

Probate and Family Court
Standing Order 3-2023
Co-Parenting Education Course for Married and Unmarried Parents
Effective November 1, 2023

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 2-16 "Parent Education Program Attendance" effective May 1, 2016, temporarily amended March 21, 2020, and suspended on June 25, 2021, is hereby rescinded, and superseded by this Standing Order.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. Mandatory Attendance

1. All parents in the following case types involving custody or parenting time of minor children, filed on or after the effective date of this Standing Order, shall be ordered by a judge of this court to attend the "Two Families Now" co-parenting education course in accordance with Paragraph C, unless the requirement is waived in accordance with Paragraph D or Paragraph E.
 - a) Annulment;
 - b) Divorce (G. L. c. 208, § 1B);
 - c) Complaint to establish custody or parenting time (including paternity); and
 - d) Post-judgment litigation involving custody and parenting time (such as a Complaint for Modification or a Complaint for Contempt).

2. Absent a written agreement filed with the Court, there shall be a presumption that at the time of filing any of the above case types, custody and parenting time of minor children is disputed.
3. A pamphlet describing the “Two Families Now” course and a copy of this Standing Order shall be given to the plaintiff or their attorney upon the filing of a case type listed above. The plaintiff or their attorney shall serve a copy of the pamphlet along with the complaint and summons to the person authorized to make service according to Rule 4 (c) of the Massachusetts Rules of Domestic Relations Procedure.
4. Parents can voluntarily attend the co-parenting education course, even if there is no order requiring attendance. 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 G below.
5. 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. Court Order to Attend “Two Families Now”

1. 60 days after the summons is filed with the Court, the judge shall issue an order for parents to attend the co-parenting education course, unless the requirement is automatically waived in accordance with Paragraph D or waived by the Court for good cause in accordance with Paragraph E.
2. Once ordered, each parent must complete the online course within 45 days of the date of the order.
3. Each parent must file their Certificate of Completion with the Court within 14 calendar days of completing the course.
4. Sanctions for failure to complete the co-parenting course may be imposed by the Court.
5. A pre-trial conference may be scheduled so long as the parents complete the program prior to the pre-trial conference. No trial will be held by the Court until the Court receives a Certificate of Completion for each parent, or the Court waives the requirement.

D. Automatic Waiver of Attendance Based on Partial or Full Agreement

Attendance at the “Two Families Now” course is automatically waived in the case types specified in Paragraph B where a partial or full written agreement on parenting time and custody issues is filed with the Court within 60 days of service of the summons.

E. Discretionary Court Waiver of Attendance Based on Good Cause

Once ordered, 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 request that the Court waive attendance and give proper notice to the other parent. Waivers will be granted only upon a showing of good cause or where justice otherwise indicates.

F. 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 G.

G. 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.

H. 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.

I. “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: September 20, 2023

John D. Casey
Chief Justice
Probate and Family Court