

THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT PARENT EDUCATION CLASS

On April 18, 1996, the Governor of Arizona approved a law to establish Domestic Relations Education on Children's Issues Programs throughout the state. This law requires every parent of a natural or adopted unemancipated minor child who files for divorce, separation, parenting time/custody, or any paternity proceeding in which a party has requested that the Superior Court determine custody, specific parenting time or child support to attend a Parent Education class. The Court may order attendance when parents are involved in a child support case or seek to change an order for custody or parenting time. This booklet answers commonly asked questions about the class.

NOTE: This booklet is intended to provide general information about Parent Education classes in Arizona. It is not a complete nor authoritative review of this subject and reflects the law of the State of Arizona only as of the date of its publication.

State laws governing parent education are found in [Arizona Revised Statutes, Section 25, Chapter 3, Article 5](#)

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Below is a list of commonly asked questions regarding the Parent Education class.

What is a Parent Education Class?

The class (called the Parent Information Program in some counties) has been designed for the purpose of sharing information with parents about the impact that divorce, the restructuring of families and the court's involvement in your case can have on your child. The class provides parents with an opportunity to explore the following topics:

- What parents can do to help their child adjust to a divorce or separation
- Emotional effects of divorce or separation on parents and their child
- Harmful effects of parental conflict on children, including domestic violence
- Ways parents can reduce parental conflict
- Avoiding and dealing with problems
- Factors that contribute to a child's healthy adjustment, including the value of parenting plans
- Family court procedures and available community resources
- Common reactions by children and parents to divorce or other legal proceedings between the parents such as paternity, custody and parenting time (formerly called visitation)
- Helpful and harmful parent behaviors
- Communication and co-parenting skills
- Children's reactions to divorce and separation at different stages
- Warning signs of children having serious problems
- Emotional and financial responsibility of parents

Why does the court require people to attend a Parent Education class?

The period of divorce or separation is often a very difficult time for children as well as parents. Studies conducted by nationally renowned researchers indicate that parents who attend a Parent Education class are better able to work cooperatively for the benefit of their children, and that such classes may keep them from having to return to court in the future. Both parents and courts around the country report that Parent Education classes are helpful and appear to be of great benefit to children and parents.

I am not interested in communicating with my child's other parent and therefore do not need to build communication skills. Why must I still take the class?

Not communicating with the other parent may make you feel better; however, it can create an uncomfortable situation for your child. Children are aware of unspoken tension. When there is absolutely no communication between parents, children become messengers delivering messages from one parent to the other. Even if you do not like your child's other parent, the class teaches you ways to develop a business relationship with that parent ... the business of raising healthy children. Putting your child in the middle of parental conflict adds more stress to their lives.

My child's other parent and I were never married. Do we have to attend the Parent Education class?

Yes. If a paternity case has been filed in which a parent has requested the court to determine custody, parenting time or child support, the parents must attend the class. These classes are beneficial both for families of divorce or those who have never been married.

Is this a class that teaches parenting skills?

This is not a parenting skills class. The focus of this class will be on how children and adults react to separation, divorce, and changes in the family. It will also help you understand what you can do to make those changes easier for your children through co-parenting and communicating effectively.

I'm already a good parent! Do I have to attend this class?

Yes. Having to attend this class does not mean you are not already a good parent, or even a great parent. The court wants you to attend the class in order to get as much information as possible to assist you in helping your child through what may be a very difficult period of adjustment.

Will I have to attend the class with the other parent?

No. The court recognizes that for some people this would be an uncomfortable situation. If you do not wish to attend class with the other parent, steps can be taken to ensure that you are not scheduled to attend the same class. In most counties, parent may attend the class together only with approval by the court.

What if a parent doesn't attend the class as ordered?

State law provides that the court cannot grant the request of a parent who does not attend the class. For example, if you are the parent seeking a divorce, you must attend the class in order to obtain your divorce decree. If the other parent does not attend, the divorce may still be granted; however, if the other parent later requests a new or modified order from the court, that parent first must attend the class. In some instances the court may hold a party in contempt of court or impose other sanctions for refusal to take the class.

I do not know where the other parent lives and have served the other parent by publication. Do I still need to take the class?

Yes. Even parties seeking a default divorce must take the Parent Education class.

My time is limited as I work two jobs. How will I be able to fit the class into my schedule?

The class usually takes up to 4-6 hours to complete and has a minimum length of two hours. It is offered early in the divorce process and is available at different and flexible times including evenings and weekends.

