



MASS Private Practice Service Information

CHILDREN:

1. Socio-Emotional assessment (SEA)

A socio-emotional assessment offers a comprehensive and holistic understanding of a child's experience within the various significant relationships and systems in their life. This process is designed to explore the child's development, environmental context (family, peers, and school), and individual factors to gain a deeper insight into their emotional and social well-being. The purpose of this assessment is to evaluate how different systems in the child's life interact with and impact the child's socio-emotional functioning. It aims to understand the child's emotional responses to these systems and identify the factors contributing to their current experiences. Based on this understanding, the assessment may include recommendations that prioritize the best interests of the child. The social worker also administers the Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) and Trauma symptoms questionnaire to assess broader trauma, that may impact the child's emotional and psychological development.

The process entails:

- a) Individual assessment with the child, ensuring a child-centered approach
- b) Interviews with both parents to gather background information / parental questionnaires
- c) Collateral sources, such as teachers or other relevant family members/persons to gather additional information
- d) Verbal feedback to parents/ social worker/ other professionals involved or, Formal report.
- e) If necessary, the child may be referred for further assessments or therapy to support their emotional well-being.

2. Forensic evaluation

An abuse investigation is a thorough, evidence-based process designed to investigate allegations of abuse in a structured and objective manner. The Forensic Social Worker follows the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) protocol and utilizes the Comprehensive Assessment Model to conduct forensic interviews into allegations of abuse. These established frameworks ensure a detailed and systematic approach to understanding the facts and considering alternative hypotheses. Upon completion of the investigation, a comprehensive court report is compiled, detailing the hypotheses and/or findings. If necessary, the forensic social worker is available to serve as an expert witness in court, providing professional testimony to support the integrity and outcomes of the investigation.

3. Voice of the Child / Child Participation assessment

Section 10 of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 states that every child who is of such age, maturity, and developmental stage has the right to participate in matters that concerning them—and that their views must be taken into account. This assessment honors that right by creating a safe, supportive space for the child to express their thoughts, experiences, and wishes. Through the use of techniques, the child is encouraged to share their perspective in a way that feels natural and age appropriate. The social worker makes use of the Voice of the Child toolkit, a specialized resource tool, designed to help children meaningfully participate in decisions that affect their lives.

ADULTS

1. Parental Coordination

A Parental Coordinator (PC) supports parents in resolving ongoing parenting disputes, with a strong focus on promoting the best interests of the child(ren) and reducing conflict between parents. The role of the PC combines elements of mediation, education, negotiation, and decision-making, helping parents navigate complex co-parenting challenges more constructively. While the PC facilitates communication and collaboration between parents, they are also authorized—depending on the terms of the agreement—to issue directives when consensus cannot be reached. This ensures that decisions are made in a timely and child-focused manner, helping families move forward with greater stability and clarity.

2. Risk and Safety assessment tool

The Risk and Safety Assessment Tool is used to systematically evaluate factors that may place a child at risk of harm, as well as to identify protective elements within the child's environment. This structured tool assists the social worker in assessing both immediate safety concerns, and long-term risks related to abuse, neglect, or exposure to harmful situations. The assessment explores various domains—including the child's home environment, caregiver capacity, behavioral indicators, and historical concerns—to guide informed decision-making. The primary aim is to ensure the child's safety and well-being, while supporting appropriate interventions where needed.

3. Mediation & Parenting Plans

Mediation is a constructive, solution-focused process led by a neutral and impartial professional—the mediator—who supports individuals in resolving conflict through open and respectful dialogue. Rather than imposing decisions, the mediator facilitates a safe and confidential space where both parties can express their needs, concerns, and perspectives. The aim is to reduce tension, explore areas of disagreement, and work towards mutual, acceptable solutions. Mediation empowers people to take an active role in resolving their own challenges, helping them move forward with clarity and confidence. It is especially valuable in emotional situations, such as family or divorce matters, where finding common ground can benefit everyone involved, especially minor children.

