



Online
Parenting
Programs

Class Guidebook

Co-Parenting / Divorce

Online Class For Families In Transition

**2 Hour, 4 Hour, 6 Hour,
8 Hour, 10 Hour and 12 Hour Classes**

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Transition

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Background

Purpose of the Class

To provide a self-directed, online educational program for parents who are separating from or divorcing the other parent of their children or for any other reason not raising their shared children together. This program provides education, not casework, legal consultation, or therapy. The overall goal is to maximize positive outcomes for parents, children, and other family members who will be raising the children in different households.

Class Creator and Sponsor

The creator of the program is Judith A. Myers-Walls, Ph.D., Certified Family Life Educator. She has a Ph.D. in Child Development and Family Studies and over 40 years of experience in creating, delivering, and evaluating programs for parents and families. Most of her experience has been with the Cooperative Extension system, primarily in Indiana at Purdue University. She has written or edited 3 books, 20 book chapters, 32 peer-reviewed journal articles, approximately 40 Extension publications, and more than 15 curriculum packages.

The sponsor of this program is OnlineParentingPrograms.com, which offers tools to courts and professionals that can help them provide innovative program solutions to support children and families facing challenges. The company is headed by Michelle Muncy, who brings more than 20 years of experience in marketing and design to her role as Planning Director and by

Victor Vacaretu, who brings more than 15 years of technology experience to his role of Chief Technology Officer.

The company has been delivering online classes since 2009 and has reached over 100,000 parents, who have achieved an 87% class completion rate.

Class Orientation/Theoretical Base

This program is organized around the National Extension Parent Education Model (NEPEM; <http://www.k-state.edu/wwwparent/nepem/>) and based on the following theories:

- Family Systems Theory: What happens to one person in the family impacts all family members, and any actions or behaviors by any family member will influence and be influenced by other family members.
- Human Ecology Theory: Families live in an environment of nested layers of influence ranging from the individual to the family to the community and eventually a global context. It is important to take those contexts into account when determining the causes of behavior and making recommendations for changes.
- Developmental/Maturational Theories: Children's (and adults') needs and abilities are determined to a large extent by their developmental or maturational level. It is important to build expectations for children's behavior based on that developmental level; adults can also facilitate and encourage children's movement to higher levels of development over time.
- Attachment Theory. Humans require close relationships with other humans in order to develop optimally. Both children and adults benefit from secure attachments, and both can suffer if close attachments are lost.
- Cognitive-Behavioral Educational Theory: Participants will learn best when they connect their feelings and thinking with their behavior. Behavior change is based on conscious decisions and the practicing of skills.

Specific theoretical citations used in individual units are provided under Sources in the curriculum outline.

Note that the 2016-2020 versions of the class and later revisions replace the co-parenting class called “Co-Parenting Class” available from onlineparentingprograms.com since 2009. Many of the changes are in response to publications by researchers who have reviewed the OPP program and other similar materials. See:

Bowers, J. R., Mitchell, E. T., Hardesty, J. L., & Hughes, R., Jr. (2011). A review of online divorce education programs. Family Court Review, 49, 776-787.

Bowers, J. R., Ogolsky, B. G., Hughes, R., Jr., & Kanter, F. B. (2014). Coparenting through divorce or separation: A review on an online program. Journal of Divorce & Remarriage, 55(6), 464-484.

Hughes, R., Jr., Bowers, J. R., Mitchell, E. T., Curtiss, S., & Ebata, A. (2012). Developing online family life prevention and education programs. Family Relations, 61, 711-727.

Myers-Walls, J. A., & Dworkin, J. (2016). Parenting education without borders: Web-based outreach. In J. J. Ponzetti (Ed.), Evidence-based parenting education: A global perspective (pp. 123-139). New York: Routledge.

Myers-Walls, J. A. (2012). Court-mandated parents and families. In A. Taylor and S. Ballard (Eds.), Family life education with diverse populations (pp. 61-90). Newbury Park: Sage. (2nd edition in process)

Target Audience

This program is designed for parents of children aged birth to 18+ who are separating from or divorcing the children’s other parent or for some other reason will not be raising their shared children together. Some limited information is provided on young-adult children because some families may have older children in addition to those aged 0-18. Parents may have been either officially married or cohabiting before separation. Some may have never lived together. The most recent version of the class provides three separate versions for those three populations; participants select the version that was created for their particular needs and situation. In addition, specific attempts have been made to include:

- Both mothers and fathers. Although there are many references to mothers and fathers, attempts were made to make the materials applicable to same-sex couples as well.
- Biological parents and adoptive parents
- Parents who initiated the separation (“leavers”) and those who did not want it (the “left”).
- Parents of children with special needs.
- Couples who were together for a long time and those whose relationship was brief.
- Information is provided for identifying child abuse and neglect and domestic violence. Some information is also provided regarding the impacts of substance abuse or mental illness. Basic guidelines are provided for those situations, but it is critical that additional services be provided by professionals in those fields to deal with the underlying problems.

