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**Assessments: Mental Health, Ability to Parent, Psych Evals, Suitability for Residential Placement and Bonding.**

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**Psychological Evaluations**

- A Psychological Evaluation is a procedure in which a mental health professional is appointed by the court to determine a diagnosis or label for a person's psychology, behavior or personality and to make recommendations which a judge can take into account when making a ruling.
  - A formal evaluation including several basic components: Interview, records review, collateral contacts, one on-one testing, diagnosis, recommendations
- This evaluation includes a clinical interview
  - Look for consistency in answers- way to discern the truth and if client is having a good/bad day
- Always has the dependency petition or LOCA with the allegations that brought the case in
  - Goes through each allegation in the petition and allows client to answer/ explain
- Interview includes background history- education, family, abuse history, etc.
- Includes testing
- Assessor always speaks to the case manager.
- **They do not know there is a GAL on the case unless you contact whoever is conducting the psych evaluation. They want to hear from you about concerns or issues you would like addressed during the evaluation. They cannot reach out to you, but love hearing from you prior to the assessment. You have the most information!! If you send a copy of your court appointment they will send you a copy of their report when they send to the case manager. You can find out who is performing the assessment from the case manager- they are the ones who do the referral.**
- **Difference between psychological and psychiatric evaluation- psychiatric eval is typically done for medication and is much more limited in scope. Please make sure that if a psychiatric evaluation is ordered that a copy of the psychological evaluation is provided to the M.D.**
- The evaluator in a psychological evaluation will proffer recommendations. They often include therapeutic recommendations (individual therapy, group therapy, family therapy, couples counseling, substance abuse treatment and psychiatric eval for meds), recommendation for further evaluations (developmental, psychoeducational, psychosexual, etc.), related services. Recommendations must be brought to the attention of the Court.
- **To perform a psychological evaluation on a child the child must be verbal (generally over 3 years old). Children 3 and under can go to the Mailman Center for developmental evaluation, bonding/attachment evaluation and also sexual abuse eval.**
- Assessment results depend on when during a case the assessment is performed (when a case first comes in and there are no services, during services, towards the end of a case plan). Age also must be considered.

**Mental Health Assessments**

- **The biggest difference between a mental health assessment and a psychological evaluation is the assessor does not give any psychological measures. If you have concerns you want a full psychological!**
- **TPR are rarely based on a mental health assessment alone.**
- **They are used to understand mental health needs and develop a treatment plan**

## **The #1 question the psychologists ask is “why was this referral made”?**

Psychologists rarely see the client again after an evaluation. At the onset they will make recommendations for services. After that your best information will come from the actual service providers. Update evaluations are not usually done (because of the cost factor and that Medicaid doesn't normally pay 2x).

- From the providers you should be able to get information regarding compliance with ordered services. Their commitment to services is a good indicator of their commitment to getting their children back.

## **Ability to Parent**

- There is no assessment to determine “insight”
- Look for compassion and empathy as well as structure and regularity
- Parents need to be able to provide safety, caring, loving in addition to food, shelter and education.
- Working parents often have difficulty complying with services and keeping their job. This should be a consideration when scheduling.
  - Children can also become overwhelmed with services- that is when the GAL needs to step up... maybe services can be combined or scheduling staggered.

## **Suitability Assessments for Residential Placement**

- Statutory requirement
  - Determines the suitability for placement in residential treatment (2 types of facilities: locked psychiatric residential program- SIPP...statewide inpatient psychiatric program or specialized therapeutic group home). Dade County has neither type of placement. There is one of each in Broward. The location of these facilities makes family therapy and visitation very difficult.
    - The child must have an emotional disturbance serious enough to require residential treatment and they must be reasonably likely to benefit from the treatment
    - Psychological, medical, educational and dental evaluations must be done
    - All less restrictive treatment alternatives must have been considered that would offer the same benefits and that they are unavailable.
  - A SIPP can mechanically and chemically restrain/treat a child. This is NOT the case in a specialized therapeutic group home. Staff is not allowed to chase or restrain a child.
  - SIPPSS do not want delinquent children or behavior problems. Mental health difficulties must supercede behavioral issues
  - Recommendations are made at the court hearing and the Judge makes the final placement determination.
    - A child cannot be placed in a SIPP without a suitability assessment
  - Statute requires that once a child is placed in a SIPP there must be a review every 90 days to determine if the child still qualifies for the residential placement. This must be done by an outside provider.
  - Intervention is a two way street and the child must be able to benefit from the program.
  - The psychologist can only recommend if a child meets criteria for placement or not- they cannot recommend any other placement) in a suitability assessment.
  - Reports must be sent to Magellan- they cannot be sent to the GAL until approved by Magellan
  - Sometimes there is a separate unit for human sexual trafficking victims.
    - Oftentimes, these victims do not even recognize that they have been abused.
    - Although we want them off the street, they may not have a diagnosis.
    - They should be kept separate from the children with mental health issues.
  - When children come out of a SIPP unit they need an even greater support system. They need a transition and they need structure.
    - They need strong advocates.
    - Their parents (if they are being released to their parents) need training
    - Services should be in place (like a CBA)
    - They need gradual reintegration.

## **Bonding/ Attachment Assessment**

- Not statutory
- A type of evaluation used to determine the quality and nature of a child's bond or attachment to a particular person(s)
- Bonding is a process between a parent/care giver and the child. It is an interaction.
- Attachment occurs on different levels and is developmental.
- Does the child see the parent, foster parent, relative as their primary caregiver
- The attachment the child has is based upon their experiences with an adult over the course of time.
- This is important because a child's early attachments are directly related to their ability to develop healthy relationships and to mature in a psychologically healthy manner over their lifetime.
  - Children who have not formed any healthy attachments by age 3 have a difficult road ahead
- Bonding allows for attachments to occur
- The psychologist will not opine on the parent/child relationship without having met with both the parent(s) and child(ren).