

Therapeutic Perspectives When Working with Impaired Clients

Considerations for the GAL evaluation process

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AFCC MA Conference
Regis College, Weston, MA
April 30, 2010

ROLES

What you are not:

Advocate

Therapist

Legal representative

ROLES

- What you can be:

Independent finder of factual information

Independent evaluator (testing)

GAL Appointments Standards

- Category E - Evaluator
- Category F - Investigator

Case Management

- Prepare your clients
 - Remind them that you are not their therapist or advocate
 - Explain the process

Case Management

- Prepare yourself
 - Sometimes evaluations hurt
 - Stay in your role as the GAL

FUNCTIONING AS A GAL

- You are a finder of fact – examine your biases
- As a mental health person you can use your clinical skills to aid your fact finding
- Hunches or clinical ‘intuition’ can be used to help you find the data but not interpret data
- Clinical knowledge can lead you to inspect areas of potential data for usefulness, validity, and educating the Court.

Issues in Management

Meeting with your client

Location

Issue of true informed consent

Number of times

Request for supporting documents

Outline of Evaluation Procedures

(Use of psychological testing?)

Special Assessments as indicated

PSYCHOLOGICAL TESTING

- Diagnosing (technical term v descriptive)
- Concerns about using psychological testing
- Positives about using psychometrics
- Be careful who you choose as an evaluator

Examples of Some Tests

- Structured interviews
- Checklists
- Personality Inventories
- Projective personality tests
- Tests of general intellectual functioning
- Tests of memory functioning
- Tests for neuropsychological impairment
- Tests for specific disorders

Mental Illness

- Remember to describe, use labels sparingly – ask when you don't understand
- Key to effects of mental illness is severity and functional impairment NOT diagnostic label
- Ask the GAL or evaluator to explain why they gave certain tests – make sure you understand what the test can and cannot do

Clinical Questioning

What to ask and how?

- What do you need to know?
 - What type of mental illness or difficulties does a parent have? (Looks like diagnosis)
 - How long have they been this way? (severity)
 - Why are they this way? (etiology)
 - How does it affect their parenting? (functional impairment question)
 - What type of treatment, if any, is applied?

Labeling of mental illness?

- Not all are created equal
- Most wax and wane
- Some are more treatable than others
- Many, when treated effectively, do not functionally impair parenting
- Most, when untreated, carry the potential to affect parenting – your job is to understand how.

Questions to ask

- When did you begin to experience (list symptoms) these problems?
- Tell me how long this has been going on?
- Have you had any treatment? What type?
- Do you take medication? What type? How often?
- Are you in therapy? With whom? How often?

More Questions

- Is your therapy helpful? How so?
- How do you think _____ has affected your parenting? What do you have to be careful of?
- Do your children know?
- Do you have supports in your community?
- Do you comply with treatment?
- How do you feel about your treatment?

And On We Go.....

- Get a detailed accounting of all the medications, all the providers
- Make a time line of illness
- Ask about stressors that may bring on the condition
- Ask about parents ability to perceive stressors

Questions for parents

- Tell a story about a situation you have found difficult in parenting and how you have handled it.
- What is most stressful for you when you are having difficulty?
- What supports you or keeps you from doing what you need to do as a parent?

- Can the parent admit when they are having difficulty?
- What does the parent do to take care of the child's needs when the parent is having difficulty?
- Ask a parent to tell you how they know when they are having a hard time?

Areas of interest

- When assessing functional impairment and severity look at the following:
 - What parental tasks are affected (preparation of food, getting kids to school, supervising activities)?
 - How disabled does the MI make the parent?
 - How often does the MI get in the way?
 - Does the parent plan for difficult times?

- Does the other parent use the MI against the parent?
- Consider the developmental needs of the child – these shift over the course of time.
- What is the child's understanding of the parent's illness?
- What issues does it raise for the child(ren)?

Conclusion

- The presence of a major mental illness does not preclude adequate or good parenting
- Not all mental illnesses are equal
- It is important to assess severity
- Understanding stressors/conditions leading to a relapse is important
- Functional impairment is key to understanding impact on parenting