

## **The AssessFamilyLaw.org Model Rule for Family Cases**

The following model rule aspires to give the architecture for a comprehensively cooperative system of family law.

While this model rule is based on interviews with hundreds of bench and bar leaders, our foundation makes no claim this is the final word on such an important subject. Our goal is to advance jurisdictions' assessments of their own family law systems and independent informed choices on useful changes.

The operation of this model rule can be considered with the following resources.

- The interactive review tool at [AssessFamilyLaw.org](https://www.AssessFamilyLaw.org).
- [An Introduction to a Cooperative System of Family Law](#).
- [Video introduction](#) (19 minutes).
- The sample court website at [FamilyCourtWebsite.org](https://www.FamilyCourtWebsite.org).

We're eager for all feedback you wish to share, as well as for accounts of the progress your jurisdiction continues to make in this vital field.

Charles A. Asher  
Freedom 22 Foundation  
Indianapolis, Indiana  
August 23, 2022

## AssessFamilyLaw.org Model Rule for Cooperation in Family Cases

### (A) Liberal Construction and Application.

- (1) The Circuit and Superior Courts of \_\_\_\_\_ are committed to a cooperative model for the handling of family cases by parents, attorneys, and judges. This Rule will be liberally construed and applied to serve the ends of (a) ensuring safety, (b) reducing conflict, (c) building cooperation, and (d) protecting the children and healthy relationships within families.
- (2) “Family cases” are defined as all marital dissolution or separation, paternity, guardianship, termination of parental rights, delinquency, and child in need of services (CHINS) cases.
- (3) Parties and counsel should visit [FamilyCourtWebsite.org](http://FamilyCourtWebsite.org) for information on the procedures in use in \_\_\_\_\_ County in support of the cooperative handling of family cases.

### (B) Case Captioning.

- (1) Parties in marital dissolution and separation and paternity cases shall not be captioned or designated as “petitioner,” “respondent,” “plaintiff,” or “defendant.” “Versus” shall not be used in the captions of any such cases.
- (2) In marital dissolution and separation cases where the parties have one or more children under the age of 20 on the date of the initial filing, all pleadings shall be captioned, “In Re the Marriage of \_\_\_\_\_, father [or mother], and \_\_\_\_\_, mother [or father].” The party filing the initial petition shall be named first.
- (3) In marital dissolution and separation cases without children under the age of 20, all pleadings shall be captioned, “In Re the Marriage of \_\_\_\_\_, wife [or husband], and \_\_\_\_\_, husband [or wife].” Following dissolution, parties without children may be captioned and designated “former husband” and “former wife.”
- (4) Parties in paternity cases shall be captioned and designated as “mother,” “putative father,” and “father.”

### (C) Duties of Attorneys and Parties in Family Cases.

- (1) Attorneys and parties in family cases shall be responsible to act with the Courts as co-problem-solvers, not mere problem-reporters. Unless safety requires otherwise, counsel should:
  - (a) speak with all clients, as soon as possible and as often as necessary, about the advantages and judicial expectations of safe cooperation in family cases;

- (b) refer clients to all co-parenting classes, counseling, mediation, and other problem-solving processes that appear to counsel to be promising resources for good family functioning;
- (c) work with other counsel to ensure safety in families where domestic violence has been, or reasonably could be, an issue;
- (d) work with other counsel in all cases to reduce conflict, build cooperation, and protect children;
- (e) avoid unnecessary motions and hearings; and
- (f) use the least divisive processes in pursuing safety, fairness, cooperation, and the best interests of children (for example, consulting with other counsel as early and often as necessary to find cooperative resolutions, using mail or acknowledgement of service instead of sheriff service of process, encouraging restraint and safe cooperation between family members, and exhausting all viable cooperative measures before requesting either custody evaluations or trial settings).

(2) The Courts will expect all parties and attorneys to consistently observe:

- (a) ***personal responsibility*** by acting on one's own opportunities to solve problems and improve circumstances rather than merely reporting on the alleged fault in others,
- (b) ***cooperation*** by sensibly defining and pursuing the best interests of all family members,
- (c) ***courtesy*** by constant observance of respectful language and behavior,
- (d) ***focused attention on children's needs*** including an awareness that parent conflict is gravely dangerous to children.

