

Collaborate, Communicate, Coordinate

A lawyer's guide to working with therapeutic professionals and the police in high conflict custody and access cases.



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Introduction

This guide [1] provides information and practical suggestions for lawyers on how to collaborate effectively with therapeutic professionals and the police in high conflict custody and access cases. These three professional groups may have to work together. For example, where a lawyer assists a client with a custody application, the police may be called during a crisis situation involving a dispute between the parties over the child. The circumstances may trigger the police to refer the matter to a therapeutic professional. A therapeutic professional may also identify safety concerns when delivering services to the client or child that require police involvement or raise legal issues.

Collaboration between the different professional groups is necessary to ensure that the emotional, psychological, and safety needs of families in such conflicts are addressed, in addition to their legal issues.

In this guide, “therapeutic professional” or “professional” is used to refer to professionals who are trained to provide support and intervention to improve the clients’ situation and circumstances (addressing mental health, social and emotional challenges, in areas such as family relationships, employment, child protection, domestic violence etc). These could be psychologists, counsellors, psychiatrists or social workers.

The purpose of this guide is to help lawyers understand:

- The different types of therapeutic professionals and their roles;
- When and how to engage therapeutic professionals for therapeutic or forensic purposes

“Therapeutic purpose” refers to engaging therapeutic professionals to assist clients or their children to improve specific challenges and concerns they may be facing (such as mental health, family relationships, employment, child protection, etc).

“Forensic purpose” refers to engaging therapeutic professionals for custody or access evaluation, when a court orders a custody or access evaluation report.

(Note: The Community Psychology Hub [2] (CPH) does custody evaluations for families with children below 8 years old, while the Family Justice Court’s Counselling and Psychological Services (CAPS) does custody evaluations for children of 8 years and above, as well as access evaluations, and other more specific incident reports that the court requests. The custody evaluation report done by CPH will contain recommendations on custody arrangements, access arrangements, therapeutic support and co-parenting support.)

Areas covered by this Guide

This Guide covers the following areas:

- How lawyers can communicate effectively with therapeutic professionals
- How to prepare and educate clients for interaction with therapeutic professionals
- How to frame these interventions positively to clients, to help them achieve better outcomes for their children and families
- When police involvement may occur in a custody and access dispute scenario, and how clients can work constructively with the police.

The suggested best practices in the above areas are demonstrated using scenarios and sample scripts which lawyers can adapt and adopt to help them facilitate productive relationships between their clients and other professionals whilst maintaining appropriate boundaries and protecting their clients' interests.

Introduction

Important Disclaimer:

The guidance, scenarios, and scripts contained in this document are broad guidelines and illustrative examples only. Every legal case is unique and must be considered on its own specific facts and circumstances. Lawyers should conduct appropriate legal research and analysis for each matter, taking into account the particular needs of the client, the applicable law, relevant court procedures, and the specific services and protocols of the professionals involved. Lawyers should always verify current procedures and requirements with the relevant professionals and institutions before providing advice to clients.

This document does not constitute legal advice and should not be relied upon as a substitute for proper case-specific legal analysis and professional judgement.

"In high-conflict custody cases, lawyers can't work in isolation. We need therapeutic professionals and police as partners to truly serve our clients and protect children's welfare."

[1] This document was inspired by, and draws from, the views shared by the participants at LAB's mixer event on 7 August 2025, which brought together lawyers, therapeutic professionals and police officers. The participants broke into groups and discussed case studies involving custody and access disputes, sharing how they would handle the situation, and suggesting how they could collaborate to better support the children and parties involved. LAB is also grateful for the views and comments of Francesca Seah from Montfort Care and our Assigned Solicitor, Angelina Hing, both of whom volunteered to review this document, as well as the views and comments of our colleagues from the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) and the Singapore Police Force (SPF), representatives of which attended the Mixer. Any errors or omissions in the contents of this document are entirely those of the LAB.

[2] The Community Psychology Hub was set up by the Ministry of Social and Family Development in 2015 and a unit sited within SG Enable Ltd. It partners with social service agencies (such as FSCs and FAM Centres) to provide psychological assessments and interventions for individuals, children, and families; and also collaborates with professionals such as social workers, counsellors and educators in a multidisciplinary approach, to support persons experiencing vulnerabilities within their communities.