There are other groups that might benefit from some parts of the program, but they will find that much of the program does not fit them. It is important to recognize that sections of the program will not feel appropriate for them, and they will not feel their needs are being addressed at numerous points.

- Parents who never really had any kind of relationship (e.g., “one-night stands”).
- Parents whose divorce or separation was final years ago, and they are simply adjusting the parenting plan or other arrangements.

These classes are NOT designed for the following audiences. It is not dangerous to expose these parents to this program, but it will not meet their unique needs. The program cannot be considered research-informed if used for these groups. It is important for anyone in a position to recommend or mandate participation in the classes to understand that it is not appropriate to include these groups in their recommendations or mandates.

- Grandparents or other relatives raising children when the parents cannot.
- Parents of children born after rape or incest. They need therapeutic support.

- Parents who live apart from each other for work or other reasons unrelated to their relationship and are still in a committed relationship.

The class will be most successful for participants who:

- Have access to enough resources to meet their own and their children's basic needs. That means, if they do not have a home (or at least temporary shelter) or enough food or other necessities, those needs should be met first so that the participants can concentrate on parenting. Such families may benefit from this program later and sometimes simultaneously with the meeting of those basic needs.
- Have some contact with their children; that is, their children live with them, or they have regular contact with the children who may be living with another parent, family member, or in a foster situation. It is possible to benefit from the program without regular contact, but the learning will be less effective, because participants will not have a chance to practice the skills immediately.
- Are mentally stable enough to participate in a psychoeducational experience. That is, they are in touch with reality enough to care for their children and are not currently a danger to themselves or their children.
- Are literate at the fifth-grade reading level or higher (English or Spanish) and competent with basic computer skills and have access to an Internet-connected device, or they can partner with someone who will assist with reading and managing the connections.
- Are provided with enough time to complete the program, practice the skills, and reflect on insights and ideas in between sessions.

Presentation Methods

- The reading level is between 4th- and 5th-grade levels throughout the class.
- Activities and frequent reflection and processing of the materials are included in each unit. We ask participants to

assess their situation and set goals at multiple points in the curriculum. Such an approach simulates some of the advantages of face-to-face programming while building on the advantages of online capabilities.

- A positive, strengths-based focus characterizes the materials. We believe that participants are more likely to make changes and feel confident about their ability to provide a positive atmosphere for their children if the materials help them identify and build on their strengths rather than reminding them of their failures or potential risks of their situation. Although we provide some information about dangers and risks, we try to help participants to find the resources that exist in themselves and their environment that will help them make positive outcomes more likely for themselves and their children.
- Language and learning methods have been examined for cultural inclusivity.
- Participants are given hints for what to look for in videos and other special presentations. This lowers the likelihood of them becoming passive recipients of the information. They also answer questions after most videos to reflect on what was useful and encourage interactive learning.

Class Learning Objectives

Primary Objectives

This version of the class is based on the following concepts and conclusions from the research literature on parenting after a break-up, separation, or divorce:

- Divorce, separation, and parental break-ups represent potential risk factors for adults and children.
- Parents can lower some of the risks for their children
- Uncontested custody and partnership dissolution cases are healthier for families than contested ones.

Specific objectives are provided for each unit. To illustrate some of the core objectives, we have listed the ones that are addressed in the 4-hour class, our most popular class.

As a result of participating in this program, compared to their feelings and behavior before participating, parents will...

- be able to describe some of the risks and protective factors that could impact them and their children surrounding break-ups, divorce, and separation.
- report increases in self-confidence related to helping their children cope with break-ups, divorce, or separation.
- be able to describe characteristics of healthy development of a person going through break-ups, divorce, and separation.
- be able to describe usual reactions and needs of children following break-ups, divorce, or separation in at least one developmental level.
- be able to describe developmentally appropriate ways to talk to their children about break-ups, divorce, or separation.
- report placing their children's best interests first when creating a parenting plan.
- be able to list what they consider important in a parenting plan.
- be able to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of using a lawyer, a mediator, and/or their own ideas to design a parenting plan.
- be able to list some of the issues that are important when developing a parenting plan for children of different ages.

