

Probate and Family Court Standing Order 3-2023
Co-Parenting Education Course for Married and Unmarried Parents
as amended January 22, 2024, effective February 12, 2024

There are instances where the best interests of the minor child(ren) of parties appearing before the Probate and Family Court would be well served by the child(ren)'s parents attending a course to strengthen parenting skills, to effectuate positive co-parent communication, to find ways to reduce co-parent conflict, and to understand the negative impact parental conflict can have on children.

This Standing Order provides the authority for judges of the Probate and Family Court to order parents to attend the Court approved parenting education course, "[Two Families Now](#)".

Probate and Family Court Standing Order 3-2023 "Co-Parenting Education Course for Married and Unmarried Parents" effective November 1, 2023, is hereby amended and superseded by this Standing Order. This Standing Order shall remain in effect until further order of the Court.

It is hereby ORDERED:

A. Court approved Co-Parenting Education Provider

"Two Families Now" is the Court approved co-parenting education course for unmarried and married parents appearing before the Probate and Family Court. The "Two Families Now" course is a 4-hour, online, co-parenting course that parents may take at their own pace, using a computer, tablet, or smart phone.

B. Attendance

1. All parents in the following case types involving custody and/or parenting time of minor children, filed on or after the effective date of this Standing Order, are ordered to attend the "Two Families Now" co-parenting education course unless the requirement is waived in accordance with Paragraph C.
 - a) Complaint for Divorce (except for complaints filed pursuant to G. L. c. 208, § 1A);
 - b) Complaint for Separate Support;
 - c) Complaint to Establish Paternity; and
 - d) Complaint for Custody/Support/Parenting Time.
2. In addition, a judge in his or her discretion may order parents in a post judgment litigation case involving disputed custody and/or parenting time issues (such as a Complaint for Modification or a Complaint for Contempt) to attend the course.

3. Absent a written agreement filed with the Court, there shall be a presumption that at the time of filing any of the above actions listed in paragraph B 1 (a-d), custody and/or parenting time of the minor children is disputed.
4. Parents must register for the “Two Families Now” course within thirty (30) calendar days of service of the complaint and complete the online course within thirty (30) days of registering.
5. Each parent must file their Certificate of Completion with the Court no later than 14 calendar days after completing the course.
6. Sanctions for failure to complete the co-parenting course may be imposed by the Court.
7. A pamphlet describing the “Two Families Now” course and a “Notice to Parents (CJD 915)” describing the requirements of this Standing Order shall be given to the Plaintiff or their attorney upon the filing of any of the above actions listed in paragraph B 1 (a-d). The Plaintiff or their attorney shall serve a copy of the pamphlet and the Notice to Parents along with the complaint and summons to the person authorized to make service according to Mass.R.Dom.Rel.P. 4 (c).
8. Parents can voluntarily attend the co-parenting education course, even if they are not required to under this Standing Order. Parents who wish to voluntarily attend this course but are unable to afford the \$49.00 fee may seek a fee waiver in accordance with Paragraph E below.
9. Nothing herein shall limit a judge from ordering parents in any domestic relations case type involving minor children from attending the co-parent education course.

C. Waiver of Attendance

Attendance is mandatory unless waived by the Court. The Court may waive the attendance requirement of one or both parents. To request a waiver of attendance, a parent must file a “Motion to Waive Attendance at Parent Education Program (CJD 444)” and give proper notice to the other parent. The motion must include the reason a parent is alleged to be unable to attend the online course. The Court may decide a request without a hearing. If not, the Court must notify the parents of the date and time for a hearing whether virtual or in person.

Waivers may be granted when there is a demonstrable showing of:

- action or patterns of behaviors which makes parental communication unsafe; or
- language barriers; or
- incarceration or other unavailability of a party.

Waivers may also be granted when:

- a written agreement on custody and/or parenting time issues is filed with the Court; or
- a parent has previously attended the course; or
- where justice otherwise indicates.

Waiver for one parent does not automatically apply to the other parent.

D. Cost to Attend “Two Families Now”

1. The cost to attend “Two Families Now” is \$49.00 per parent. Once purchased, the course is available to the parent for 30 days.
2. Each parent must pay a \$49.00 fee to the provider when registering for “Two Families Now”, unless the fee is waived by the Court in accordance with Paragraph E.

E. Waiver of Fee for “Two Families Now”

1. If a parent is unable to afford the \$49.00 fee, the parent must submit to the Court an “Affidavit of Indigency and Request for Waiver, Substitution or State Payment of Fees and Costs.” This form is a result of an order by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Judicial Court pursuant to G. L. c. 261, § 27B. The form and instructions are at <https://www.mass.gov/lists/court-forms-for-indigency-waiver-of-court-fees>. This form is also available at the Registry of Probate for each division of the Probate and Family Court.
2. If a fee waiver is allowed by the Court, the parent must upload a copy of the approved waiver at the “Two Families Now” website when registering.

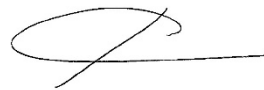
F. Non-Discoverable Information

All information and documents submitted or used in conjunction with the online “Two Families Now” co-parenting course shall not be discoverable.

G. “Two Families Now” Parent Satisfaction Evaluation

Parents who take the “Two Families Now” course are strongly encouraged to complete the Parent Satisfaction Evaluation offered at the end of the course. This will assist the Probate and Family Court with ongoing monitoring of parental satisfaction with the course.

Date: January 22, 2024



John D. Casey
Chief Justice
Probate and Family Court