(3) Attorneys appearing in family cases shall (a) furnish their family clients with a copy of this Rule and (b) assist them in fully understanding and observing its provisions.

**(D) Attorneys as Problem-Solvers Presuit**

(1) The Courts of \_\_\_\_\_ County make the following specific findings:

- (a) Actions taken in the earliest stages of parents' separation and other family crises often define much of the future of the family case and the family.
- (b) While courts are largely powerless to affect cases before they are filed, attorneys can at such early stages set a tone of either beneficial cooperation or destructive conflict in the cases and families they touch.

- (c) Therefore, attorneys' language and conduct in the earliest stages of family cases, including before they are filed, should be governed by a responsibility to reduce conflict, build cooperation, and protect children.
- (2) The Courts of \_\_\_\_\_ County, therefore, strongly request and will continuously encourage attorneys to conduct themselves at all times, including before cases are filed, in ways that ensure safety, reduce conflict, build cooperation, and protect the children and healthy relationships within families. Before a case is filed, this attorney commitment to those ends should include the following:
- (a) **Assessment of Case and Safety Considerations.** Counsel meeting with a person contemplating a family case should promptly assess whether the case can safely be handled cooperatively and without adversarial motions or hearings. Unless safety or other exceptional circumstances make cooperation unreasonable, counsel should handle the case in ways that avoid court and maximize the prospective parties' and other family members' development of cooperative problem-solving.
  - (b) **Cooperation between Counsel before Initial Filings.** Counsel representing persons anticipating a family case should make reasonable efforts to determine if the other possible parties have, or may be seeking, representation. Unless doing so would be dangerous or otherwise unreasonable, counsel should:
    - (i) consult and cooperate with each other before filing;
    - (ii) attempt in good faith to find cooperative resolutions to provisional matters, including peaceful separation, so that unnecessary provisional filings and hearings can be avoided;
    - (iii) refer parents to resources such as co-parenting education, counseling, and mediation that can help them, their children, and the healthy relationships in the family.
  - (c) **Cooperation with Self-Represented Parties before Initial Filings.** Unless doing so would be dangerous or otherwise unreasonable, counsel should employ these same efforts at consultation and cooperation with self-represented persons prior to the filing of any family case. When safe to do so, counsel should (i) communicate directly with such persons (including a self-represented spouse, parent, putative parent, or guardian) and (b) take all reasonable measures to avoid provisional filings and hearings on matters that could be resolved by cooperative measures such as discussion, counseling, and mediation.

**(E) Parenting Plans**

(1) The preparation of a Parenting Plan is recommended for all parties in dissolution, separation, and paternity cases, though mandatory only if one or more motions are filed or a hearing is scheduled. All parents and guardians with one or more children together under the age of 20 should as soon as possible (and in time for any hearing in the case) fill out and sign a Parenting Plan on the form provided in Appendix A or B. Parents signing an agreed Parenting Plan will be governed by that Plan unless it is modified by written agreement or court order.

(2) If parents have an issue that results in a motion being filed or a hearing being set, then prior to any hearing, they shall make all reasonable efforts to prepare, sign, and file an agreed Parenting Plan on the form provided in Appendix A or B and shall bring that agreed Parenting Plan to all hearings. If the parents cannot agree on a Parenting Plan, then each shall complete the form from Appendix A or B, supply a copy to each other, and bring copies to all hearings.

**(F) Mandatory Website Work and Co-Parenting Class<sup>1</sup>**

(1) Divorcing parents without children under the age of 20 on the date of the initial petition shall file a confirmation, either separately or together, stating in substance, “The parties confirm they have no children together under the age of 20.”

(2) In all separation, dissolution, and paternity cases where the parties have one or more children together under the age of 20 on the date of the initial petition, the parents must show timely completion of important website and classroom work as provided below.

(3) In marital dissolution, separation cases, and paternity cases, parents with one or more children together under the age of 20 shall make arrangements to attend a co-parenting class by contacting [ ] within 10 days of the filing of the initial petition in their case. Parents must complete the class within 60 days of the initial petition in their case and show proof thereof by filing a copy of their certificate of completion. Parents shall complete the work on [UpToParents.org](http://UpToParents.org) and take their completed work to their co-parenting class.