Part 1: Working with a Therapeutic Professional for a Therapeutic Purpose

Overview



Therapeutic Professionals

A lawyer can work with a therapeutic professional for a therapeutic purpose, i.e. to assist your client or their children with mental health, emotional, and social challenges and concerns. If safety concerns arise during the course of working with the professional, he or she may need to involve the police or Protective Service (PSV)(under the Ministry of Social and Family Development).

*When lawyers, therapists, and police
work as one team,
families win.*

Contacting the Professional

There are various types of therapeutic professionals. These include social workers, counsellors, psychologists, psychotherapists, or psychiatrists. See below for information on the different professionals. It is possible to see more than one professional at the same time. For example, someone who is clinically depressed might need medication to manage their illness, which only a psychiatrist can prescribe, but may also benefit from seeing a psychologist, psychotherapist, or counsellor to talk through their issues. Note also that the term “therapist” is often used to refer to both counsellors and psychologists – and indeed, both types of professionals can and do serve the same function for various types of cases, but there are differences between them, which are briefly set out below.

Counsellors/ Psychotherapists

Qualifications :

Qualified in counselling – i.e. has an undergraduate or postgraduate degree or diploma in counselling



How they can help

Practical guidance, conflict resolution, emotional support. Help parents develop healthier communication patterns, learn to de-escalate conflict, and provide psycho-education (e.g. teaching how conflict affects children and how to co-parent more effectively). Counsellors often have psychotherapeutic training, and therefore can employ one of a few therapeutic modalities, depending on the needs of the client. Some common examples include Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT).



When to refer

When parties require help to work through relationship conflict, parenting challenges or emotional distress etc.

Counsellors will assess the situation and recommend appropriate modes of counselling.

Individual sessions may be more suitable when there are family violence concerns; when one party does not consent to joint sessions or the parties are not ready to have joint sessions.

Contacting the Professional

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Psychologists

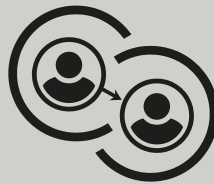
Qualifications :

Qualified in psychology – i.e. has a master's or doctoral degree in applied psychology



How they can help

Assessment, therapy and structured interventions. Address underlying issues like trauma, depression or anxiety.



When to refer

Counsellor may recommend further support or when there are complex psychological issues requiring formal assessment or specialised therapeutic interventions.

Psychiatrists

Qualifications :

Medical doctors specialising in mental health issues and conditions



How they can help

Diagnosing psychiatric disorders and prescribing medication, though they can also provide psychotherapy



When to refer

A person suspected of having or diagnosed with a mental health condition (e.g. bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, severe depression, suicide risk) that is fuelling conflict, and medication may be needed along with therapy.

Contacting the Professional

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Social Workers

Qualifications :

Qualified in social work



How they can help

Provide case management and counselling, assessing individual/family's biopsychosocial needs including physical, financial, employment, psychosocial, and safety concerns.

Thereafter, implements therapeutic and systemic interventions, does basic counselling and coordinates resources to meet the client's practical needs, to enhance functioning, coping and well-being.



When to refer

When the client and/or the client's family appear to have complex, multi-layered issues – a combination of mental health needs (e.g. suicide risk, substance abuse, eating disorders), and practical needs (such as inadequate housing and unemployment), and family dynamic issues (such as family violence and severe family dysfunction).



Contacting the Professional

If a therapeutic professional is of the view that there are child protection concerns in a case, he or she would be expected to make a report to the National Anti-Violence and Sexual Harassment (NAVH) Helpline. Trained professionals will handle the calls, to provide guidance, safety advice and support. Where a child protection concern is identified, NAVH may refer the case to a designated Child Protection Case Management agency (e.g. a Family Service Centre, Protection Specialist Centre), which would have specialised expertise, resources, and statutory powers to lead a coordinated case management effort to address the child protection concerns. Police and lawyers should maintain close communication links and co-ordinate the sharing of information with the Child Protection Case Management agency, and take their guidance in account, to ensure the child's safety and well-being.

