

A Comprehensive Guide to Child Custody Evaluations: Mental Health and Legal Perspectives

By Roanna Bunker Rohrbaugh. New York: Springer, 2008. 702 pp. \$89.95.

After performing child custody evaluations for over 30 years, I am delighted to find a book from which I can still learn and which, I hope, will make me a better forensic child psychiatrist. This superb guide is a must for neophytes as well as experienced evaluators. It is clearly a product of a great deal of research and planning by Dr. Rohrbaugh, a member of the Department of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School.

The target audience for *A Comprehensive Guide to Child Custody Evaluations: Mental Health and Legal Perspectives* is family and probate judges, matrimonial attorneys, and forensic mental health professionals. The volume comes with a CD containing pertinent forms for motions and reports. Although the book is geared to three different groups, it is a must read for all professionals involved in child custody.

The book is divided into three parts. Part I discusses the role of child custody evaluators and includes standards and guidelines. (Missing are the Practice Parameters on Child Custody Evaluations promulgated by the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry.) Chapters are devoted to science and pseudoscience in child custody evaluations; professional roles and ethics-related concerns; standards for the resolution of child custody disputes; legal topics, such as collaborative versus adversarial law practice, gender bias, and fees; and argu-

ments for and against rendering a definitive custody recommendation.

Part II focuses on developmental needs of children and families, high-conflict families, and parenting plans.

Part III is devoted to the use of psychological tests within custody evaluations and the evaluation itself.

Part IV is about special subjects, such as family diversity, relocation, alienation, parental kidnapping, mental illness in parents, substance abuse, domestic violence, and child abuse and neglect.

The book contains a large reference list that is sure to help custody evaluators who need social science support for their reports and testimony, as well as a glossary. Throughout the text are boxed sections that highlight the text and provide specific and detailed supplements. These make the reading much more productive and inclusive.

Every aspect of child custody disputes is covered in a comprehensive manner. The book can serve as a reference, as every chapter is self-contained. It can also be read cover to cover if one wishes. The book flows well, as it is written by one person. The sections on writing a report and special subjects are especially good and very detailed. I was most impressed with the author's writing on parental kidnapping and relocation.

The book will serve as a guiding light for a long time to come for those involved in these highly emotional and fraught evaluations. Nothing, though, takes the place of having a mentor. The two together should make a professional feel more secure. Regardless of how experienced you are, *A Comprehensive Guide to Child Custody Evaluations* should be kept handy.

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