(4) If a hearing is scheduled in dissolution, separation, or paternity case, the parents shall merge their chosen Commitments from their website work into a set of Agreed Commitments, review those Agreed Commitments, and take copies of them to all hearings. If more than a year has passed since the parents’ completion of the website

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<sup>1</sup>. Note to courts considering this rule: There are huge variances between jurisdictions in their processes to send parents to co-parenting classes and show proof of attendance. This model rule suggests one approach, and doubtless it will have to be adapted to each jurisdiction’s needs.

It is recommended that any formulation stress parents’ *early* completion of this work so that it can impact the “meaning-making” stage of separations. This model rule puts the burden on parties to timely file either (a) a confirmation that they have no children together under the age of 20 or (b) proof of completing the required co-parenting class.

work, they shall redo the work, merge their Commitments into a set of Agreed Commitments, and bring those Agreed Commitments to all hearings.

**(G) Mandatory Protocols for Motions, Hearings, Custody Evaluations, and Trial Settings**

(1) Attorneys and parties (a) shall work as co-problem-solvers with the court, not mere problem-reporters, (b) shall make every reasonable effort to resolve problems by reaching agreements that serve the best interests of all family members, and (c) should appear in court on contested matters only in rare circumstances. The courts' intervention, however, will be liberally available in cases of domestic violence.

(2) Except in instances where it would be dangerous or otherwise unreasonable, counsel (or self-represented parties) shall use good-faith personal or telephone consultation to resolve any issue before seeking relief from a court. Correspondence by mail or electronic communication will not suffice. Counsel and self-represented parties contacted for a consultation under this rule shall make themselves reasonably available for the consultation. In the consultation, counsel (and self-represented parties) shall:

- (a) attempt to resolve the matter at issue;
- (b) discuss, and make a list of, the resources they believe the parents could use to resolve all current and future issues and to build cooperation, including any resources listed in paragraph (I)(2) (separate lists shall be made if a joint list is not agreed on);
- (c) confirm that the parents (i) have completed the website work referred to in paragraph (D), (ii) have merged their chosen Commitments into a set of Agreed Commitments, and (iii) will review and bring their Agreed Commitments and all other website work to any upcoming hearing;
- (d) confirm the date each parent completed the required co-parenting class,
- (e) confirm that the parents have completed and will be bringing to any upcoming hearings a completed Parenting Plan Worksheet (PPW) on the form provided in Appendix A or B.

(3) All motions and pleadings (including any requests for provisional relief) shall include a Cooperation Update (a) confirming compliance with, and the details of, each of the requirements in paragraph (G)(2)(a)-(e) and (b) listing the dates and subject matter of all prior hearings in the case. Motions and pleadings filed without a complete Cooperation Update shall be inadequate to raise any issue for court review unless they recite the specific reasons for the lack of a personal or telephonic consultation or the lack of a complete Cooperation Update. Sample conforming motions are attached as Appendix C.

(4) The duty of consultation shall be continuing. Following the filing of any motion, counsel (and parties without representation) shall continue to hold all consultations that may help resolve the matter at issue and build cooperation between the parties.

(5) Custody evaluations and trials will be reserved for cases where one or both parents lack the capacity to safely resolve the issues they face. No custody evaluation or trial may be requested, ordered, or conducted unless and until all cooperative measures (including, at least, co-parenting education, counseling, and mediation) have been exhausted or shown to be dangerous, lacking a reasonable possibility of success, or otherwise unreasonable. All requests for custody evaluations, trials, or both shall be in writing and shall state:

- (a) what specific issues are resolved and what specific issues remain unresolved;
- (b) what problem-solving resources have been used to date (including any co-parenting education, counseling, mediation);
- (c) exactly why no further cooperative measures can be expected to assist the parents or the resolution of issues.

(6) Parents shall review and bring to every hearing a copy of their Agreed Commitments and current Parenting Plan Worksheet.

(7) The Domestic Relations Counseling Bureau [address and telephone number] is available to assist attorneys and parents in holding the consultation required by paragraph (G)(2) and in completing the required website work and Parenting Plan Worksheet.