Where clients present with mental health challenges or concerns (that are not urgent, without immediate safety risks), lawyers can refer them to a counsellor or social worker as a first step. (If it is an urgent situation, presenting immediate safety risks, then call emergency services, or the Institute of Mental Health Helpline at 6389-2222, or Samaritans of Singapore at 1-767 (for suicide prevention). For clients who present with complex multi-layered issues or needs, a referral to a social worker is more suitable. The social worker or counsellor can assess whether further referral to a psychologist or psychiatrist is needed.

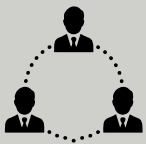


Available Therapeutic Resources

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Resources for your clients

You have access to a range of community resources to support clients' therapeutic and emotional needs, including family service centres, counselling services, family violence helplines, and mental health support services.



National Council of Social Service (NCSS) Supported Counselling Services

This initiative provides accessible and affordable counselling support to those in need through a network of counselling service providers across Singapore. The services are offered both in-person and online.

The counselling centres can support a wide range of needs/issues, including mental health concerns, such as anxiety and depression, intrapersonal challenges such as stress, self-esteem, identity, and grief, and interpersonal dynamics involving couples or families.

Subsidised rates are available for specific groups, such as Pioneer or Merdeka Generation cardholders, Blue or Orange Community Health Assist Scheme (CHAS) cardholders, full-time students from Ministry of Education schools (primary to tertiary level), and those receiving financial assistance from Social Service Offices or Restructured Hospitals.

Login/register for online counselling at this [link](#).

Website:

<https://familyassist.msf.gov.sg/content/resources/counselling/ways-to-seek-counselling/online-counselling/>



Family Service Centres (FSCs)

48 FSCs across Singapore provide counselling services amongst other services.

Access the [link](#) to view all the FSCs and their contact details



Strengthening Families Programme (FAM) Centres

11 locations providing counselling services focused on divorce-related issues.

Access this [link](#) to view all the FAM Centres and their contact details



Online Counselling on Family Assist (OCFA)

OCFA is an anonymous platform providing online counselling for individuals experiencing pre-marital, marital, parenting, divorce, and family-related issues. It is run by a team of qualified counsellors from the FAM centres.

OCFA is:

- Available to Singapore citizens, permanent residents and non-residents of Singapore with a Singapore nexus, aged 18 and above.
- Conducted over live chat, audio call, and email.
- Available from Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm (excluding public holidays) and on the eve of New Year, Chinese New Year and Christmas, 9am to 1pm.
- Anonymous (you are not required to reveal any personal details such as your name or NRIC).
- Free-of-charge.

Website:

<https://familyassist.msf.gov.sg/content/resources/counselling/ways-to-seek-counselling/online-counselling/>

Available Therapeutic Resources

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National Anti-Violence and Sexual Harassment Helpline (NAVH)

NAVH provides support for individuals experiencing:

- Family violence
- Child abuse concerns
- Sexual harassment
- Other forms of violence or abuse

When to Contact NAVH:

- If you or someone you know is experiencing abuse or violence
- To report suspected child abuse or neglect
- To report suspected vulnerable adult abuse
- For guidance on safety planning
- To access support services and resources

Hotline: 1800-777-0000 (24/7)

Online Reporting: Available through the NAVH Reporting Form at <https://go.gov.sg/navh>



Protection Specialist Centres (PSC)

Protection Specialist Centres (PSC) provide a holistic range of socio-emotional, supportive and practical services to survivors, including their families and other vulnerable members in the family in order to address the danger and likelihood of future harm posed to the survivors, and meet the survivors' needs.

- Support for family violence cases
- Services provided include:
 - Casework
 - Counselling
 - Application for personal protection orders

Care Corner Project StART

Tel: [6476 1482](tel:64761482)

Email: projectstart@carecorner.org.sg

Website: <https://www.carecorner.org.sg/services/family-violence-protection/>

PAVE Integrated Services for Individual and Family Protection Specialist Centre (ISIFPSC)

Tel: [65550390](tel:65550390)

Email: intake@pave.org.sg

Website: <https://pave.org.sg>

TRANS SAFE Centre

Tel: [64499088](tel:64499088)

Email: transsafe@trans.org.sg

Website: <https://www.trans.org/services/family-violence-protection-sexual-violence-recovery/>

First Stop for Mental Health services

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Youth Community Outreach Teams (CREST-Youth)

CREST-Youth conduct outreach to raise awareness of mental health issues and provide basic emotional support and screening to facilitate early identification and referrals of youth at risk of mental health conditions for further assessment and intervention if necessary.



