

**IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE NINETEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
IN AND FOR INDIAN RIVER, MARTIN, OKEECHOBEE, AND
ST. LUCIE COUNTIES, FLORIDA**

ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER 98-08

RE: EDUCATION PROGRAM FOR DIVORCING PARENTS

WHEREAS the Dissolution of Marriage has a long term impact on the best interests and emotional development of children, and;

WHEREAS pursuant to Section 61.21, Florida Statutes (1998), all judicial circuits in this state are required to approve a parenting course designed to educate, train, and assist divorcing parents in regard to the consequences of divorce on parents and children;

NOW THEREFORE I, PAUL B. KANAREK, pursuant to the authority vested in me as Chief Judge of the Nineteenth Judicial Circuit of Florida, under Rule 2.050, Florida Rules of Judicial Administration, do hereby establish the following plan designed to identify the minimum requirements necessary for Parent Education Programs used in the Family Division of the Nineteenth Judicial Circuit and the procedures required to obtain approval of such plans as follows;

PURPOSES

The principal purpose of the parent education programs shall be to educate parents regarding the emotional impact on minor children of the dissolution of the parents' marriage.

REQUIRED PARTICIPANTS

All parties to a dissolution of marriage proceeding with minor children or a paternity action which involves issues of parental responsibility shall be required to complete the Parent Education and Family Stabilization Course. Parties ordered to attend the course shall take the course within thirty (30) days of the filing of this action or service of the complaint, whichever shall be later, and shall file proof of compliance with the court prior to the entry of the Final Judgment. The court may excuse a party from attending the parenting course for good cause. The court may also require other parties involved in family law actions to attend the course.

INSTRUCTORS

Instructors shall be persons who are either certified as instructors by a nationally or state recognized Parent Education Program approved by the Chief Judge or must hold a Masters Degree,

or higher in Counseling, Mental Health, Social Work, Psychology, or Education. Instructors must participate in a training program for the specific program they are teaching lasting no less than four hours.

Mental health professionals who serve as instructors, or are affiliated with entities which provide seminars, and such entities with which they are affiliated, shall be prohibited from rendering counseling or therapy to participants and/or their families during the pendency of the proceedings resulting in referral.

SEMINAR AND CONTENT

The seminar shall be a minimum of four (4) hours focusing on topics which shall include, but not necessarily be limited to:

1. Legal aspects of deciding child-related issues between parents including use of Family Mediation
2. The emotional aspects of separation and divorce on parents
3. The emotional aspects of separation and divorce on children including adjustment and development needs of children
4. Family relationships and family dynamics
5. Parents financial responsibilities to a child or children
6. Issues regarding spousal or child abuse and neglect
7. Skill-based relationship education that may be generalized to parenting, workplace, school, neighborhood, and civic relationships
6. Visitation, its importance, common problems and solutions
7. Co-parenting skills
8. Identification of problems that may require treatment or services beyond the seminar and identification of community resources available to assist in dealing with these problems.

In addition, the program shall provide each participant with a list of local agencies that provide assistance regarding spousal abuse and child abuse or neglect.

Cost to participate shall not exceed \$40.00 per person. The costs may be waived at the discretion of the court if financial hardship would result to the participant. Each provider shall either (a) be required to enroll indigent participants in numbers constituting ten percent (10%) of their classes; or (b) provide the course on a sliding fee scale basis.

The method of presentation shall be at the discretion of the instructor; however, a significant time shall be allotted for participation by individual members of each group. The program shall incorporate an up-to-date and realistic video tape of brief vignettes to dramatize the difficulties that commonly arise in the course of a dissolution with children. These videos should stimulate

discussions. All members of each group shall be encouraged to ask questions, make comments, and share ideas and experiences. Group size shall be structured to facilitate broad participation by the individual members of the group and should not exceed thirty (30) participants.

Each participant shall receive a handbook/workbook which is designed to assist them in identifying specific problems within their own family unit and in formulating appropriate responses and techniques for effectively dealing with those problems. The handbook should also contain sufficient bibliography to enable participants to refer to locally available literature and materials which may assist them in identifying and resolving problems of children in divorce beyond completion of the seminar.

CERTIFICATES OF ATTENDANCE

Parties will receive a certificate of completion if they have attended the entire course. Any party that is more than one half hour late for a program will not be allowed to participate in that class. Certificates must be provided for the parties and personally signed by an official of the program.

REGISTRATION FORMS

A list of approved classes will be distributed to the parties who are required to attend by the court. This list will include the name of the program and telephone number. Each program, at its own cost, shall provide to the Clerk's Office sufficient registration forms which outline the name of the program, telephone number, costs, frequency of classes, number of locations, and whether classes are provided in languages other than English. In cases where the classes are available in languages other than English the registration form shall list the specific languages offered. The Court will distribute only information relevant to registration. General information and pamphlets that outline an institution's general services will not be included.

EVALUATIONS AND REPORTS

Each participant shall be provided a written evaluation of the seminar at its conclusion. These evaluations shall be retained by the provider for a period of one year and shall be available to the court for inspection. On or before November 1st of each year, each program shall submit a written report to the court which shall include the following information:

- a. Number of participants who attended during the year
- b. Enhancements to the program during the year
- c. Copies of any new hand outs or materials
- d. Other changes that have increased the program's adaptability to the community needs
- e. A summary of the evaluations for the preceding year.

CERTIFICATION OF PROGRAM

All persons wishing to apply for program approval shall do so by submitting their application package to the Court Administrator. This package shall include the following:

- A. Name, address, telephone number, contact person and the county or counties for which the application is being made.
- B. A list of instructors including proof of certification by a national or state program or proof of their academic qualifications.
- C. Copies of all materials used in the program including teachers manual, parent text or workbook, and videos used in the program.
- D. If program is a national or statewide program, a list of other jurisdictions that are currently using the program along with contact persons at such other jurisdictions.
- E. Locations and times at which classes will be offered.
- F. If the program is offered by a Not for Profit Corporation, a list of the names and addresses of the board of directors of the corporation. If the program is offered by a For Profit Corporation or and individual, a list of the shareholders or owner of the entity which is offering the program and their address.

The Chief Judge shall evaluate the program to determine if the program and the proposed provider meet the criteria established by the circuit. Certification shall be for a period of two (2) years except for the first group of applicants whose certification shall extend from November 1, 1998, through December 31, 2000. Thereafter all certifications shall begin on January 1st and shall be for a period of two (2) years. If during the period of certification the program or the materials are changed, all such changes must be approved by the Chief Judge in advance. At the end of the two (2) year period a program may reapply for certification. The Chief Judge may also decertify the program if it fails to comply with the certification requirements. There shall be no more than two providers certified and authorized to operate a program in each county of the circuit at any one time.

APPLICATION DATE

The requirements of this Administrative Order shall apply to all programs which wish to provide such services on or after November 1, 1998. Applications for the first period of certification shall be filed with the Court Administrator on or before September 1, 1998. Beginning in the year 2000 and continuing each year thereafter all applications shall be submitted to the Court Administrator on or before October 15th of each year.

DONE AND ORDERED in quadruplicate, at Vero Beach, Indian River County, Florida, this 23 day of July, 1998.



PAUL B. KANAREK
Chief Judge