

This course has one purpose: to help parents effectively care for their children and themselves while co-parenting with someone from a previous relationship.

Single-parent families are part of our culture. You don't have to look far for it: movies, talk shows, books, and the Internet are overflowing with information about the causes and impact of raising children in a single-parent family. Most people hold preconceived ideas about what it means and how it affects their lives and the lives of their children. One goal of this course is to provide practical information and strategies for parents. Another aim is to debunk some limiting, stereotypical, and outdated beliefs about single-parent families and raising healthy children.

Most people know there will be changes in their lives. Few, however, recognize just how significant and unsettling these changes may be. The good news is that not all changes are bad, even if changes of any kind take some getting used to. The decision to end the relationship starts a chain of events that occur over time.

The choices you make during that time greatly affect how well your children adjust and whether they develop any significant or lasting difficulties. Taking the time to read and think about the ideas presented here should be helpful. Learning about the emotional, psychological, physical, and legal aspects of living separately will help you and your children deal with the inevitable changes associated with the new normal your family will have.

Effective co-parenting (and that term embodies a variety of concepts and behaviors) is critical. It can be the most powerful antidote to the stress on children. Depending on their age, it is not uncommon for children to feel rejected, abandoned, confused, and hurt. Parents may feel overwhelmed by their own stress and emotions. However, it is crucial for parents to recognize their children's age-appropriate needs and take the steps necessary to reassure children that their parental roles will continue.

Positive Co-Parenting can:

- Help your child feel safe and secure.
- Ensures your child will meet developmental milestones because they can focus on themselves.
- Teach them how to better regulate their emotions by your example.
- Aid in their development of healthy relationships in the future.
- Learn how to effectively manage conflict and how to overcome it.

The degree of stress that children experience during their parent's break-up usually increases with any additional turmoil in the family, which can easily result from parents' own distress. Problems begin to fade as parents regain their own emotional stability and can provide more nurturance and support. For this reason, parents must remember to be parents first and foremost with respect to their children before, during, and after the ending of the relationship. Generally speaking, problem behavior in children can range from

nonexistent to prolonged difficulty years after you and your significant other's legal process is final. There is no such thing as a typical breakup and you must find out what works and is the most effective for your individual family.

Most research and experience tell us that children successfully adjust if parents create specific necessary conditions. For example, open, age-appropriate communications, clear boundaries and limits, and stable routines all help children develop the internal controls necessary for healthy adjustment. Problems appear in families who are chronically stressed with instability and continued open conflict. Current life circumstances can play a critical role in children's long-term problems.

Understanding Court Procedures

Whether you are establishing paternity or filing for a divorce, there are certain court procedures to follow. Let's take a minute to review some general terms and concepts that you will encounter through the process.

Alimony

The legal obligation of one spouse to provide support for the other; now known as maintenance and spousal support.

Allocation of Parenting Responsibilities

The division or allocation of responsibilities related to the child(ren) which can include but is not limited to medical care, education, religious training, and extra-curricular expenses.

Answer

Refers to a written response prepared by the party against whom a pleading was filed.

Appearance

The filing of a document with the Court saying you want to be heard by the Court.

Appraisal

A means to obtain the fair market value of your property.

Child Support

The obligation of parents to contribute to the economic needs of their children.

Custody

No longer awarded in Illinois as of January 1, 2016 and has become known as the allocation of parental responsibilities.

Deposition

A discovery tool whereby oral testimony is taken of a party or witness under oath, by an attorney of the opposing party.

Discovery

The right of one party to obtain information from the other party.

Dissolution Of Marriage

Refers to the termination of a marriage, thereby ceasing all rights incident thereto.

Divorce Decree

Also known as a Judgment for Dissolution of Marriage, the court order terminating the marriage.

Domestic Violence

Also known as domestic abuse, refers to violent acts and inappropriate conduct of one spouse towards the other.

Equitable Division

The power of the court to divide the assets and liabilities of the parties as the court finds to be fair and just.

Exclusive Possession

The right to use and hold property, denying the use of that property by the other party.

Grounds

The legal basis or reason for the divorce. The only grounds for divorce recognized in Illinois are irreconcilable differences which some people refer to as no-fault divorce.

Guardian Ad Litem

Also known as the attorney for the minor child, refers to a person appointed to represent the interests of a child, to assist the Court in contested cases involving children.

Home Study

An investigation by a government agency of a parent's home, background, and conduct; used in disputed cases of child related issues.

Injunctions

A court order prohibiting a person from doing something.

Interrogatories

Written questions sent to the opposing party regarding issues and facts relating to the matter before the Court.

Joint Parenting Agreement

A written agreement granting both parties joint custody of the children and outlining the obligations of both parties but is no longer used in Illinois as of January 1, 2016.

