

## Parenting Education Approval Under the Nebraska Parenting Act (2007)

- A. Name of Educational Component: LB 554 Parent Education Guidelines and Approval Process
- B. Statutory Authority: Subsection (3) of Nebraska Revised Statute §43-2928 (2007) states: "The State Court Administrator's Office shall approve all parenting and child of divorce education courses under the act." The Parenting Act makes attendance at basic level parent education courses mandatory for all parties to a proceeding under the Parenting Act (Section 43-2928 (1)). Attendance at a second-level parenting education course is discretionary by the court. (Subsection (2) of §43-2928).

The Act sets forth descriptions of content of these courses as follows:

Subsection (4) states: "The basic level parenting education course pursuant to this section shall be designed to educate the parties about the impact of the pending court action upon the child and appropriate application of parenting functions. The course shall include, but not be limited to, information on the developmental stages of children, adjustment of a child to parental separation, the litigation and court process, alternative dispute resolution, conflict management, stress reduction, guidelines for parenting time, visitation, or other access, provisions for safety and transition plans, and information about parents and children affected by child abuse or neglect, domestic intimate partner abuse, and unresolved parental conflict."

Subsection (5) states: "The second-level parenting education course pursuant to this section shall include, but not be limited to, information about development of provisions for safety and transition plans, the potentially harmful impact of domestic intimate partner abuse and unresolved parental conflict on the child, use of effective communication techniques and protocols, resource and referral information for victim and perpetrator services, batterer intervention programs, and referrals for mental health services, substance abuse services, and other community resources."

- C. Implementation Process: An LB 554 Parent Education Guidelines Subcommittee was formed in June 2007 under the auspices of the State Court Administrator's Office to provide recommendations to the State Court Administrator for approval of parenting education. The subcommittee's recommendations are contained within this document. Subcommittee members represented a multi-disciplinary family law, education, and mediation background, as follows: David Hubbard, attorney and family law mediator, Omaha and Lincoln; Grant Story, professional educator for divorcing parents, Omaha; Michelle Zinke, professional educator for children in domestic relations and abuse; Mona Callies, adult education dean, Lincoln; Suzanne Curran Carney, attorney and mediator, Grand Island; Toni Ahrendt, professional probation and social work for families in domestic abuse, Lincoln; Debora Denny, attorney, mediator and educator, Lincoln; Cindy Strasheim, child and family educator for divorcing parents, Loop City; and Romney Olson, child and family educator and mediator, Lincoln. This subcommittee's recommendations were submitted for review to Carole McMahon-Boies, Judicial Branch Education director, whose recommendations have been incorporated in this draft.
- D. Educational Objectives and Provider Guidelines: The statutorily required educational objectives and provider guidelines are indicated below by an underlined statement. Additional educational components which are optional are itemized with each required educational objective.

## 1. Basic Level Parenting Education

a. Objectives: Parents who attend this educational course will:

- Learn about the potential impact of the court action (separation/divorce) upon a child

*Additional elements under this objective may include:*

- To what extent children should be involved in the court action
- Empowering parents
- Using a child centered approach
- Safety

- Identify ways to appropriately address parenting functions

*Additional elements under this objective may include:*

- Basic Parenting Education
- Parenting functions as outlined in the statute

- Identify the developmental stages of children

*Additional elements under this objective may include:*

- What is "normal" behavior?
- Ages and stages and the ranges of these stages
- Impact of crisis such as divorce upon the stages of the child's development
- Consideration of the child(ren)'s stage(s) of development when designing the Parenting Plan

- Learn about ways to support the child's adjustment to parental separation

- Identify the elements of the court process in terms of the Parenting Plan

*Additional elements under this objective may include:*

- Elements of a parenting plan
- Guidelines for parenting time/visitation/or other access
- How to create a parenting plan (parental negotiation, attorney negotiation, mediation, specialized alternative dispute resolution (SADR), litigation)

- Learn about alternative dispute resolution, conflict management, stress reduction, appropriate language usage, and positive communication

*Additional elements under this objective may include:*

- Use of "I" messages and alienation
- Interest-based negotiation techniques

- Identify provisions for safety and transition plans under the Nebraska Parenting Act