The mediation process:

Step 1: Agreement to mediate

During the first session, the mediator works with both parties to establish a clear agreement that outlines the goals, boundaries, and expectations for the mediation process. This agreement forms the foundation of a respectful and collaborative working relationship. Sessions can take place either in person or virtually, depending on what is most convenient and comfortable for the parties involved.

Step 2: Identification of challenges and setting of the agenda

The mediator assists both parties to develop a structured agenda which ensures that discussions remain focused on the key issues at hand. This approach supports clear, respectful, and effective communication, allowing each person the opportunity to be heard and understood.

Step 3: Joint Mediation Sessions

The parties will meet with the mediator for a series of joint sessions designed to facilitate constructive dialogue and problem-solving.

The focus areas include:

- a) Exploring options and alternatives to address the challenges at hand
- b) Empowering both parties to make informed decisions
- c) Developing effective communication strategies for healthier interactions
- d) Creating strategies for managing future conflict in a positive way
- e) Identifying solutions to specific issues that are fair and acceptable to both parties
- f) Collaboratively drafting a parenting plan that is mutually agreed upon, prioritizing the best interests of minor children involved.

Step 4: Review

Once the sessions are complete, the parties have the opportunity to review all agreements, with particular focus on the parenting plan. After both parties sign the parenting plan, it can be submitted to the court, where it may be considered a legally binding document. It is often recommended that parties seek legal advice to review the agreement before signing it, ensuring that all aspects are understood and in line with their best interests.

Step 5: Implementation of the Parenting Plan

Parties have the option to formalize their mediation agreements by requesting an official order of the court and/or the Family Advocate's Office be made, ensuring that the agreement are legally recognized and enforceable.

BOTH CHILDREN AND ADULTS:

1. Care and Contact investigations

The aim of a care and contact investigation is to determine the most suitable arrangements for children and their parents, guardians, or co-holders of parental responsibilities. This investigation considers the perspectives of the child(ren), parents, significant family members, teachers, therapists, and other relevant individuals who can provide valuable insights. All conclusions and recommendations are made in line with the best interests of the child, as outlined in Chapter 2, Section 7 of the Children's Act 38/2005.

Care and Contact Investigations Include:

- a) Voice of the Child assessments with the child(ren) to understand their needs and preferences
- b) Interviews with both parents or guardians involved in the matter
- c) Structured & unstructured interactional analysis
- d) Home visits to assess the living environments of both parties
- e) Collateral interviews with professionals who may have relevant information
- f) Mediation, if applicable, to help the parties reach mutually agreeable solutions.

2. Interactional Analysis

An interactional analysis is an evidence-based assessment that examines the interaction between a child and a caregiver/parent. This type of assessment focuses on key aspects of the relationship, including attachment, communication, boundaries, responsiveness to needs, emotional nurturing, reactions to instruction, and the dynamics of separation and reunification. By observing these interactions, the assessment provides valuable insight into the attachment style, parenting style, and relational patterns between the child and caregiver, which can inform decisions in the child's best interest. This assessment can be done in a structured environment (office), or unstructured (child's home/parent's residence).

3. Home visits

Home visit assessments are conducted to evaluate the safety, well-being, and overall living conditions of children within their home environment. These visits are used to identify both potential risks and protective factors that may impact the child's welfare. The specific focus and scope of a home visit may vary depending on the nature and purpose of the investigation, but the overarching goal remains the same: to ensure that the child's living environment supports their physical, emotional, and developmental needs.

4. Supervised contact

Supervised contact is often recommended when there are concerns about a child's emotional or physical safety during interactions with one or both parents. The primary goal is to ensure the child's safety while maintaining contact with the parent in a secure, conflict-free environment. Contact under supervision is when there is continued contact between the child and the parent, in the presence of an objective, neutral third party. This arrangement is typically used in cases where there are allegations of physical or sexual abuse, neglect, parental alienation, or family violence, ensuring that interactions are closely monitored to protect the child's well-being.