

# The contribution of psychologist expert witnesses to the family courts

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# FJC/BPS Guidelines



The British  
Psychological Society  
Promoting excellence in psychology



Family  
Justice  
Council

Psychologists as expert witnesses in the  
Family Courts in England and Wales:  
Standards, competencies and expectations

Guidance from the Family Justice Council  
and the British Psychological Society

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- Regulation & Codes of conduct
  - HCPC / BPS
    - must state who regulated by.
- Competence
- Quality
- Titles
  - *Must “only use the appropriate protected title(s) in all communication...”*
- There is no such thing as a child psychologist!

# What sort of psychologist is needed?

- Assessments of?

- Adults

- Children

- Family groups  
/ integrated  
assessments

## Practitioner Psychologists

- Educational Psychologists

- Clinical Psychologists

- Counselling Psychologists

- Forensic Psychologists



# The value of expert Psychological evidence

- Well timed, high quality psychological evidence should save time and money, and crucially lead to better outcomes.
- Key issues
  - Capacity
  - ‘Treatability’ / timescales
  - Are the interventions being offered likely to be effective / lead to necessary change?
  - Private and Public law
  - Placement

# making the case...

- In the absence of an expert, 'psychological' evidence and opinions will continue to be offered by non-psychologists and impact on decisions.
- We are *all* natural psychologists.
- Folk Psychology – natural capacity to explain and predict the behaviour of others etc.

*But - Influenced by - biases, assumptions, experience, culture, class, our own parenting experiences etc.*

# making the case...

- With increased complexity comes increased risk of error.
- Complimenting the skills of social workers / children's guardians
- Reliable methodology, standardisation, evidence-based approaches, synthesis of information 'triangulation'

# Assessment Factors

## what should a formulation consider? – not exhaustive

- Developmental
- Environmental
- Cognitive ability
- Mental health
- Personality
- Parenting experiences
- Relationship patterns
- Attachment representations
- Parental attributions
- Meaning of the child
- Impact of substance misuse /alcohol
- Culture
- Offending
- Resilience
- Support networks
- Previous uptake of help

# Integrated family assessments

- Interacting factors
- **This** parent's competencies and difficulties with **this** child's needs.
- Interplay of dynamics of relationships in the family
  - E.g. Crucially important in context of allegations of Parental alienation / rejection



# Good reports

- Objective, balanced and clear opinions
- Offer possible solutions and ways forward that are innovative / realistic
- Describe the prospect of success and timescales
- Evidence-based / formulation driven opinions
- Evidence-based intervention options
- Formulation driven interventions vs diagnostic driven interventions
- Potential Risks
- Bringing together multiple factors
- Cross-psychological models/theories
- Systemic framework

Thanks for listening