

Child Custody Evaluations: A Practical Guide. Dianne Skafté. Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, Inc., 1985, 250 pages, \$12.50.

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For such emotion-laden and sober subject matter, the author writes in an interesting, understandable and sometimes refreshingly witty style. Her great depth of knowledge and experience in the subject area are obvious from the outset, but are conveyed in a delightfully non-pedantic fashion.

The book abounds in concrete practical helps for the novice and the experienced practitioner alike. The first chapter contains a sample *Personal Data Questionnaire* which would prove an efficient tool for gathering necessary factual information about the litigants themselves, as well as consents needed to contact various collaterals. Sample fictitious "case notes" taken during the evaluation process are included at the end of each chapter and relate to the preceding material.

In my opinion, these "case notes" make the book. They are highly informative in suggesting the kind of material which needs to be gathered during the various interviews, but they are also much more. Skafté masterfully uses these notes to transport the reader from a realm of theory and casework practice to a world of reality and honest feeling, from the standpoints of both litigants and evaluator.

The book also has a wealth of information on interviewing techniques in general, and an excellent chapter on interviewing children specifically. This book could easily be incorporated into any college social service or counseling curriculum.

On the whole, the author presents a rational and logical procedure for conducting the custody evaluation and preparing the final written report. A quote from page 145 of the book provides a good summary of Skafté's basic philosophical approach.

The best plan for the child, therefore, will be the one that maximizes his or her chances for full development of the "self" in the new family structure. For our purposes (and for court testimony later on), we identify three primary aspects of the self: the physical, the emotional/social, and the intellectual. The child must be nurtured in all three areas to thrive successfully in the world. Each parent can contribute differently to this process. What living situation and time-sharing plan will provide the child with the best from each parent? The answer to this one question constitutes the "best interests of the child."

For those agencies which have the legal responsibility for conducting custody evaluations, this book would be an invaluable resource for the personnel involved. The same holds true for the private practitioner, and in many ways would prove more valuable for the latter group who are sought for their expertise by the private sector.

