

Abstract

Experience sharing on the challenges in dealing with divorced / divorcing couples wrestling with the custody and access issues of their children

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The phenomenon of divorce/separation of couples is getting more and more prevalent in contemporary Hong Kong families. When these parents cannot agree between themselves on the custody/access arrangement of their children or when the court has concern over these areas, the latter may call for a social investigation/welfare report and further updates from the Social Welfare Department (SWD) for assistance in determining the custody or access matters. Where necessary, the responsible social work officers may also be requested to attend court for cross-examination, child dispute resolution or other purposes as deemed appropriate by court. As regards cases with access problems or childcare problems, depending on the complexity of these cases, the court may also place those children under the supervision/care/guardianship of the Director of Social Welfare with a view to safeguarding their best interest.

The Family and Child Protective Services Unit operated in each of the eleven districts of SWD are responsible for dealing with the afore-mentioned cases. Aside from couples who succeed to reach compromise among competing interests of their divorce/separation matters, social work officers handling these cases often face with excessively adversarial parents with intractable dispute over custody or access, such as parental alienation, hostile parental conflicts and abusive relationship making compromise most difficult if not impossible. This session aims to share the multi-faceted challenges confronting the social work officers as well as the experiences in engaging and re-engaging the conflicting parents wrestling with the custody, care and control and access issues of their children to budge on the impasse of child custody arrangements.