

Frequently Asked Questions of the FCI

1. What is a Custody Evaluation/Investigation?

A custody investigation is a fair and impartial examination of the dynamics and issues impacting a family, which are preventing custody and visitation issues from being resolved between the parents. This is an extensive process and requires the Investigator to meet with each of the parties individually, as well as the children, and to contact collateral resources such as police, school and CPS records. The Investigator might also contact teachers, therapist, doctors, treatment facilities and anyone else who may have insight into the issues of the family. Parties involved may need (or be requested) to provide the Investigator with pertinent information, release of information forms or documents, prior to the report deadline. Children over the age of (12) may also need to sign a release. After a thorough examination of the issues, the Investigator/GAL prepares a report for the Court and makes recommendations regarding custody and/or visitation issues, which takes into consideration best interests of the child. These reports could also include recommendations about services the parents might be expected to complete.

2. Why do I need an Investigator?

The parties or their attorney's may request an Investigator, or the Judge may request an Investigator based on a number of reasons. Sometimes the issues are so complex the Judge does not have the time to sort them out from the bench and sometimes the Court would like the children interviewed or the CPS records reviewed.

3. Who are the Family Court Investigator's? Are they the same as a GAL (Guardian ad Litem)?

The Family Court Investigator is a trained experienced professional who has completed the Guardian ad Litem training and has other extensive training as well. In Yakima County the FCI has a master's degree in Education Counseling and has completed the Child Abuse Interviewing and Assessment Training. The Investigator has experience working with the courts and is trained in assessing family issues such as substance abuse, domestic violence, mental illness, communication skills, problem solving skills, child development and dysfunctional family systems. The investigator is also knowledgeable of community resources and in the laws governing Family Court issues. The main difference between a Family Court Investigator and a GAL is the Court Investigator does NOT go out to the homes, and once the report is completed the Court Investigator is discharged. The Court Investigator will not go to further hearings, but if there is a trial the investigator WILL go to the trial and testify if necessary.

4. What are the fees for an Investigation?

The fees are set by the Judge and the Order Appointing FCI will specify each party's dollar amount. The fees can vary but are usually split between the parties and the fees are to be paid in the clerk's office prior to meeting with the Investigator. The Court Investigator cannot meet with you until proof of payment is provided. It is very rare that the fees are waived as the Family Court Program is funded by these fees.

5. How long will it take to complete the report?

The length of time it takes to complete each investigation or evaluation and report varies depending on the complexity of the issues, the proximity of the parties, and whether or not one or two parties miss their appointments, delaying the process. A report may be completed without your participation if the other party chooses to move forward. If the investigator is waiting for CPS reports and they have not arrived, the investigator may ask for a continuance in order to read the CPS reports prior to interviewing the parties. However, once an investigation begins, it is likely to be completed in approximately 12 weeks.