**(H) Cooperation Conferences**

(1) A cooperation conference will ordinarily be scheduled by the Court for approximately 60 days after the filing of the initial petition for dissolution (or, in paternity cases, approximately 60 days after the finding of paternity). Additional cooperation conferences should be requested whenever parents or counsel believe they would be helpful in reducing conflict, building cooperation, preserving relationships, or protecting children.

(2) The chief purposes of cooperation conferences will be (i) for attorneys and self-represented persons to report on progress in reducing conflict, building cooperation, preserving family relationships, and responding to the needs of the children and (ii) for families, where required, to be referred for any necessary help.

(3) Counsel and self-represented persons shall consult in advance of cooperation conferences to exchange and discuss suggestions for the future course of the case that would serve the best interests of all family members.

**(I) Additional Assistance to Families**

(1) At any time parents need resources to ensure safety, reduce conflict, build cooperation, or protect the children and healthy relationships in families, they and their attorneys, if any, should identify and use the resources that could be of help to those ends.

(2) The Domestic Relations Counseling Bureau [address and phone number] will be available to give free assistance to parents and attorneys in identifying helpful resources, including:

- (a) Redoing the website work from [UpToParents.org](http://UpToParents.org).
- (b) Additional co-parenting classes, including re-attending the basic class or attending high-conflict classes.
- (c) Completing a new Parenting Plan Worksheet (PPW).
- (d) Mediation.
- (e) A confidential therapeutic assessment of the parents by DRCB to develop a set of recommendations for their improved interaction.
- (f) Individual, joint co-parenting, family, or child counseling.
- (g) Appointment of a parenting coordinator.
- (h) Any other measure that might protect children, reduce conflict, or build cooperation.

(3) If parents nevertheless continue to have conflict and appear in court without an agreement about the resources they will use, the Court may select the resources the parents will be ordered to use.

**(J) Standard Discovery Order on Financial and Property Matters** [Rule should provide what specific financial and property information will be part of a standard order available automatically on the request of either party.]

**(K) Courts' Notice to Parents in Dissolution Cases.** The Clerk shall distribute to all parties in dissolution cases the Judges' Notice attached in Appendix D to this Rule.



## Commentary

*Family cases of all sorts (see paragraph (A)(2)) must be handled in ways that ensure safety, reduce conflict, build cooperation between parents, and protect the children and healthy relationships in families. The Courts of \_\_\_\_\_ County will expect parents and attorneys to give consistent attention to those ends and will liberally construe and apply this Rule to serve those ends.*

*The Rule provides nine measures to promote the cooperation necessary to serve the best interests of all family members involved in family cases.*

- (1) Cases will be captioned and parties will be designated in ways that better convey everyone's duty of cooperation. Parents will be designated as "mother" and "father" (or in some paternity cases as "putative father"), never as "petitioner" or "respondent." "Versus" is never used. See paragraph (B).*
- (2) Attorneys and parents will be expected to consistently observe personal responsibility, cooperation, courtesy, and focused attention on children's needs. Attorneys will have many problem-solving responsibilities both before and after the filing of a family case. See paragraphs (C) and (D).*
- (3) Parents will be encouraged to prepare Parenting Plans and will be required to file one (or their separate proposed parenting plans) if any motion is filed or hearing is set. See paragraph (E).*
- (4) Parents in dissolution, separation, and paternity cases will be referred for mandatory website work and a co-parenting class. See paragraph (F).*
- (5) Before filing motions or pleadings, counsel are required to have a personal consultation on five matters: (a) an attempt to resolve by agreement the matter at issue; (b) a discussion of the resources parents could use to resolve current and future issues; (c) confirmation that the parents have completed, and will bring to any upcoming hearing, their Agreed Commitments from their website work; (d) confirmation of the parents' attendance at their required co-parenting class; and (e) confirmation that the parents have completed, and will be bringing to any upcoming hearing, a Parenting Plan Worksheet. See paragraph (G)(1) and (2).*
- (6) Counsel shall include in their pleadings a Cooperation Update on those five matters and on the history of hearings in the case. See paragraph (G)(3).*
- (7) Custody evaluations and trials will be reserved for cases where one or both parents lack the capacity to safely resolve the issues they face. Neither custody evaluations nor trials will be ordered, allowed, or conducted unless and until all cooperative measures have been exhausted or shown to be dangerous, lacking a reasonable possibility of success, or otherwise unreasonable. See paragraph (G)(5).*
- (8) Parents must bring their Agreed Commitments and Parenting Plan Worksheet to all hearings. See paragraph (G)(6).*
- (9) The Courts will hold routine cooperation conferences to hear counsel's suggestions for helping families cooperate and function better. See paragraph (H).*
- (10) While not every case will require such discovery, the Rule will provide the terms of a standard discovery order on financial and property matters. See paragraph (J).*