Specific Objectives as presented to participants in the 4-hour class. These are presented here as an example.



Unit 1: Taking Care of You

After you finish this unit, you should be able to:

- List some good things and some bad things about break-ups, divorce, or separation.
- Describe what can make people happier after break-ups, divorce, or separation.
- List some common stages of dealing with break-ups, divorce, or separation.
- Feel more confident about dealing with your break-up, divorce, or separation in a positive way.

Unit 2: Taking Care of the Children

After you finish this unit, you should be able to:

- List common reactions children have when their parents break up, divorce, or separate.
- Describe some good ways to talk with children about break-ups, divorce, and separation.
- Make a plan to help your children if they are having special problems.

Unit 3: Managing as a Single Parent

After you finish this unit, you should be able to:

- Demonstrate positive ways to communicate with your co-parent.
- Describe ways to help your children stay in contact with various family members.
- Demonstrate positive ways to manage conflict.

Unit 4: Co-Parenting

After you finish this unit, you should be able to:

- List several reasons why co-parenting is important.
- Describe how to separate romantic and parental roles.
- Demonstrate several ways to keep your children out of the middle between you and your co-parent.
- Demonstrate effective ways to cooperate with your co-parent.
- List some times when co-parenting may not work.

Unit 5: Moving Ahead

After you finish this unit, you should be able to:

- List what you and your co-parent consider important in a parenting plan.
- Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of using a lawyer, a mediator, and/or your own ideas to design a parenting plan.
- List some of the issues that are important when developing a parenting plan for children of different ages.
- Discuss how decisions about money after divorce and separation are related to parenting plans.
- Feel comfortable with the arrangements you are making for co-parenting.

Class Materials

All classes are available for review online. Contact OnlineParentingPrograms.com to obtain administrative access for reviewing the class. There is no instructor manual, because the class is self-directed. Videos and other learning materials can be seen online.

Below is a description and outline of what topics are included online.

Content Outline

Welcome Section – This section includes a discussion of feelings about being recommended or mandated to participate in this program. It also includes guidelines and instructions for using the program. This section is not timed.

Each content unit begins with a pre-unit assessment (multiple-choice questions) and an introduction to the unit that includes

some description of the importance of the topics covered and a list of objectives (What You Will Learn). All units include text, videos, narrated slide presentations or videos, links to outside sources, and reflective journal entries that must be completed by the participant in order to advance. Each unit ends with a brief description of what is coming in the next unit and a post-unit assessment that includes the same questions as the pre-assessment along with a video quiz and formative evaluation questions. Participants must provide the correct answers to the content-related items to be allowed to move forward. Correct answers are explained after users have a chance to respond. Other items do not have right-or-wrong answers but instead assess attitudes and personal experiences. Final elements in each unit are additional resources that might be helpful for anyone wanting more information on the topics and the sources that were used.

Class Content Chart

The following chart provides a map of what content is included in each of the classes. Each class is divided into 5 Units (except for the 2-hour class that contains only 4). The chart lists the topics that are included in each unit. A black space indicates that the topic is not included in that particular class. The chart indicates how much time is devoted to that topic in the class.

The shaded rows list the total times for each unit in each class. Note that the total times do not include the times for the pre- and post-assessment for each unit and the other introductory and wrap-up sections. That means that the classes will take somewhat longer than the times lists in the content outline.

Unit	Topic
UNIT 1 Taking Care of You	Divorce and Separation (Breaking Up)
	Grief and Loss
	Adult Attachment
	Stages of Adjustment
	Handling Anger
	Telling Your Parents
	Thinking about Stress
	Managing Stress
Stay Safe	
Total time for Unit 1	
UNIT 2 Taking Care of the Children	Children's Reactions
	Ages and Stages (Babies, Toddlers, Preschoolers, School-Age, Teens, Adult Children, Special Needs)
	Talking about Difficult Topics
	Talking with Children (Babies, Toddlers, Preschoolers, School-Age, Teens, Adult Children, Special Needs)
	Children's Stress
	Lowering Stress
	Attachment (Babies, Toddlers, Preschoolers, School-Age, Teens, Adult Children, Special Needs)
	Supporting Children
Caution Areas!	
Total time for Unit 2	
UNIT 3 Managing as a Single Parent	Managing Communication
	New Communication Styles
	Communication and Break-ups
	Managing Children's Behavior
	When Children Break the Rules
	Managing Finances
	Managing Conflict
	New Partners
Blended Families	
Total time for Unit 3	
UNIT 4 <i>(Called Unit 3 in 2h)</i>	New Partnerships
	Effective Co-Parenting
	Protect Children
	Disciplining with your Co-parent
	Expanding the Circle
	Family Strengths
	When Co-Parenting Does not Work
	Absent Parents
Total time for Unit 4	
UNIT 5 <i>(Called Unit 4 in 2h)</i> Moving Ahead	Dealing with the Law and Legal Systems
	Finding Your Focus
	Custody Evaluation Process
	Making Decisions
	Caring for the Children
	Contact with Extended Family
Designing a Parenting Plan	
Total time for Unit 5	

