



ALL IN THE FAMILY

Legal blog on all aspects of Family Law and Divorce in Massachusetts and Rhode Island

Two Families Now

BY ROBIN M. LYNCH NARDONE • JUNE 17, 2024

Absent a waiver, anyone involved in a child custody case in the Massachusetts Probate & Family Court – whether via a Complaint for Divorce, Complaint for Separate Support, Complaint to Establish Parentage, or Complaint for Custody/Support/Parenting – is required to complete an online parenting course called “Two Families Now.” Judges also have the authority to order parties to post-divorce modification and contempt actions involving parenting to complete the course.

The online course aims to strengthen parenting skills, effectuate positive co-parent communication, assist parents in finding ways to reduce conflict, and help parents understand the negative impact that parental conflict has on children. There are four video modules that can be completed on a computer or smart phone and can typically be completed in four to six hours. The modules cover parenting transition, stress reduction, communication and family routines.

Parents must register for the online course within 30 calendar days of the service of the complaint and complete the course within 30 days thereafter. The four hours do not need to be completed in one sitting but can be spread out over several days. A certificate of completion must be filed with the Court within 14 days after completion of the course.

A waiver from the requirement to complete the co-parenting course can be obtained in the following circumstances:

- when patterns of behaviors make parental communication unsafe;
- language barriers make the course difficult (the course is presently offered in English and Spanish);
- incarceration or other unavailability makes it impossible for a party to complete the course;
- a written agreement on custody and/or parenting time is filed with the Court;
- a parent has previously attended the course; or
- where justice otherwise indicates.

The Court will not move the case forward unless both parties complete the course or obtain a waiver. This is a revamped effort by the Court to address issues prone to high conflict. Parents should approach the course with an open mind and a goal towards making progress individually and with their co-parents that will ultimately serve the children's best interests.