## **Appendices**

- A. Parenting Plan Worksheet (PPW) (Version for parents answering together)**
- B. Parenting Plan Worksheet (PPW) (Version for parents answering separately)**
- C. Sample Motions on Unresolved Matters**
- D. Sample Court Pamphlet in Divorce/Dissolution Cases**
- E. Sample Court Pamphlet in Paternity Cases**



2. **Parent and child names.** Your names and the names (and ages and dates of birth, e.g., Robert John Smith, age 7, d.o.b. 7-2-XX) of all children involved.

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3. **Status.** What is the status of each of you in this case (for example, father, mother, putative father, legal guardian, etc.)?

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4. **Reason for joint PPW.** Please describe briefly the cooperation and positive interaction between you making it possible for you to prepare a joint PPW.

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5. **Overall co-parenting/family relationship.** How would you describe the relationship between you?

- Peaceful and cooperative.
- Peaceful but somewhat uncooperative.
- Peaceful but quite uncooperative.
- Uncooperative and abusive or dangerous.
- Other. (Please describe.)

Please briefly explain your choice:

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6. **Safety issues.** Is any adult or child in this family in any way unsafe (physically, emotionally, or in any other way)?

- No.
- Possibly.
- Yes.

Please briefly explain your choice:

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7. **Level of peace, respect, and predictability in co-parenting.** How peaceful, respectful, and predictable is your current interaction?

- Very peaceful, respectful, and predictable.
- Somewhat peaceful, respectful, and predictable.
- Not at all peaceful, respectful, and predictable.

Please briefly explain your choice:

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8. **Success in reducing conflict and building cooperation.** How successful would you say you are at reducing conflict and building cooperation for your child(ren)'s sake?

- Very successful.
- Somewhat successful.
- Not at all successful.

Please briefly explain your choice:

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9. **Online workshop.** When did each of you complete the online workshop at [UpToParents.org](http://UpToParents.org)?

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Please carefully look over your work on [UpToParents.org](http://UpToParents.org) now—and complete any Exercise responses that aren't as complete as could help you and your child(ren). Then please answer, Do you think you and your co-parent are putting the lessons on [UpToParents.org](http://UpToParents.org) to good use for the sake of your child(ren)?

- Yes.
- Somewhat.
- No.

Please briefly explain your choice:

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10. **Class completion.** When did each of you complete the “Parents as Partners Co-Parenting Class”?

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

11. **Other resources already used.** Other than the UpToParents.org online workshop and the “Parents as Partners Co-Parenting Class,” what other resources have you and your co-parent used?

- Co-parenting or divorce adjustment counseling together.
- A parenting coordinator.
- Other. (Please specify.)

Please briefly describe these and your success with them.

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12. **Guiding strategies.** Check those guiding strategies you’ll be using in your parenting. (Check only those that you think are appropriate in your circumstances.)

- Assuring everyone in the family is safe.
- Appreciating that for our children we will always be family.
- Using every contact we have as an opportunity to create goodwill and show our children a courteous partnership between their parents.
- Remembering our children will experience any attack between us as an attack on them.
- Recalling that our children’s only job is to be children, not our messengers, Spies, counselors, confidence, or carriers of our hurt.
- Remembering our love for our children is greater than any issue we could ever have with each other.
- Regularly sharing compliments and positive memories about each other with our children.
- Celebrating good things our children get to do with each of us.
- Regularly encouraging them to call their other parent for a friendly chat.
- Respecting each other’s parenting time while also being flexible, so our children’s lives can be as normal as possible.
- Respecting our children’s relationships with other important family members.
- Reaching agreements in ways that make our children proud of their family.
- Educating our extended family, close friends, and new relationships that they need to make peace with each of us and between each other.
- Other suggestions.

