

Parenting and



Family

Stabilization Class



Mental Health America of East Central Florida offers this class in a live classroom setting utilizing lecture, scenario's and discussions. The class has been approved by the Florida Department of Children and Families and satisfies the mandated 4-hour parenting class.

The live class curriculum includes:

Hour 1 The Single Parent

- Divorce Law
- Reasons for Divorce
- Cost of Raising A Child
- After the Divorce

Hour 2 Co-Parenting

- Definitions
- Co-Parenting

Hour 3 The Child

- Stages of Development
- Grief and Loss
- Effects of Divorce on Children

Hour 4 Strategies for Healthy Families

- Anger Management
- Live Your Life Well
- Activities to Help Your Child
- Resources



About the Parenting and Family Stabilization Class

Welcome to Parenting and Family Stabilization, a workshop designed to meet the statutory requirements of the State of Florida for divorcing families or other situations involving children where the courts may decide that parents may benefit from learning new knowledge and skills.

Divorce is a major personal crisis for adults and children. The stress can produce physical symptoms as well as behavioral and emotional problems. Children of different ages may react differently to divorce — from irritability in infants to drug use in adolescents. Recognizing the signs of trouble early and helping children deal with them may prevent serious future problems.

By coming to an agreement on parenting issues, you and your spouse avoid or minimize harm to the children and avoid a court fight. However, if you are unable to resolve these issues, the court must decide them for you.

You know, divorce is rarely as "friendly" as spouses might wish. Parents may want to strive for that perfect child custody solution that makes everyone happy, but this is often an unrealistic goal. Parents, though, will do their

children a world of good by doing everything they can to make sure that their sons and daughters remain as happy as possible even after their parents' divorce.

Children are our most precious resource. We must protect them from undue hurt and turmoil. Concern for the children should be the primary concern for both parents in a divorce (called a "dissolution of marriage"). You should remember that in a dissolution action, you are ending your marriage to your spouse. Neither of you are ending your relationship with your children. You will no longer be husband and wife, but you will always remain a father and mother, or "Mom" and "Dad" to your children.

Parents inability to communicate effectively with each other sometimes results in anger, hurt feelings and unrealistic expectations that make us lose sight of the ultimate goal, the safety and well-being of our children. As a result, many times decisions about the best interest of a child are left up to the judge to decide.

In a divorce situation, the parents should at all times conduct themselves and their activities in a way that will promote the welfare and best interests of the children. It is the public policy in Florida that each child should have frequent and continuing contact with both parents in the event of separation or dissolution of the marriage. It is also the public policy of the State to encourage parents to share the rights, responsibilities and joys of childrearing. There is no presumption for or against the father or mother in dissolution actions.

Both parents have an affirmative duty under Florida law to promote a good relationship between the children and the other parent. Both parents must attempt to insure that the children have unhampered contact and free access with both parents.

Neither parent may do anything to hamper the natural development of the children's love and respect for the other parent. A parent should not disparage the other parent or discuss the divorce in the children's presence.

Each parent must make all reasonable efforts to encourage and facilitate communication between the other parent and the children. Neither parent should do anything that would estrange the children from the other parent or that would injure the children's opinion of either parent.

In 2008, there were numerous changes made to Florida law governing parenting issues in divorce cases. Parenting plans are designed to more

closely reflect the modern day challenges and circumstances facing parents and minor children before, during and after the dissolution of a marriage.

Parenting plans address the details of how the parents will share and be responsible for the day-to-day tasks in raising the children. The parenting plans also address time-sharing schedules for the time the children will spend with each parent. Parenting plans also encompass issues such as the designation of who will be responsible for school-related matters and methods and technologies for communicating with the children among other issues.

In approving a parenting plan, a court must make a determination of what is in the best interest of the child. Among the twenty factors to be considered by the court:

- 1.** Demonstrated capacity and disposition of each parent to facilitate a close and continuing parent-child relationship.
- 2.** The length of time the child has live in a stable and satisfactory environment.
- 3.** The geographic issues raised by the parenting plan.
- 4.** The moral fitness and mental and physical health of the parents.
- 5.** The child's home, school, and community record.
- 6.** The child's preference, if the child is mature enough to express a preference.
- 7.** Evidence of domestic violence or child abuse or evidence that a party has made false accusations of domestic violence.