- Identify attributes of child abuse, neglect, domestic intimate partner abuse (DIPA), and unresolved parental conflict, and how they impact members of the family

*Additional elements under this objective may include:*

- Mandatory reporting requirements
- Effects of DIPA and child abuse/neglect at different stages of development
- On going persistent parental conflict and its impact on children
- Definitions/terms: domestic intimate partner abuse vs. high conflict

- Identify parenting through separation resources and references for those wanting to get more information from web sites and books

b. Provider Guidelines for In-Person or Virtual (Synchronous)

- Each Parent Education Provider must address specific safety issues during the intake process and throughout the educational experience, to include but not limited to:
  - Offering separate classes for either party in a case.
  - Screening questions to assess presence of domestic intimate partner abuse<sup>1</sup>.
  - Safety measures are in place at the site and time of the class.
- Each provider must provide a written proof of completion for each participant, at no additional cost.
- Each provider shall inform participants that they will need to complete Nebraska State Court Form *Certificate of Completion of Parenting Education Course* (DC 6:5.5) and provide instructions where the form is located or provide the form to participants.
- Providers must submit significant curriculum modifications to the AOCPP for approval.
- Parenting Act mandated basic level classes must be at least two (2) hours in length and no more than six (6) hours in length.
- Providers are encouraged to offer participants the opportunity to evaluate the course.
- Education class facilitator qualifications shall include:
  - Bachelor's degree required in children and family, psychology, sociology, social work-related field or equivalent
  - Master's degree preferred in children and family, psychology, sociology, social work-related field or equivalent or equivalent experience in one of the above listed areas
  - Exceptions to these requirements will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis and approved by the Office of Dispute Resolution
  - Must submit three written references
  - Child welfare background check must be done for those facilitating the course
  - Knowledge required in the following fields: domestic violence, mediation and Specialized ADR under the Nebraska Parenting Act, parenting plans, family dynamics, understanding of mandatory reporting requirements, and parental conflict and the impact on children.

c. Provider Guidelines for Online (Asynchronous)

- Educators shall provide an opportunity for participants to ask questions of course facilitators. Educators or facilitators, qualified as described below, will inform participants as to when they are available for regular communication by:
  - Sharing email address and phone number with all participants at the start of the class.

- Scheduling telephone office hours where participants can expect to call and speak directly to the instructor.
  - Returning emails or voicemail messages in a timely manner.
- If the provider offers online chat, blogs, or posts in an open forum, the provider shall screen all on-line communications prior to posting.
- Comprehension of educational objectives will be facilitated using a variety of means including text, images, video, and quizzes.
  - Video will be used to distribute information such as visual or procedural concepts that are hard to express in text.
  - Real life or simulated demonstrations of parenting dilemmas, conflict, and related separation issues will be used in addition to lecture format.
- Safety for participants during the intake process and throughout the educational experience is addressed by:
  - Keeping participants' direct contact and personal information for use only by the instructor, not shared with any other participants.
  - Assigning a username (which will not compromise personal information) to every participant for use during course and participant interaction.
  - Maintaining privacy of feedback and information from outside of group discussions.
  - Allowing either party to enroll in separate classes if safety is a concern.
- Provider shall provide a written proof of completion for each participant, provided at no additional cost.
- Provider shall inform participants that they will need to complete Nebraska State Court form *Certificate of Completion of Parenting Education Course* (DC6:5.5), and provide instructions where the form is located or provide the form to participants.
- Providers must submit significant curriculum modifications to the AOCPE for approval.
- The online class reflects an amount of content similar to that which is provided during an in person/synchronous workshop of two (2) hours in length and no more than six (6) hours in length.
- Participants have the opportunity to evaluate the course.
- Participants will sign off on a course policies agreement that incorporates the guidelines within this statement.
- Provider will need to define hardware and software and internet requirements for class participation. Provider will respond to technology questions in a timely manner.
- Online curriculum has been developed by educators and partners with qualifications that reflect:
  - Bachelor's degree required in children and family, psychology, sociology, social work-related field or equivalent.
  - Master's degree preferred in children and family, psychology, sociology, social work-related field or equivalent or equivalent experience in one of the above listed areas.
  - Knowledge required in the following fields: domestic violence, mediation and specialized ADR under the Nebraska Parenting Act, parenting plans, family dynamics, understanding of mandatory child

abuse and neglect reporting requirements, and parental conflict and impact upon children.