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*Children have no defense against their parents' anger.*  
–Dr. Ross Campbell

13. **Motions and court.** Please list (from the earliest to the most recent) any motions and hearings in your case, the matters raised in each, each outcome, and whether you think they helped your family’s functioning.

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14. **Decision-making.** How are the major child decisions being made (for example, child address, school selection, health care, counseling, and handling of special problems)?

- We cooperate and make these decisions together (“joint legal custody”).
- One of us makes these decisions alone.
- One of us makes these decisions but only after we discuss them with each other.
- Other. (Please specify.)

Please briefly explain your current decision-making *and* whether you think that should change:

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15. **Child legal residence.** What is each child’s declared legal residence for school and legal purposes?

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16. **Parenting time.** What schedule are you using for giving your child(ren) quality parenting time with each of you—and do you find this schedule satisfactory?

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17. **Child support and medical insurance.** What is the child support and medical insurance order/arrangement?

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18. **Open issues.** Please list any issues you have at this time and your plans for resolving them.

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19. **Useful assistance.** What assistance do you think your family could use at this time? (Choose all that apply.)

- No assistance is needed.
- Redoing the UpToParents.org online workshop.
- Mediation to help us reach important agreements.
- More co-parenting education, such as the 6-week Level II co-parenting class.
- Counseling for us individually.
- Co-parenting/divorce adjustment counseling for us together.
- A parenting coordinator to oversee our interaction as co-parents.
- A court-supervised safety plan developed with the help of the Office of Family Safety (574-900-3322).
- Other assistance. Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

Please briefly explain your choice(s):

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\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature and date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature and date



**Appendix B: Parenting Plan Worksheet (PPW)**  
**(Version for a parent answering alone)**

STATE OF INDIANA                                     )                     MORGUSON FAMILY COURT  
  ) SS             Case No. 48D06-\_\_\_\_\_

COUNTY OF MORGUSON                             )

In Re the Marriage/Paternity of \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Mother/Father/Guardian/Other

and

\_\_\_\_\_  
Mother/Father/Guardian/Other

**Parenting Plan Worksheet**

*“Conflict between patents is  
the best predictor of a child’s later maladjustment.”*  
--Dr. Anthony L. Berardi

This Parenting Plan Worksheet (PPW) can assist co-parents (meaning parents who live apart) in doing well for their children and themselves.

There will also be situations (such as when a motion is filed) when a PPW must be filled out and either filed or brought to court.

**1. Type of case.**

- In a divorce/dissolution case but not yet divorced/final.
- Already divorced.
- Paternity case with paternity already established.
- Paternity case without paternity established.
- Other (Please describe.)

Optional comments:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*If parents will agree on one thong, they’ll agree on everything,  
If that one thing is, ‘What do we want our children to look like when they’re 25?’”*  
--Patrick Brown, attorney and mediator

2. **Parent and child names.** Your name and the names (and ages and dates of birth, e.g., Robert John Smith, age 7, d.o.b. 7-2-XX) of all children involved.

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3. **Status.** What is your status in this case (for example, father, mother, putative father, legal guardian, etc.)?

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4. **Reason for separate PPW.** It is acceptable to file this separate PPW instead of a joint one with your co-parent. But please state briefly why you are choosing to file a separate one.

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5. **Overall co-parenting/family relationship.** How would you describe the relationship between you and your co-parent (or the family members you must relate with)?

- Peaceful and cooperative.
- Peaceful but somewhat uncooperative.
- Peaceful but quite uncooperative.
- Uncooperative and abusive or dangerous.
- Other. (Please describe.)

Please briefly explain your choice:

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6. **Safety issues.** Is any adult or child in this family in any way unsafe (physically, emotionally, or in any other way)?

- No.
- Possibly.
- Yes.

Please briefly explain your choice:

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7. **Level of peace, respect, and predictability in co-parenting.** How peaceful, respectful, and predictable is your current interaction with your co-parent?

- Very peaceful, respectful, and predictable.
- Somewhat peaceful, respectful, and predictable.
- Not at all peaceful, respectful, and predictable.

