

Will the Child Welfare Officer let me know before visiting me at home?

Whether the Child Welfare Officer will inform you before visiting your home or conduct an unannounced home visit will depend on the circumstances of your case. Given your case, the Child Welfare Officer will decide on how the visit should be carried out.

What will be written in the social report?

The social report will focus on your child's welfare and best interests. Issues that will be addressed are:

- the quality of the parent-child relationship;
- the child's attachment to both parents;
- the child's developmental needs and the parents' capacity to provide for those needs;
- the child's wishes and feelings;
- the care plan for the child and the likely effects of any changes in the child's life.

Can I see the social report?

The court's position is that the social report is confidential and is generally not extended to the parents and their lawyers.

How will I be treated

How will the Child Welfare Officer treat me?

The Child Welfare Officer will treat you with respect and dignity. They are aware of the difficulties divorcing couples face. They welcome and consider feedback from you at any stage of the investigation. They will extend all necessary assistance and co-operation to you.

What's the timeline

How long will it take to prepare the social report?

For a non-complex case, it will take about 3 months from the time the report is called for by the Court to the submission of the report to the Court.

If I'm not happy with the outcome

What can I do if I am not happy with the Court's orders in granting the custody of or access to my child?

You can seek the advice of your lawyer if you are not happy with the order of the Court.

Any counselling for me.....

In the course of investigation, will the Child Welfare Officer give the other party or me any counselling, or offer us any advice on parenting skills?

The role of the Child Welfare Officer is to investigate your case and prepare the social report. However, during the course of their investigation, if need be, the Child Welfare Officer may refer you to the appropriate social / community service agency for counselling and assistance.

For any queries, you could call us at
1800-258 6378 or 6354 8260.



Family and Child Protection and Welfare Branch
512 Thomson Road, MCDS Building, Singapore 298136
Email: MCDS_Email@mcds.gov.sg
Website: www.mcds.gov.sg / www.familytown.gov.sg

The Ministry of Community Development and Sports would like to thank the Family Court for its contribution towards the publication of this pamphlet.

Materials may not be reproduced without prior permission in writing from the Ministry of Community Development and Sports.
All rights reserved. June 2003.

CUSTODY DISPUTE INVESTIGATION

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS



Ministry of Community Development and Sports

Often, when the Court refers parents to the Ministry of Community Development and Sports (MCDS) for social investigation into a custody matter, there are many questions parents have with regard to the report and the procedures involved. This pamphlet aims to assist parents in gaining a better understanding of the reasons for a social report and the processes involved in the social investigation conducted by MCDS

A social report

Why has a social report been ordered for my case?

When parents cannot agree between themselves on who should get custody of their child or when the Court has concerns about the custody of the child, a social report may be called for by the Court. A social report may also be called in cases where a parent has expressed concerns about the non-custodial parent getting any access to the child.

The social report which has been ordered in your case will assist the Court in making a decision with regard to the custody, care and control of your child, or with regard to whether the parent who does not have custody should have any access to the child.

Who prepares the Social Report?

The Child Welfare Officer from MCDS will conduct an investigation and prepare the social report.

What are the qualifications of the Child Welfare Officers who prepare the social report?

The Child Welfare Officers are professionals with a degree in Social Work, Psychology or other relevant fields like

Sociology. They receive specialised on-the-job training focusing on the needs of children and what is in a child's best interests.

Preparing a social report

What is the process of preparing the social report?

The preparation of the social report involves the following steps:

- (i) **The Child Welfare Officer will interview the parents, children and other persons whom the Officer deems necessary to interview;**
 - *The Child Welfare Officer will usually carry out the interviews in the MCDS office. The number of interviews to be held will vary according to the nature of your case. Your cooperation will help the Child Welfare Officer obtain the information he or she needs from the interviews.*
- (ii) **The Child Welfare Officer will visit the residence of the parents and others whom the Child Welfare Officer deems necessary to visit;**
 - *The Child Welfare Officer will conduct home visits to observe the home environment and the parent-child relationship and interaction. The number of visits to be conducted and who should be visited will vary from case to case.*
- (iii) **Approval and submission of the report to Court;**
 - *The report prepared by the Child Welfare Officer will be vetted and approved by the officer's supervisor and the Head of the Child Welfare Section respectively before it is submitted to the Court.*

What will the Child Welfare Officer want to know during the interview?

The Child Welfare Officer's interview will focus on your child's needs and development. The officer will want to know the present and future care arrangements for your child should you get the custody. You will be asked about how you plan to help your child with access to the non-custodial parent. The Officer will want to know the role you will take in your child's growth and development.

How can I be prepared for the interview with the Child Welfare Officer?

There are three things you could do. First and foremost, focus your thoughts on your child. Think through why you are contesting the custody of the child and what are your child's needs with regard to education, health and development.

Secondly, help your child to go through this process as smoothly as possible. Do not subject your child to stress and hurt through accusations against the other parent and telling them what they should say to the other parent or to the Child Welfare Officer. Such actions will distress the child and will also prolong the investigation, thereby affecting the timeline for the completion of the report.

Thirdly, cooperate with the Child Welfare Officer by giving the required information truthfully and without unnecessary delay. This will help speed up the submission of the report to the Court.

Am I required to bring along any documents during my appointment with the Child Welfare Officer?

Yes, you are required to bring along the original and photostated copies of your identity card, children's birth certificates, letter of employment or the latest pay slip.