



Parenting Apart

An Opportunity for Both Parents to Make Choices Together in the Best Interests of the Children.

When parents come to court unable to agree about the care for their children, they are asking the Court to make these decisions for them. In this adversarial process, winners and losers are declared.

Families cannot be divided by declaring winners and losers. When we go through the adversary process, the strong feelings that come out in the courtroom create barriers that prohibit future cooperation. In the adversarial process, children always lose. The goal of mediation is to make children the winners.

The Judges of this district believe the children always win when parents make parenting decisions together rather than the Court.

Parenting Apart Classes

Parenting Apart classes are a 9-hour, 3-session curriculum that was developed by Harriet Shacklee at the University of Idaho Consumer Education Division. It is designed to teach parents a "business-like" way of communicating with each other in order to reduce the level of conflict that children might be exposed to because of the emotions parents are experiencing. The court heightens parents' awareness of the child's point of view and children's needs both during and after the family restructuring. Developmental needs of children based on ages are presented as are suggestions about such things as parenting from a distance, handling issues that may arise from extended family members or friends, and seeking non-adversarial conflict resolution alternatives. All of these skills are intended to empower parents to be good parents for their children and helping them to avoid using court procedure to resolve problems.

All parents who file for a divorce, a modification of a parenting arrangement or for a visitation order in a paternity case are ordered by the Court to attend these classes before action is

taken on their petition. Their children between the age of 6 and 17 shall also attend the program for children of divorcing parties. There are also "volunteer" participants who may be stepparents, grandparents, or previously divorced parents who wish to learn the skills taught in the classes.

The classes are taught in Blaine, Jerome, Minidoka and Twin Falls County. Each parent must pay a \$50 fee to attend, which helps pay for the instructor. The instructors are Supreme Court approved Child Custody mediators who have participated in training on the curriculum and observed a series of classes.

Each parent who attends Parenting Apart is asked to complete a written evaluation of the classes. The evaluations have been overwhelmingly positive and anecdotal data indicates parents, and thus children, are benefiting from attendance at these classes.