I have a good working relationship with my child's other parent, and we agree completely about custody and parenting time. Do we still have to attend?

The law requires all parents to a case (as described earlier in this booklet), unless waived by the court, to attend a class. The class is not just for those parents who are fighting over parenting time or custody. Working together is just one of several topics covered by the class. There are many other topics discussed in the class that even parents who are getting along can benefit from when raising their children.

My child's other parent currently does not reside in Arizona. Do they have to come back to Arizona to take this class?

If you or the other parent no longer live in Arizona, you both may be able to satisfy the requirements of the Parent Education class by attending a comparable class in the area where you each reside or by viewing an approved video. There are hundreds of such parent education classes around the country. You may wish to contact the court in your jurisdiction for information about programs available in your area.

The other parent has never been involved in my child's life and does not want to be. Do I still have to attend the class?

Yes. The situation of an uninvolved parent can pose problems for children as well as unique challenges for the custodial parent. The Parent Education class will provide information and suggestions that may be useful to you in raising your child.

My child and I have been going to counseling about my divorce. Do I still have to go to this class?

Yes. The importance of counseling is one of the topics discussed in a Parent Education class. Although your counselor might help you with some of the issues mentioned in the class, the Parent Education class may provide you with information not provided in counseling and may complement whatever information you are given during your counseling sessions.

Who teaches the classes and what are their qualifications?

The Arizona Supreme Court has established standards for Parent Education classes, including minimum qualifications for program presenters. The program must be conducted by at least one presenter who possesses a graduate degree in a related field and has relevant experience in a number of areas, including child welfare and family dynamics. Each presenter must have experience working in the areas of family law, family protective orders, child welfare, family dynamics and domestic violence issues.

Will I be required to pay for this class?

State law permits the court or program to charge a class fee for attending a Parent Education class. Class fees range by county, but cannot exceed \$50. Persons of limited financial means may file an application with the Clerk of Superior Court requesting the fee not be charged or that it be paid in installments. Application forms for fee waiver (forgiveness) or deferral (postponement) are available at the office of the Clerk of Superior Court in each county.

Where are these classes taken, and at what times are they scheduled?

There are Parent Education classes located in each county. Classes are offered at various times of the day or evening, during the week and on weekends in some counties. For a list of class locations, as

well as the days and times the classes are offered, please contact the Clerk of Superior Court in your county.

How do I show the Court that I have taken the class?

In most counties, the instructor of the class will have forms which verify your attendance available for you to return to the Clerk of Superior Court for filing in your county. In a few counties, the instructor forwards the forms to the Clerk of Superior Court directly. Check with your individual instructor about the method which is used by your county. The form must contain your court case number, your date(s) of attendance, your name and the name, address and telephone number of the instructor.

HELPFUL TIPS FOR PARENTS

Children whose parents are separating or who are already divorced must make a big adjustment. They need lots of special attention. The good news is that it is possible to protect, love, and nurture your child even though you are no longer together with the other parent! Here are a few tips to help you identify your child's particular needs. With a little extra "know how," you can personally help your child succeed now and after your separation or divorce.

- **Listen To Your Child**
Always remember: Your child's statements are important. Children's feelings of fear, confusion and anger during a separation or divorce are often reflected in their statements.

Be sure to listen when your child talks to you. Let your child know they can share their happy, sad, or angry feelings with you. Children won't share their feelings if they are afraid of hurting one of their parents.
- **Talk To Your Child**
Your child may not understand that a separation or divorce was not his or her fault. In fact, some children blame themselves for the problems that parents experience with each other. Help your child understand that the divorce or separation is not their fault, and that your child is not being "divorced" by the parents.
- **Be There To Comfort**
There will be times when your child will display behavior that may appear disruptive. Remember that your children will need to know they are loved, they will be cared for, and that both parents will still be their mom and dad.
- **Protect Your Child From Disagreements**
If you include your child in conversations or disagreements about the other parent, your child will become insecure and uncomfortable around you. Children should never be placed in the middle of a disagreement between parents or made into messengers, or overhear you making derogatory remarks about the other parent.
- **Praise Your Child**
Praising your child will help them grow up feeling very good about themselves. When children feel good about themselves, it is easier to understand that although their parents are no longer together, both parents still love them.
- **Have Fun With Your Child**
Your child needs to spend quality time with you regardless of how difficult your divorce or separation may be. Having fun allows parents and children to feel good about their relationship.