Please briefly explain your choice:

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8. **Success in reducing conflict and building cooperation.** How successful would you say you and your co-parent presently are at reducing conflict and building cooperation for your child(ren)'s sake?

- Very successful.
- Somewhat successful.
- Not at all successful.

Please briefly explain your choice:

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9. **Online workshop.** When did you complete the online workshop at [UpToParents.org](http://UpToParents.org)?

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Please carefully look over your work on [UpToParents.org](http://UpToParents.org) now—and complete any Exercise responses that aren't as complete as could help you and your child(ren). Then please answer, Do you think you and your co-parent are putting the lessons on [UpToParents.org](http://UpToParents.org) to good use for the sake of your child(ren)?

- Yes.
- Somewhat.
- No.

Please briefly explain your choice:

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10. **Class completion.** When did you complete the “Parents as Partners Co-Parenting Class”?

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

11. **Other resources already used.** Other than the UpToParents.org online workshop and the “Parents as Partners Co-Parenting Class,” what other resources have you and your co-parent used?

- Co-parenting or divorce adjustment counseling together.
- A parenting coordinator.
- Other. (Please specify.)

Please briefly describe these and your success with them.

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12. **Guiding strategies.** Check those guiding strategies you’ll be using in your parenting. (Check only those that you think are appropriate in your circumstances.)

- Assuring everyone in the family is safe.
- Appreciating that for our children we will always be family.
- Using every contact we have as an opportunity to create goodwill and show our children a courteous partnership between their parents.
- Remembering our children will experience any attack between us as an attack on them.
- Recalling that our children’s only job is to be children, not our messengers, Spies, counselors, confidence, or carriers of our hurt.
- Remembering our love for our children is greater than any issue we could ever have with each other.
- Regularly sharing compliments and positive memories about each other with our children.
- Celebrating good things our children get to do with each of us.
- Regularly encouraging them to call their other parent for a friendly chat.
- Respecting each other’s parenting time while also being flexible, so our children’s lives can be as normal as possible.
- Respecting our children’s relationships with other important family members.
- Reaching agreements in ways that make our children proud of their family.
- Educating our extended family, close friends, and new relationships that they need to make peace with each of us and between each other.
- Other suggestions.

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*Children have no defense against their parents' anger.*  
–Dr. Ross Campbell

13. **Motions and court.** Please list (from the earliest to the most recent) any motions and hearings in your case, the matters raised in each, each outcome, and whether you think they helped your family’s functioning.

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14. **Decision-making.** How are the major child decisions being made (for example, child address, school selection, health care, counseling, and handling of special problems)?

- We cooperate and make these decisions together (“joint legal custody”).
- I make these decisions on my own.
- My co-parent makes these decisions on their own.
- One of us makes these decisions but only after we discuss them with each other.
- Other. (Please specify.)

Please briefly explain your current decision-making *and* whether you think that should change:

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15. **Child legal residence.** What is each child’s declared legal residence for school and legal purposes?

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16. **Parenting time.** What schedule are you using for giving your child(ren) quality parenting time with each of you—and do you find this schedule satisfactory?

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17. **Child support and medical insurance.** What is the child support and medical insurance order/arrangement?

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18. **Open issues.** Please list any issues you and your co-parent have at this time and your plans for resolving them.

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19. **Useful assistance.** What assistance do you think your family could use at this time? (Choose all that apply.)

- No assistance is needed.
- Redoing the UpToParents.org online workshop.
- Mediation to help us reach important agreements.
- More co-parenting education, such as the 6-week Level II co-parenting class.
- Counseling for us individually.
- Co-parenting/divorce adjustment counseling for us together.
- A parenting coordinator to oversee our interaction as co-parents.
- A court-supervised safety plan developed with the help of the Office of Family Safety (574-900-3322).
- Other assistance. Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

Please briefly explain your choice(s):

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\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



STATE OF \_\_\_\_\_ )  
 )  
COUNTY OF \_\_\_\_\_ ) SS: \_\_\_\_\_ COURT  
 CAUSE NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

IN RE THE MARRIAGE OF)  
 )  
 )  
AND , mother, )  
 )  
 )  
 )  
 , father. )