There are additional factors and considerations to be made by the court in approving a parenting plan. The above are just a few examples of those considerations. Obviously, the more closely and cooperatively the two parents can work through the issues and consider the primary goal of doing what is in the best interest of the children, the easier it will be for of the process of the dissolution of the marriage to take place.

Unfortunately, many times angry and hurtful feelings end up in court due to issues such as domestic violence. When domestic violence is introduced into a relationship, the parents may serve jail time, become unproductive parents and suffer additional loses such as jobs and even the removal of a child from their custody as a result. Domestic Violence is covered extensively in chapters 61, 64, and 741 of the Florida Statutes. Those statutes are available for review on-line and at all public libraries.

This is why Florida legislature, in an attempt to educate divorcing parents about the effects of divorce on children, has made it mandatory for all

parents who are divorcing with children must take a 4-hour parenting class. It is our hope that the class will provide you with tools to assist you in making decision that will positively affect both spouses relationship with your child.

There are many reasons why you may need an attorney when going through divorce and even after the divorce to deal with parenting and custodial issues. The hiring of an attorney is a serious matter, and attention should be given to the attorney's credentials and expertise.

One reason why you might seek legal advice is Complex Property Division which involves the distribution of property. This can include issues such as what to do with assets from a family-owned business, pre-marital or post-marital agreements, marital debt, inheritances and assets from large estates and even tax issues.

If you or your spouse is in the military, you may need legal advice on Military Divorce which can be complicated because of federal laws that protect serving men and women from having to respond to law suits. Divorce and formal papers cannot be served on your spouse while they are on active duty. Even after a military divorce there are questions remaining such as: what happens to a spouse's military ID and what happens to the non-military spouse and children's military benefits.

Alimony is sometimes called spouse support and unless agreed to in a prenuptial agreement, both parties may need legal advice and representation. There are questions on both sides such as: Can I get alimony? Will I have to pay alimony? Is alimony the same as child support? Can I claim alimony as a tax deduction? Do I have to pay income tax on alimony payments? As you can see, there are many questions concerning alimony and the answers can sometimes get complex.

Cohabitation can sometimes get complex especially if alimony payments are being received and child custody is involved. Questions may include: Do I have to continue alimony payments if my ex-spouse lives with someone? If my ex-spouse is living with someone, can I withhold child visitation on the grounds that I do not want my children exposed to that lifestyle? Cohabitation can introduce some difficult questions into even a cooperative divorce agreement.

Relocation in Florida over 50 miles or to another state can be a major legal battle when the custodial caregiver is transferred or has to relocate for other financial reasons. What are the rights of the other parent and how are custody and visitation rights honored?

Of course, all ruling of the court are subject modification and enforcement. What do I do when I need to request a modification? What do I need to do to seek enforcement of child visitation rights?

Other issues that individuals may need legal advice on are Father Rights and Grandparents & Relational Custody rights.

However, Child Custody and Child Support remain the number one reasons for contacting an attorney.

It is our hope that Parenting and Family Stabilization will assist you as you prepare for divorce and become a single parent. Should you need assistance or referral to an attorney, the Florida Bar Association provides a list of attorney in your area for you select from. The number will be given to you in the resources section of today's presentation.

Mental Health America of East Central Florida is proud to introduce you to Parenting and Family Stabilization, a parenting class designed to fulfill the Florida Statutes for the mandatory 4 hour parenting class requirements. The goal of this course is to provide information which will help divorcing parents realize the importance of developing and maintaining an equitable parenting plan, learn the effect of divorce on children at specific developmental levels and to learn skills to assist in developing healthy families.

Couples undergoing marital strain are encouraged to seek the assistance of a mental health professional specializing in family counseling. The yellow pages in your local phone book contain a variety of such mental health professionals. Clergy are also available for assistance and/or referrals. Throughout the presentation, you will be exposed to additional information on these and other topics. It is our sincere hope that the information provided will be of assistance to you as you seek to make choices in your life that will affect the lives of both you and your children forever.

Disclaimer

The components of this parenting course are intended for educational purposes only. The presentation of this material is not intended to constitute mental health therapy, give information on specific mental health disorders nor medications to treat mental health disorders. Participants are encouraged to discuss specific mental health questions with a licensed mental health therapist of their choice.

Any legal components of this parenting course are general Florida law principles. The presentation of this material is not intended to constitute legal advice. Participants should contact a licensed attorney for answers to specific legal questions.

Attendees must pre-register and pre-pay.