Community Outreach Teams (CREST)

71 Community Outreach Teams (CREST) provide screening and basic mental health support to individuals aged 18 and above in the community.

CREST will link clients to other services for further assessment and intervention if necessary.

Use the Community Mental Health Wayfinding Tool in mindline to find the mental health service provider near you.

Go to: [mindline.sg/_/Free Mental Health Resources & Mindfulness Tools in Singapore](https://mindline.sg/_/Free_Mental_Health_Resources_&Mindfulness_Tools_in_Singapore)



The national mindline 1771

Singapore's national mental health helpline and textline which offers round-the-clock mental health support on an anonymous basis. The helpline will link clients to other services for further assessment and intervention if necessary.

Call 1771; or

Whatsapp at +65 6669 1771; or

Visit online at [Webchat](#)



mindline.sg

A digital mental health platform that hosts a plethora of more than 1,000 self-help tools, resources, an AI-enabled chatbot and online chat with counsellors and other fellow help-seekers. The counsellors will link clients to other services for further assessment and intervention if necessary.

Visit online at mindline.sg



CHAT – Centre of Excellence for Youth Mental Health in Singapore

CHAT runs a national youth mental health outreach and assessment service for youth and young adults aged 16 to 30. CHAT will link clients to other services for further assessment and intervention if necessary.

Youth and young adults could visit www.chat.mentalhealth.sg to access resources or request for an appointment to meet allied health professionals for mental health assessments and discuss resources available to address their needs.

Consent

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How should I get client consent for information-sharing?

You should ask the client whether they agree to you sharing information with the therapeutic professional, for the purpose of assisting with their mental health, emotional or social challenges and concerns, and keep an attendance note of this conversation. It would be good practice to keep a record of the client's written consent. You can then send this record to the therapeutic professional.



Example

Scenario: A 10-year-old has been showing symptoms of anxiety, bedwetting and school refusal after witnessing numerous parental arguments. The parents separated 3 months ago following physical and verbal abuse allegations. Each parent blames the other for the child's distress - the mother says the father is too strict, whilst the father says the mother nags but is also too permissive.

Lawyer to professional:

Hello, I'm representing one of the parents in this family where the parents are on bad terms and my client, the mother, is thinking of getting a divorce. They have a 10-year-old who is having anxiety, bedwetting and refusing to go to school. The parents have very different views on what's causing the child's behaviour. The mother has agreed for the child to go for counselling, to help the child. So I am contacting you to see if you can counsel the child and the mother. The mother's consented to me sharing information with you about the case and referring the case to you/your agency.

Maybe you can share what my client and the child can expect when you work with them, so I can let my client know? Anything that you would like to ask me about the case that you would find helpful?

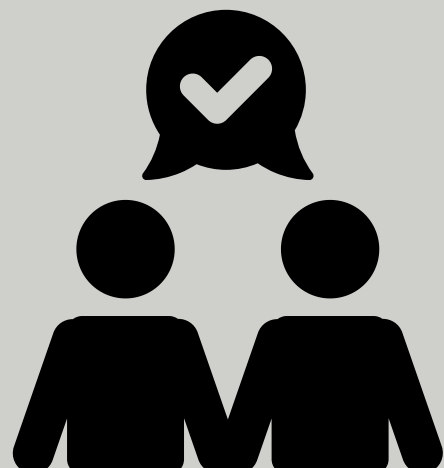
Assuming my client agrees to a referral to a suitable therapeutic professional, what information should I provide when referring a case?

- Explain that you are seeking support to help the family manage conflict and ensure the child's wellbeing.
- Share relevant information (with your client's consent) about the client. Provide a brief description of the family's background, circumstances and what help is required for the family. For example, if the child has bedwetting, school refusal, anxiety, or the client has insomnia and feels depressed.

