



**Key Questions to ask court-appointed professionals/ therapists/ psychiatrists and others when coercive control tactics are being used in your relationship**

- How many hours of training do you have in Coercive Control Tactics in relationships?  
*Look for a minimum of 7-14 hours.*
- How many hours of training do you have in Dynamics of Domestic Violence in Relationships?  
*Look for a minimum of 14-28 hours*
- How many hours of training do you have on the Effects of Domestic Violence on Children?  
*Did that include long-term emotional and physical impacts?*  
*Look for a minimum of 7-14 hours*
- What is your understanding of the use of children as leverage by an abusive parent in high conflict/contested custody cases?  
*Watch out for use of terms like parental alienation, parental alienation syndrome, or similar terms. These are "red flags" this person does not understand Coercive Control Tactics.*

If you are required to go to therapy for yourself or for reunification of your children with their abusive parent, or your children are required to go to therapy, add these questions to the ones above.

- When parents are no longer living together, how do you work with both parents around issues concerning their children?
- How do you approach financial abuse of one parent by the other parent in therapy when the child is the client/patient? For example, one parent pays, but the other parent brings in the child and refuses to allow the other parent access to what is talked about in therapy or access to the therapist.

*Is the parent who brings the child to therapy responsible for paying for part or all of the therapy?*

*Are both parents equally responsible for payment for therapy?*

- What is your approach to working with children's emotional, social, and cognitive development in shared parenting situations where prior Domestic Violence or Coercive Control Tactics are witnessed by a child?

*Look out for therapists who are more interested in reunification of a child who does not want contact with the other parent than meeting the emotional needs of the child.*

*How willing is the therapist to explore, work with, and understand why a child does not want contact with one parent?*

Protective mothers often find that court-appointed professionals listen differently to them than to their spouses/partners by holding them to a higher standard of care and responsibility for their children. In many cases, mothers talk about being interviewed for a much longer time period of by the GAL/CLR, the Child and Family Investigator, or Parental Responsibility Evaluator/Custody Evaluator than the father. The reports that come from these court-appointed professionals tend to be biased toward the father, giving him much more leeway to make parenting errors. It is as if the father has not had major responsibilities for the children, but now that he does he is not required to show the same level of responsibility as the mother.

Another issue that mothers continually bring to my attention is alienation. Mothers are held responsible for the father's behavior. His being uninvolved, harsh, or referring to the mother negatively when the children do not want to spend time with him are seen as the mother's fault. The father blames the mother, through the court-appointed professional, and recommendations are made to limit mother's time with the children or even require supervised visits.

The truth is that the father is creating the circumstances where the children do not want to be connected with him. When the father does not comply with court orders, he is backed up by court-appointed professionals and the mother becomes the target of his blame. The father

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is not held accountable and the mother is punished. Sometimes the mother is punished by being held in contempt of court and being required to pay fines or pay the father's legal fees. Other ways mothers are punished are loss of primary parenting time, loss of joint legal or physical custody. In some cases, mothers are restricted to supervised visits or jailed.

Mothers and their children are sent to "reunification therapy" to improve the relationship between the children and the father. Courts often require mothers to force the children to see the father and spend time with him even if his actions and behaviors are causing the children to avoid parenting time with him. Because the blame is placed on the mother, she is required to pay for the therapy and the father is not responsible for any of the costs.

Mothers who listen to their children's concerns about their fathers and attempt to protect the children from the father's abuse or neglect share with me their children's reactions to forced parenting time with their fathers. Younger children, who are abused physically or sexually by their fathers, may experience multiple problems. These may show up as nightmares or night terrors, unwillingness to see their father in a supervised setting, or begging their mother not to make them go with daddy.

Older children have refused to see their father and either hide when he arrives for his parenting time or leave their home to hide with their friends. In one case, their father so negatively impacted two teenage boys when he took them to his home, they refused to see him except in a public location. When the father insisted the boys come to his home, where the father's girlfriend encourages the father to abuse the boys, the older boy told a counselor that he wanted to kill his father and commit suicide. This resulted in the boy's hospitalization. The father reacted by threatening the younger boy, through his school counselor, to force him to come for parenting time. This boy became physically sick and was picked up from school. He, then, refused to go back to that school. Eventually, the mother helped this boy decide to return to the school he was attending.

Court-appointed professionals are more interested in parents' rights than in children's responses to their parents. They refuse to learn and understand that these children are responding to the abuse and violence they were exposed to that led to the dissolution of the parent-child relationship. Court-appointed personnel are often focused on forcing relationships that do not work, and the ultimate price is the long-term impacts on the children. The questions above are provided for you to ask court-appointed therapists/counselors if you are required by the court to involve your children with their services.