	2 Hour	4 Hour	6 Hour	8 Hour	10 Hour	12 Hour
	14:00	14:00	14:00	14:00	14:00	14:00
			3:00	3:00	3:00	3:00
				5:00	5:00	5:00
	10:00	10:00	10:00	10:00	10:00	10:00
				5:00	5:00	5:00
						12:00
			5:00	5:00	5:00	5:00
			8:00	8:00	8:00	8:00
	2:00	2:00	2:00	2:00	2:00	2:00
	26:00	26:00	42:00	52:00	52:00	64:00
	11:00	11:00	11:00	11:00	11:00	11:00
				8:00	8:00	8:00
				7:00	7:00	7:00
	9:00	9:00	9:00	9:00	9:00	9:00
					10:00	10:00
					16:00	16:00
			11:00	11:00	11:00	11:00
						18:00
	6:00	6:00	6:00	6:00	6:00	6:00
	26:00	26:00	37:00	52:00	78:00	96:00
			21:00	21:00	21:00	21:00
		6:00	6:00	6:00	6:00	6:00
			6:00	6:00	6:00	6:00
				14:00	14:00	14:00
				17:00	17:00	17:00
					19:00	19:00
		20:00	20:00	20:00	20:00	20:00
					18:00	18:00
						16:00
	0	26:00	53:00	86:00	121:00	137:00
			14:00	14:00	14:00	14:00
	11:00	11:00	11:00	11:00	11:00	11:00
	11:00	11:00	11:00	11:00	11:00	11:00
				9:00	9:00	9:00
						12:00
						14:00
	13:00	13:00	13:00	13:00	13:00	13:00
				5:00	5:00	5:00
	35:00	35:00	49:00	63:00	63:00	89:00
				3:00	3:00	3:00
	2:00	2:00	2:00	2:00	2:00	2:00
					7:00	7:00
	6:00	6:00	6:00	6:00	6:00	6:00
	19:00	19:00	19:00	19:00	19:00	19:00
					9:00	9:00
	12:00	12:00	12:00	12:00	12:00	12:00
	36:00	39:00	39:00	42:00	58:00	58:00



End-of-class Test

When participants complete the 4-hour Co-Parenting/Divorce class, they are given an exam of 12 multiple-choice questions. Shorter classes include fewer questions and longer classes include more. Those questions are randomly selected by the computer from a bank of questions that cover each of the 5 units. It is necessary to get at least 75% right in order to pass the class and earn a completion certificate.

If participants do not pass the test, they will be given a chance to review the class and then repeat the test. (After a participant has completed any section of a class, that section is available to him or her to access without restrictions of time or sequence.) Each administration of the test will include a different set of randomly selected questions from the question bank. Participants can repeat the final exam as many times as necessary to achieve a passing score.

Evaluation Plan

The overall class outcome evaluation plan includes the following items:

1. a full-class pre- and post-assessment,
2. the final exam,
3. some items from the single-unit pre- and post-assessments, and
4. some journal entries.

Formative evaluation data are collected by way of a brief questionnaire at the end of each unit and an overall formative evaluation at the end of the class. The final formative piece is

called Feedback on This Program and is included after the Final Exam.

All items in the full-class pre- and post-assessment are collected when the participant first begins the class. Some follow-up evaluation data have been collected and analyzed previously.

Some pre-class forms can be seen in the Welcome section under Intake Forms. These forms ask about demographic information, the parent's perceived knowledge level in several topic areas, assessment of the couple relationship, plans for dealing with disagreements, and self-assessed coping by the children and the parents. Many of those items are asked again at the end of the class. In addition, questions about parent confidence, comfort, perceived learning, goals, and behaviors are asked before and after individual units and will be included in the evaluation as well.

The pre- and post-class assessment tool has been developed in conjunction with a team of professionals from across the country who are also conducting programming for parents who are divorcing, separating, or for other reasons not raising their children together. The data collected by the various groups will be compared to analyze for broad evaluation outcomes.

Previous outcome evaluation results are available upon request.



www.onlineparentingprograms.com

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