Where necessary, you could ask the therapeutic professional how they intend to work with the client, what you can tell the client about the intervention to encourage the client to cooperate with the professional, and how you can work with the professional to support the client.

Note: FAM Centres^[1] require parental consent for the child to receive counselling services.

[1] FAM Centres = Strengthening Families Programme Centres



Seeking help



How do I talk to my client about seeking professional help for mental health challenges and concerns?

It is indeed a sensitive issue to talk to a client about seeking professional help for their or their child's mental health challenges and concerns. As your client is a parent, it can be useful to focus on the child's wellbeing.



Example

"Your child is showing clear signs of distress - the bedwetting, school refusal, and anxiety. He needs help before things get worse. Meeting with a counsellor will give him a safe space to talk about how he feels and process what is happening.

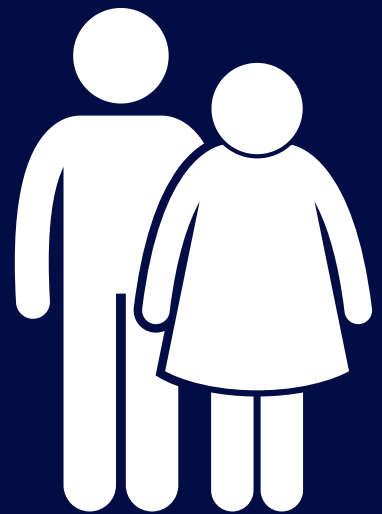
The counsellor can also help support you through this process - you deserve to have a safe space too, to talk about what you're going through. You can also learn how to support your child and get tips on co-parenting, so that he gets better. "

Educating the Client

How do I recognise when my client or the child needs therapeutic professional support?

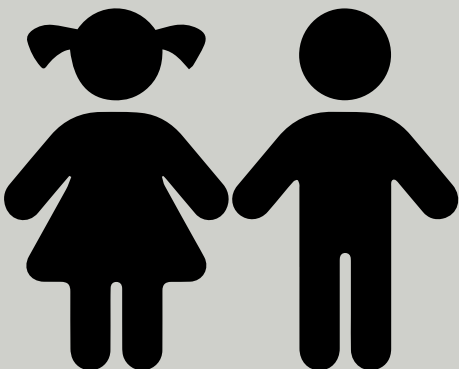
Warning signs for adults include:

- Intense feelings towards the other party, such that they cannot talk about them without getting highly emotional
- Emotional dysregulation in consultations (e.g. crying frequently, reacting explosively)
- Looping on the same grievances, being very repetitive, unable to move forward in the conversation
- Paranoia (e.g. Asking a lot of "what if" questions and raising hypothetical scenarios)
- Unable to make decisions or give instructions because they are too emotional
- Language of hopelessness or helplessness, e.g. "Nothing will ever change.", "I cannot take it anymore."