Judgment For Dissolution Of Marriage

Also known as divorce decree, refers to the written court order dissolving a marriage.

Legal Separation

A court order setting forth both parties' rights and obligations while living separate and apart, but not divorced.

Maintenance

The legal obligation of one spouse to provide support for the other, also known as alimony or spousal support.

Marital Property

Property that was accumulated during the course of the marriage.

Marital Settlement Agreement

The written agreement of the parties in a divorce distributing property and setting forth the obligations of both parties.

Mediation

The use of a third party, who attempts to assist the parties in reaching a settlement of the issues involved in the divorce.

Order

The commands of the Court upon the parties of the case.

Order Of Protection

A court order often used in domestic violence cases prohibiting a spouse from certain conduct toward the other spouse such as harassment, physical abuse, and intimidation. This is often referred to as a stay away order.

Parenting Time

The schedule as to when a child will have time with each parent and was formerly known as Visitation.

Petition For Dissolution Of Marriage

Also known as a Petition or Complaint for Divorce, wherein a party seeks a court order dissolving a marriage, distributing the parties' assets, and resolving issues regarding the parties' children.

Pro Se

Representing yourself in court without an attorney and is now known as an unrepresented litigant.

Ruling

The order entered by a Judge after hearing the evidence presented by the parties.

Subpoena

A legal notice to appear or produce certain documents.

Temporary Order

A court order setting forth obligations for a specific period of time or prior to the entry of the divorce.

Verification

A party's affirmation that the facts and allegations outlined in the body of a pleading are true and correct to the best of the party's knowledge.

Best Interests of the Child

The court's primary concern in addressing child-related issues is the best interests of the child. The needs of children will be placed ahead of the needs of the parents in the settlement. It is best if both parents are comfortable with the arrangement they have worked out and can implement it with a high level of confidence. When parents are unable to accomplish this on their own, the best interests of children are left to the court.

In Illinois, whenever a 'best interests' determination is required, the following factors shall be considered in the context of the child's age and developmental needs:

- The physical safety and welfare of the child, including food, shelter, health, and clothing
- The development of the child's identity
- The child's background and ties, including familial, cultural, and religious
- The child's sense of attachments, including the following:
 - Where the child actually feels love, attachment, and a sense of being valued
 - The child's sense of security
 - The child's sense of familiarity
 - Continuity of affection for the child
 - The least disruptive placement alternative for the child
- The child's wishes and long-term goals
- The child's community ties, including church, school, and friends
- The child's need for permanence, which includes the child's need for stability and continuity of relationships with parent figures, siblings, and other relatives
- The uniqueness of every family and child
- The risks attendant to entering and being in substitute care
- The preferences of the persons available to care for the child

Further, courts have no preference for or against the either parent of the child when considering a parenting plan or time-sharing schedule.

To refer to the Illinois Statute on this topic:

<https://www.ilga.gov/legislation/ilcs/fulltext.asp?DocName=070504050K1-3>

Parental Time and Responsibilities

Illinois law now requires allocation of decision-making concerning the children and a parenting time schedule. Illinois parents, after the filing of the legal action, will be required by the court to file, either separately or jointly, a proposed parenting plan. A judge may require couples who have disagreements about these issues to participate in mediation.

In making decisions regarding the children, the court will consider the allocation of various parental responsibilities, including the ability to make decisions about education, health, extracurricular activities, and religious matters for the child. The court will consider what is in the best interest of the child as well as any agreement made between the parents.

Community Resources:

Illinois Legal Advice:

<https://il.freelegalanswers.org>

Illinois Association of Family Mediators:

<https://www.illinoismediators.org/roster>

Legal Aid

<https://www.illinoislegalaid.org>

The Division of Family & Community Services (FCS)

<https://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=31754>

Reference Books for Parents

BIFF for Co-Parent Communication: Your Guide to Difficult Texts, Emails, and Social Media Posts, by Bill Eddy, Annette Burns, et al., 2020

The Co-Parenting Survival Guide. Zimmerman, Jeffrey, and Elizabeth Thayer. Oakland: New Harbinger Publications, 2001.

Transition: Helping children through divorce: A guide for Parents. The Union League Civics & Arts Foundation, 2005

The Truth about Children and Divorce. Emery, Robert. New York: Viking, 2004.

What About the Kids? Wallerstein, Judith, and Sandra Blakeslee. New York: Hyperion, 2003.

Between Two Worlds. Marquardt, Elizabeth. New York: Crown Publishers, 2005.

Parenting After Divorce: A Guide to Resolving Conflicts and Meeting Your Children's Needs
by Phillip Michael Stahl, 2007

Online Support Resources for Parents

<https://www.divorcemag.com>

<https://www.divorcenet.com>

<https://divorcesupporthelp.com/>