- Basic technology skills including but not limited to:
  - ability to operate within the preferred standard operating system (Windows, macOS).
  - ability to use the preferred standard word processing application(s).
  - ability to use preferred email applications.
  - ability to use the preferred web browser.
  - ability to use the preferred course management system.

## 2. Second-Level Parenting Education

### a. Objectives: Parents who attend this educational course will:

- Identify the "why" and "how" to develop provisions for safety and transition plans

*Additional elements under this objective may include:*

- As it applies to the parenting plan
- Examples of safe transitions
- Parallel parenting
- Options if plan is violated

- Identify the potential harmful impact of domestic intimate partner abuse and unresolved parental conflict on the child

*Additional elements under this objective may include:*

- Definition of terms
- Developmental stage specific effects
- Resiliency factors
- Joint and sole custody behaviors
- Purpose of child support and ways to defuse unnecessary conflict

- Learn effective communication techniques and protocols

*Additional elements under this objective may include:*

- Plan for communicating about the needs of children
- Safe communication for all parties with examples

- Become aware of resource and referral information for victim, perpetrator, and batterer services

*Additional elements under this objective may include:*

- Victim services
- Perpetrator services
- Batterer intervention programs
- Referrals for mental health services, substance use services, and other community resources

### b. Provider Guidelines

- Safety for participants during the intake process and throughout the educational experience is addressed by providing an increased level of security and requiring specific separate classes for men and women.
- Providers shall provide written proof of completion for each participant at no additional cost.

- Providers shall inform participants that they will need to complete Nebraska State court form *Certificate of Completion of Parenting Education Course* (DC 6:55) and provide instructions on where the form is located or provide the form to participants.
- Providers must submit significant curriculum modifications to the AOCPE for approval.
- Providers are encouraged to offer participants the opportunity to evaluate the course.
- Second-level courses are to be a minimum of a two (2) hours and a no more than six (6) hours in length.
- Education class facilitator qualifications shall include:
  - Bachelor's degree required in children and family, psychology, sociology, social work related field or equivalent
  - Master's degree preferred in children and family, psychology, sociology, social work related field or equivalent OR equivalent experience in one of the above listed areas
  - Exceptions to these requirements will be reviewed on a case by case basis and approved by the Office of Dispute Resolution
  - Must submit three written references
  - Child welfare background check must be done for those facilitating the course
  - Knowledge required in the following fields: domestic violence, mediation and Specialized ADR under the Nebraska Parenting Act, parenting plans, family dynamics, understanding of mandatory reporting requirements, and parental conflict

E. Administrative Office of the Courts and Probation Approval Process

1. Ongoing: July 1, 2008, and following fiscal years

Education providers may submit an application of their course offering(s) for approval by the State Court Administrator. Applications may be submitted by email to: [nsc.mediation@nejudicial.gov](mailto:nsc.mediation@nejudicial.gov).

Submissions may also be mailed to:

Nebraska Administrative Office of the Courts and Probation  
 ATTN: Office of Dispute Resolution, Parent Education  
 P.O. Box 98910  
 Lincoln, NE 68509-8910

The required components of the application packet include:

1. Provider Information Sheet
  - a. Contact Information
  - b. Education course(s) being requested for approval
  - c. Language(s) course is provided in
  - d. Course schedule (date, time, location(s), and cost)

- e. Availability of sliding fee or fee wavier
  - f. Facilitators/educators (names, contact information, relationship, and educational background)
  - g. Facilitators/educators that have not been previously approved must submit three letters of reference.
2. Educational Objectives and Provider Guidelines/Statement of Compliance
- a. Basic Level Parenting Education (in-person and virtual [synchronous])
  - b. Basic Level Parenting Education (online [asynchronous])
  - c. Second Level Parenting Education

Notification of application status will be sent within 30 days of receipt of application by United State Postal Service.

Approvals are for a calendar year.

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<sup>i</sup> Nebraska Coalition to End Sexual and Domestic Violence is a possible resource for screening questions