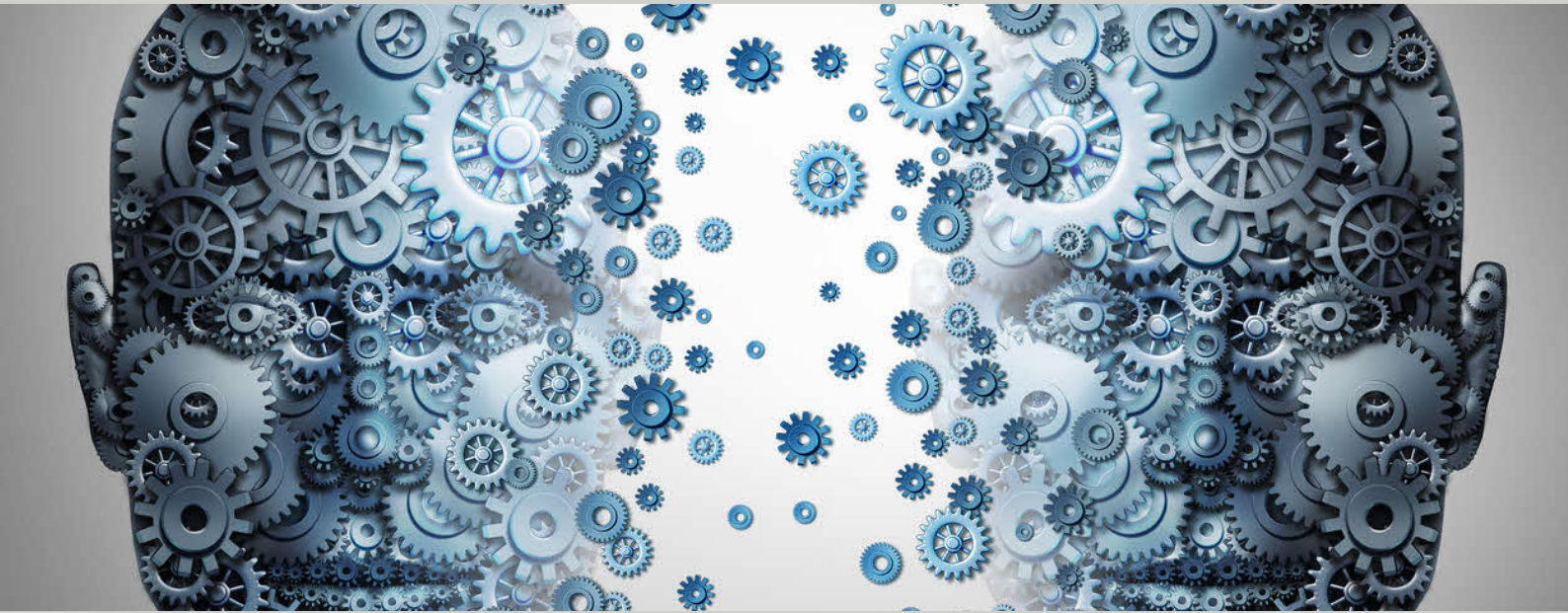


Warning signs for children include:

- Bedwetting in older children (indicating anxiety)
- Decline in school grades or School refusal
- Sudden loss of interest in hobbies or activities they used to enjoy
- Being extremely quiet, unlike previously
- Acting out, and/or behaving badly
- Child being caught physically/emotionally between parents during disputes
- Blaming themselves (e.g. the child saying "It is all my fault.")
- Highly sensitive to conflict or loud voices



Communication



How can I frame therapy positively?

It is important for lawyers to remain calm and convey a positive mindset towards therapy to encourage the client.

- Explain that seeking support demonstrates commitment to the child's wellbeing during custody and access proceedings
- Emphasise that counsellors are neutral parties who prioritise the child's best interests, they are not there to decide who is right or wrong
- Remind parents that children often blame themselves for parental conflict, and counselling helps them realise that they are not to blame

Some useful lines might be:

"Children often think they caused their parents' problems. Counselling helps them understand that adult relationships aren't their responsibility."

"Your child's reluctance to see the other parent might be because they feel caught in the middle of your conflict. A counsellor can help both of you understand what your child is really experiencing and find ways to make the situation less stressful for them."

"Seeking counselling doesn't mean there's anything wrong with you or your child - it proves you recognise your child is struggling and you're willing to get help. You going for counselling also shows that you recognise that you're in a challenging situation and are willing to do something about it. These are exactly what a responsible parent does during a crisis."



Part 2: Working with a Therapeutic Professional for a Forensic Purpose (Court Ordered Custody or Access Evaluation)

Working with a Therapeutic Professional

This section is relevant where the court has ordered a therapeutic professional, such as a psychologist from CPH, to furnish a custody evaluation report on the child.

The lawyer should keep in mind that in the majority of cases, both parents would still be involved in the child's life after the divorce, whether as the custodial or the access parent. The goal should be to send the client a message that cooperative co-parenting is in the child's best welfare, which starts with seeing the custody evaluation report as a tool to discover what parenting arrangements are the best for the child, rather than a contest to find out who is the "better" parent.



Contacting the Professional



Am I allowed to communicate with the professional doing the evaluation report?

