

A Discussion of, “Who can conduct child custody evaluations and offer parenting coordination services?”

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All Mental Health Professionals can conduct custody evaluations and act as Parenting Coordinators as long as: (1) Their credentials are acceptable to the Court and (2) They are not specifically excluded from this activity by either their state licensing agency in the states where the services will be performed or their professional associations.

Currently, custody evaluations and parenting coordination services are being offered by every type of mental health professional including (but not limited to): Psychologists, Psychiatrists, Social Workers, Marriage and Family Therapists, Marriage and Family Counselors, Professional Counselors, Certified Mental Health Professionals, etc.

PACE is accepted as a national mental health professional organization and has been for since 1991.

PACE has been approved and granted continuing education provider status by the American Psychological Association (APA), the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), the California Board of Behavioral Sciences, and the Judicial Council of California. In the future, PACE will be applying for additional state and national memberships.

PACE, as a recognized national mental health organization, has the right to certify qualified mental health professionals to practice certain specific specialty fields such as conducting custody evaluations or acting as parenting coordinators. The training and experience criteria established by PACE as the basis for certification must meet normally accepted standards within the mental health industry.

PACE, in essence, acts as a clearinghouse, making certain that the elements of the current criteria are in place so that Courts throughout the land can accept with confidence the national certification held by the mental health professionals in question.

The credentialing of PACE's Registered Custody Evaluators (R.C.E.) has already been accepted throughout the U.S. The new certification, Nationally Certified Custody Evaluators™(NCCE) follows the same guidelines established by PACE in 1991. Additionally, ongoing continuing education requirements have been made part of the certification renewal.

States have been concentrating their licensing efforts on mental health professionals who offer therapy to individuals and couples. Conducting custody evaluations and/or providing parenting coordination are regarded as specialty services provided by mental health professionals. Most states do not require licensing for mental health professionals who are licensed in another state and are providing specialty services of a non-permanent nature in their state. It is relatively easy to contact a state's licensing bureau to see if there are special compliance rules for out-of-state mental health professionals offering custody evaluation or parenting coordination services. Our research has not found any such states at this time (March of 2010). However, if you are not licensed in a state where you intend to offer services, it would be prudent to first contact the licensing board in that state.

PACE has plans to contact every state's mental health licensing bureau to educate them about Nationally Certified Custody Evaluators™ (NCCE) and Nationally Certified Parenting Coordinators™ (NCPC)

PACE's credentials have three levels of regulatory supervision built in:

- (1) The individual must have a state license or be certified by an approved mental health membership association.
- (2) The individual must be a member in good standing of an approved mental health membership association.
- (3) The individual must meet PACE's Criteria as to education, training, and experience.
- (4) The individual's credentials must be accepted by the Court.

The individual is certified by PACE only when numbers 1, 2, 3, and 4 are shown to be active and in good standing.