



JUDICIAL COUNCIL OF CALIFORNIA

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REPORT TO THE JUDICIAL COUNCIL

For business meeting on: August 22, 2014

Title

Family Law: New Online “Parenting After Separation” Course

Agenda Item Type

Information Only

Date of Report

August 12, 2014

Submitted by

Family and Juvenile Law Advisory
Committee

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Executive Summary

“Parenting After Separation” is a component of the Families Change website (www.familieschange.ca.gov), providing an online, free, parent education course that can be accessed directly at www.parenting.familieschange.ca.gov. The course provides approximately three hours of parent education addressing separation and divorce, children’s developmental needs, and the court process. The course was developed in response to requests from courts throughout the state for an efficient way of getting parents information they need before or during a child custody matter.

Previous Council Action

On recommendation of the Trial Court Budget Working Group (now the Trial Court Budget Advisory Committee), the Judicial Council approved \$52,850 from the Trial Court Improvement Fund during fiscal year (FY) 2011–2012 for this project. In order to maximize resources, the funding was used to adapt sites developed by the Justice Education Society (JES), a nonprofit organization that supports the British Columbia justice system. JES and the British Columbia justice system are internationally recognized for their work to provide online public education resources concerning the court system.

The first stage of the project was demonstrated at the June 28, 2013, meeting of the Judicial Council. Two online resources were launched at that meeting. The first was www.familieschange.ca.gov, which provides related websites aimed at parents, teens, and children and covers child custody and support issues. The second was www.changeville.ca.gov, a highly interactive website for children. These websites make it easier for courts to provide information to families and children about divorce and separation. These sites have been used extensively by Californians in the last year.

Methodology and Process

Work on “Parenting After Separation” continued during FY 2013–2014 to ensure that the law was accurate for California and that the course was close-captioned to meet requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Various features were added at the request of courts so that this online course can take the place of existing local parent education courses and produce a certificate for participants to show the court or Family Court Services upon completion.

“Parenting After Separation” provides approximately three hours of parent education addressing separation and divorce, children’s developmental needs, and the court process. The course includes:

- Videos with children’s perspectives;
- Worksheets for parents to consider possible parenting plans prior to or as part of mediation; and
- An extensive online handbook providing information that elaborates upon the course content.

The course also includes the existing Family Court Services orientation video developed by the Center for Families, Children & the Courts, which covers all the topics currently required to be addressed. Those taking the course for credit will be guided through the entire course and given the opportunity to complete a final exam to obtain the certificate of completion.

This resource was developed based on requests from courts throughout the state. Family courts have in the past routinely needed to use staff time to develop and provide parent education courses. In the current fiscal climate, courts and agencies have had to cut back and look at how to provide much-needed information as efficiently and effectively as possible. This course provides a much-needed resource that will save courts money and offer a more efficient way of getting parents information they need before or during a child custody matter.

JES conducted extensive research in developing their site and the original course, with significant input from families, children, and professionals. As the California version of “Parenting After Separation” was being developed, Family Court Services professionals and judicial officers reviewed the course and provided input to staff working with JES so that the legal information, approach, and resources were redesigned for a California audience. As a non-

profit agency working to improve access to justice, JES originally designed the course so that it could easily be adapted by other court systems at a significantly reduced rate, making innovative technology and relevant information as easy for courts and the public to access as possible. California is the first state to adapt the website and course.

Next Steps

The Family and Juvenile Law Advisory Committee and staff at the Center for Families, Children & the Courts will provide outreach to courts statewide to ensure information about the course is made available to judicial officers, court staff, and the public. Additionally, information already provided on the California Courts website (www.courts.ca.gov) will be updated and efforts will be undertaken to provide information through social media and other outlets to inform the public and community organizations about the course. Staff is available to provide a walkthrough of the course via webinar to share information about all the features of the course without incurring significant training costs.

Efforts are underway to have www.familieschange.ca.gov and “Parenting After Separation” translated into Spanish.