Generally, the professional would not respond to lawyers who email them directly but would only communicate directly with the clients themselves. There are two reasons for this. The first is that the professional would wish to remain neutral between the parties, and not take sides – and thus it would not be appropriate to communicate just with one client’s lawyer, without making the communication transparent to the other client or the other client’s lawyer. Secondly, the professional and the lawyer play different roles. The lawyer advocates, argues and gathers evidence for the client’s court case. The professional assists the client with their mental health, emotional or social challenges and concerns. If a professional engages with lawyers, they might run the risk of getting involved in litigation strategy, and being distracted from their main role.

Therefore, the lawyer should ask his or her own client for information regarding the progress and content of the sessions.

If the lawyer wants to communicate with the professional for administrative and practical matters, for example to find out how many sessions are left (because the client could not provide this information), the other party’s lawyer (or the other party, if he or she is in person) should be copied on the communication.



Can I send court documents to the professional?

Generally, it would not be helpful to send the court documents (pleadings, affidavits) of the case to the professional. Court documents often contain legal arguments, allegations against the other party, and have an adversarial tone. It would be best to let the professional focus on what the parties and children have to say, without having to deal with the “noise” of all the court documents.



Can I ask to see the professional’s report?

Usually, the professional’s report will not be disclosed to the parties or their lawyers, but the court may share some recommendations in the report with the parties and also make reference to the report when making its orders.

Working with the Professional

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How do I support the professional's work?

The lawyer can support the professional's work by educating the client regarding their role and how the client can work with them.



Cooperation

Encourage client cooperation (e.g. turn up for appointments punctually, answer the professional's questions openly and frankly, follow the professional's advice on co-parenting, communications etc.). Caution the client that any incidents of non-cooperation would be documented in the report. The client should also respect professional boundaries, by being courteous and respectful to the professional, and being guided by them, rather than trying to set their own agenda.

For example, in a scenario where a mother insists that you contact the professional directly to explain her version of events before the professional sees either party, because she is convinced that the father is a "smooth talker" and she will not be able to communicate her views as clearly, some useful lines might be:

I understand your concerns, but trying to contact the professional directly like this, without notifying the other side, will make you look like you have a strong need to influence or control the process. It would be better for the professional to see that you respect boundaries and follow proper procedures - that actually supports your case about being the more stable parent.



Understanding their role

Explain that the professional is a neutral party who is dedicated to helping both parties resolve co-parenting issues to benefit the child's wellbeing and adjustment after divorce. Clients should trust the professional's training and experience, and the established framework and process of evaluation, which has been successfully applied to many other families.

Example of useful lines:

"Your child won't be asked to choose between you and their father. The professional will talk to them about how they're feeling and what would help them feel safer, not about who's the better parent."



Advise

Advise clients not to tell their children what to say, as the professionals can detect coached responses through children's behaviour and micro-expressions. This would harm their case - and coaching will also affect the children's psychological health. Also, advise the client not to ask the children what they said to the professional, as this would be stressful for the children and breach their confidentiality.

For example, in a scenario where the client tells the lawyer that he has asked the child to say to the professional that the mother is the one who makes it difficult for the child to see the father, the lawyer could say:

"Your child is in a difficult situation, because I am sure he loves both his parents, and is very distressed that you are separating. If you ask him to say certain things to the professional, you're adding more pressure and stress to him. The professional is trained to spot when children are repeating rehearsed answers, and it will make you look manipulative rather than protective. The best thing you can do is let your child speak honestly about their feelings. His time with the professional is supposed to be a safe space for him, so don't ask him what he said once he leaves the session."

Working with the Professional



How do I use the professional's recommendations constructively?

As stated earlier, the professional's report will not be disclosed to the parties or their lawyers. In some cases, the court may share some recommendations in the report with the parties and also make reference to the information in the report when making its orders.

When going through these recommendations with the client, it would be best to get the client to focus on what is in the child's best interests rather than on grievances they have with the other party or the therapeutic professional, and to emphasise that the evaluation is about understanding what best meets their child's needs, not a judgment on their parenting.



Example

For example, in a scenario where, pursuant to the evaluation report, the court ordered supervised access visits, and the child is increasing reluctant to see the father and the father's escalating behaviour in response (for example threatening to take the child away, making a scene during the access handover), some useful lines to the father might be:

"The supervised access is about helping your child feel safe again, it's not that you're not a good parent. I can see how much you care for your child and want to see him. But things have happened, and your child feels worried and anxious when he needs to see you. Supervised visits will let you rebuild that trust step by step, so eventually your child will look forward to spending time with you again. If the supervised visits go well, then we can try for unsupervised visits after that."



