

# Psychological Testing

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# Introduction

- Forensic Mental Health Assessment
  - What is a FMHA?
  - How does this differ from a “regular” clinical assessment?
- Who performs the evaluations?
- How do I determine which type of psychological evaluation needs to be selected?
  - Use the vignettes as a “guide”
  - Call us!

# Types of Psychological Evaluations

- 215 Evaluation
- Psychological Evaluation
- Violence-Risk Assessment
- Parenting Capacity
- Child Custody Evaluation 604b

# 215 Evaluation

- Driven by statute: “...physical or mental condition of a part or of a person in the party’s custody or legal control is in controversy...”
- “Snap Shot” of current mental status
  - What is mental status: “A mental status examination is an assessment of an individual’s level of cognitive (knowledge-related) ability, appearance, emotional mood, and speech and thought patterns at the time of the evaluation.”
- Time Limited
  - 21 Day submission of report mandated from last session date
- Degree level for completion
  - A licensed mental health clinician (for mental health referrals of 215): Master’s degree level clinician is required
- Limitations
  - Looks at functioning at time of testing, does not speak on long-term functioning for the client
- Vignettes

# Psychological Evaluation

- Broad range of referral questions that are “specific” in nature
  - What do I want to know?
  - What am I wanting to clarify in this case?
  - What decisions are being made?
- In-depth psychological picture
  - Can include data from: norm-referenced psychological tests, informal tests and surveys, interview information, school or medical records, medical evaluations and observations
- Completed by a licensed mental health clinician, usually a psychologist, with psychometric training
- Vignettes

# Violence-Risk Assessment

- A more specific psychological evaluation
  - Uses actuarial tools: involves a formal, algorithmic, objective procedure to reach the decision
- What psychologists can assess where violence potential is in question
  - Use structured decision making process
  - Background information: school records, arrest records, collateral interviews, mental health records, legal records, psychological norm-referenced instruments
- Instruments available
  - HCR-20
  - Hare-Psychopathy Checklist
- “Predictability” vs. Risk
  - Predict = certainty (cannot “predict” violence)
  - Risk is determined as an outcome and stated as a “likelihood.”
- Vignettes

# Parenting Capacity

- What does this look like?
  - More involved than a psychological evaluation
  - Look at individual child and individual parent
- When is this the best choice?
  - Recommend appropriate treatment for remediating behavior, or assess if remediation is possible
  - Assist in identifying poor prognosis, highlight potential areas to improve for successful outcomes, and to offer services and recommendations for the family
- Who does this evaluation?
- Vignettes

# Parenting Capacity

- Capacities measured:
  - Capacity to care, nurture, and be involved in the child's life, development, necessary care
  - Capacity to protect- supervision, frustration tolerance, impulse control
  - Capacity to change- intelligence, response to interventions, recognition of need to change
- The evaluation looks at these areas as related to parenting:
  - risk
  - safety
  - resiliency

# Child Custody Evaluation 604b

- Quick overview as a service provided
  - In-depth look at all parties: both parents, each child
  - Essentially a parenting capacity for each individual parent to each individual child
  - Psychological evaluation conducted on each party
    - Norm-referenced instruments
    - Clinical interview
    - Collateral interviews
    - Review of records: school records, mental health, medical, legal
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    - Review of records: school records, mental health, medical, legal
  - Explanations clearly stated on the following:
    - Limitations to the reporting
    - Any recommendations for parental allocations by professional

# Red Flags in an ordered evaluation

- Psychological Evaluation and 215 Evaluation
  - Missing information: background information, test instruments used, multiple data points,
  - Does the report answer the referral question?
  - Data/evidence versus Professional “opinion”
  - Does not address incongruent information
  - Provides recommendations without support of the data
- Parenting Capacity
  - Report fails to address parent-child dynamics
  - Does not address child safety
  - Does not address cultural context
  - Does not address evolving child needs

# Questions and Wrap-Up

- How do you feel with this brief overview of how psychological testing can assist you in coming to decisions for your clients?
- If you have questions, consult with mental health professionals. We are here to help.

# References

- Clark, J. R., Connell, M., & Budd, K. S. (2013). Evaluation of parenting capacity in child protection matters. *Forensic Assessments in Criminal and Civil Court: A Handbook for Lawyers*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Budd, K. S. (2001). Assessing parenting competence in child protection cases: A clinical practice model. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, Vol. 4(1), p. 1-18.