A. Slabach, JD, retired judicial officer, presided over Family Court in San Francisco Superior Court 1997-2011

"Drozd, Olesen, & Saini have integrated aspects of current research on cognitive errors and applied this knowledge in a superb manner to assist child custody evaluators to think more clearly and with greater awareness of the ways in which personal and professional biases may interfere with our ability to produce the best work product we can. Their application of the 'fast and slow' thinking paradigm and their development of checklists and flow charts to help guide us toward more systematic examination of our thinking are challenging, new, and welcome additions to the child custody literature."

-Jonathan W. Gould, PhD, ABPP, Diplomate in Forensic Psychology, Charlotte, NC; author of Conducting Scientifically Crafted Child Custody Evaluations (2nd Ed) and co-author of The Art and Science of Child Custody Evaluations

About the book:

The three authors are active custody and parenting plan evaluators, teach workshops on custody evaluations and parenting, and review reports prepared by other evaluators. Their experience has made them acutely aware of the flaws that appear in some evaluations despite the development of professional association guidelines and standards, ongoing continuing education programs on these topics, and increasing demands from the courts and attorneys for evaluations of the highest quality.

This book guides evaluators in developing systematic ways to improve the processes they use to create and test hypotheses, collect information, organize the information they have, and analyze the data in a transparent and comprehensive way. The authors also provide visual ways to organize information in these evaluations with charts, decision trees, and grids. They include many reproducible 8 1/2" x 11" checklists and tools to reduce human biases and errors and to improve the accuracy of decision making. They believe that the processes they describe

may mirror the process used by judicial officers in sorting and weighing evidence, creating clusters of factors around issues, and generating decisions based on the overall evidence presented in court. These tools were "field tested" in the authors' practice and teaching, and they believe the consistency and transparency of decision making has increased with the aid of these tools.

Throughout the book, the deliberate use of the term parenting plan evaluation (PPE) rather than child custody evaluation is more than just semantics or an attempt to further confuse the field with yet another new term. The authors strongly believe that it is critical for those who work with families to emphasize the importance of parenting over the ownership implications of determining custody. Although both terms are used interchangeably throughout the book to be consistent with previous writings, the term parenting plan evaluations is used in the development of the resources that have been created to make better parenting plan decisions.

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Leslie M. Drozd, PhD, is a licensed psychologist and marriage, family, and child therapist in Newport Beach, CA. She is the editor of the *International Journal of Child Custody* and coeditor with Kathryn Kuehne of *Parenting Plan Evaluations: Applied Research for Family Court* (Oxford University Press). She has coedited other books on relocation, psychological testing, and child sexual abuse and written chapters on domestic violence, treatment of trauma, alienation, and unification therapy. Dr. Drozd has been a child custody evaluator for over 20 years, trains other evaluators, and serves as a consultant to attorneys and as a testifying expert in family law matters. She has helped write the AFCC Model Standards for conducting child custody evaluations and for those parenting plan evaluations involving allegations of domestic violence. She also works clinically with families in the various stages of divorce, conducting coparenting therapy, family therapy, and unification therapy, as well as acting as parent coordinator. Dr. Drozd has spoken at conferences on these topics in the US, Canada, and Europe.

Nancy W. Olesen, PhD, is a licensed psychologist working with children and families. Since receiving her doctorate in clinical psychology from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, she has conducted hundreds of child custody and dependency evaluations for the courts in California. Dr. Olesen has also provided expert testimony in child custody cases both in California and other states. She has taught many courses for professionals in the best practices in child custody evaluation in California, throughout the US, in Europe, and in Asia. These courses include the mandatory training required for court appointed evaluators. In addition, she has conducted courses for judges, attorneys, and mediators on child custody special issues such as child abuse, alienation, domestic violence, and attachment.

Michael A. Saini, PhD, is an Associate Professor at the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto, and the Course Director of the 40-hour Foundations to Custody Evaluations at the University of Toronto. For the past 14 years, he has been conducting custody evaluations and assisting children's counsel for the Office of the Children's Lawyer, Ministry of the Attorney General, in Ontario. He has authored or coauthored 50 publications, including books, book chapters, government reports, systematic reviews and peer-reviewed journal articles. He is an editorial board member for the *Family Court Review*, the *Journal of Child Custody*, *Research for Social Work Practice*, and *Oxford Bibliographies Online*. As well, he is a peer reviewer for 10 peer-reviewed journals and 4 international funding organizations.

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