Part 3: Police

When should clients call the police when they are involved in an argument with their spouse?



Emergency Situation

It would be appropriate to call the police in emergency situations, when there is an urgent need for Police assistance. This is when:

- You have just witnessed a crime and it is still in progress.
- Someone suspected of committing a crime is close by, or you have information on his/her whereabouts.
- When you observe suspicious parcels left at public areas.



Non-Emergency Situation

For non-emergencies that do not warrant urgent Police assistance, you should make a Police report when:

- You are a victim of a crime, or a crime has been committed.
- A person is missing.



Example

- situations of violence (e.g. being hit, pushed, have something thrown at you),
- a threat of violence, serious intimidation or harassment (e.g. someone is breaking things, shouting at you, and preventing you from leaving the place, or refusing to leave your residence),
- threatening to harm themselves or others,
- if a child is in danger of being physically or sexually abused.

However, ordinary quarrels, arguments or disagreements where no threat or harm of the sort described above is present would be better managed by:

- a cooling-off period (one or more of the parties involved leaving the scene)
- calling a trusted friend or relative to help defuse the tension or
- seeking professional counselling or mediation help.



Example

In particular, parties should not file police reports just for "record purposes", or simply to harass the other party. Police reports should only be filed if there have been incidents of the sort described in the first paragraph, which genuinely warrant police investigation. If the parties are unsure of whether an incident warrants Police investigations, a police report may be lodged for the Police's assessment of the matter.



What will the police do when they are called to the scene?

The police will:

- Check for immediate threats to safety and take action to de-escalate the situation (e.g. to restrain any person who is being violent).
- Interview the parties involved.
- Conduct preliminary investigations to assess if any criminal offence is disclosed. If so, they may arrest the relevant person.
- In cases of domestic violence, the police will refer the case to PSV for further assessment and intervention. Police will also work alongside PSV's First Responders Team (FRT) for high-risk domestic violence cases with immediate safety concerns. This allows the Police to focus on managing the incident, while FRT officers attend to the victim-survivor's well-being and provide the necessary immediate social intervention.



What should clients do to cooperate with the police?

If the client is at the scene when the police arrive, they should:

- Give the police a truthful account of what transpired
- Answer all the questions the police ask them openly and frankly
- Speak to the police calmly and courteously, as this will enable the police to find out the relevant information more efficiently and assess the situation more quickly
- Show any relevant documents to the police, such as interim access orders or custody orders
- Follow the directions or suggestions of the police, e.g. if the police advise them to leave the scene or ask them to come with them to the police station.



Can evidence from police interactions be used in court?

Any police report a client makes can be obtained and used as evidence. However, how much weight should be given to police reports is a separate issue. Little weight will be given to such evidence if they are considered self-serving, for example, they only contain one party's version of events, and they are filed in respect of incidents which occurred some time ago, rather than contemporaneously.

It should be noted that the police will generally not release information obtained for the purpose of criminal proceedings to any other party, as such information is obtained pursuant to their powers to investigate crimes, which are not to be used for any other purpose. Therefore, if you write to ask the police for evidence obtained on, for example, your client's spouse's pending theft case, even if it is relevant to your client's custody dispute with the spouse, the police are unlikely to accede to your request.



This guide provides lawyers with practical tools to work effectively with therapeutic professionals and police in high conflict custody cases. The scenarios and scripts offered are starting points that must be adapted to each family's unique circumstances.

Successful collaboration amongst these three professional groups serves the best interests of children and families in crisis. By embracing these partnerships rather than viewing them as obstacles, lawyers can help clients achieve outcomes that prioritise their children's wellbeing alongside their legal rights.

The children and families we serve deserve our coordinated best efforts. When lawyers, therapeutic professionals, and police work together with mutual respect and clear communication, we transform the legal process from a source of conflict into a pathway for healing and resolution.

Every case is different, but our shared commitment to protecting children remains constant. This guide provides the foundation—now it is up to each practitioner to put these collaborative principles into practice.