**Motion of Mother for Supervised Exchanges and Referral to *Parenting as Partners* Class**

Mother moves the Court for supervised exchanges and an order referring both parents to the eight-week *Parenting as Partners* class, stating as follows:

1. The parents have three minor children, ages 8, 7, and 2.
2. The parents’ interaction has been difficult to the point that unsupervised exchanges of the children is dangerous. It’s believed that the multi-session classes at *Parenting as Partners* could help the cooperation and good outcomes for everyone in the family.
2. **Cooperation Update:**
  - a) **Required discussion:** Counsel for mother has not been able to speak to father (who is without representation) as he has declined to speak about the matter with him. Counsel sent father a copy of the instant motion one week ago and asked that he be in touch should he change his mind. He has not contacted counsel as of this filing.
  - b) **Suggestions for helpful resources:** Mother and her counsel believe the following resources could be useful for the parents in resolving this and any future issue, reducing any conflict between them, and building cooperation: mediation after completion of at least half of the *Parenting as Partners* class.
  - c) **Website work:** Both parents have been advised of their duty to review and bring to any upcoming hearing their copies of their Agreed Commitments from [UpToParents.org](http://UpToParents.org).
  - d) **Co-parenting class:** Both parents completed the basic TransParenting class in May 20xx.
  - e) **Parenting Plan:** The parents have a current Parenting Plan, and both have been advised of their duty to review it. Mother will bring a copy to any hearing.
  - f) **History of Hearings:** The parents have had the following hearings:



- (i) June 16, 20xx: Provisional hearing on exclusive occupancy of marital residence, child custody, child support, and parenting time schedule.
- (ii) July 30, 20xx: Hearing on father's motion to change custody and parenting time and on mother's request for a custody evaluation.
- (iii) September 1, 20xx: Hearing on parents' separate rules to show cause and cross-motions to hold each other in contempt.
- (iv) February 1, 20xx: Hearing on mother's motion to modify custody and for second custody evaluation.
- (v) February 19, 20xx: Hearing on parents' cross-motions to correct errors.
- (vi) September 1, 20xx: Hearing on father's rule to show cause and hold mother in contempt.
- (vii) November 19, 20xx: Hearing on submission of agreed settlement of divorce and approval of joint legal custody.
- (viii) January 11, 20xx: Hearing on mother's motion to modify custody and father's motion to change custody.
- (ix) January 21, 20xx: Hearing on parents' cross-motions for attorney fees.
- (x) August 30, 20xx: Hearing on mother's motion to modify custody and parenting time.
- (xi) November 17, 20xx: Hearing on father's rule to show cause and hold mother in contempt.
- (xii) January 4, 20xx: Hearing on father's motion to change custody and mother's rule to show cause, motion to hold father in contempt.
- (xiii) January 15, 20xx: Continued hearing on father's motion to change custody and mother's rule to show cause and motion to hold father in contempt; and hearing on mother's request for attorney fees.
- (xiv) February 10, 20xx: Hearing on parents' cross-motions for reconsideration of rulings on custody and parenting time.
- (xv) February 16, 20xx: Hearing on mother's motion to modify parenting time.<sup>2</sup>

Respectfully submitted,

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Attorney for Mother

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<sup>2</sup> Note from article author: This hearing history is a condensed version of one from an actual case. The litigation in the actual case was longer than what is shown here, including eight different motions to change custody. It's likely the sad procession of hearings carried on largely because no one had assembled in one place a simple chronology of all the times the parents had been in court. That chronology could have drawn everyone's attention—or at least the court's—to the minimal prospects that each new hearing and ruling would actually help the family function. It likely also would have led to an earlier (and thus more promising) referral of the parents to a high-conflict class or counseling.

## **Appendix D: Judges' Notice to Parents in Divorce Cases in \_\_\_\_\_ County, Indiana**

As Judges presiding over divorce (marital dissolution) cases in Stretter County, we will do our best to guide everyone in ways that help the entire family.

Please consider these thoughts to better understand this process, what is expected of you, and what can help you. ***Please note! Where there's been domestic violence or abuse, parents are expected to immediately seek counseling to decide which of the ideas in this Notice they may safely use.***

1. ***We expect everyone's goal in any divorce case to be helping the family work—even if it's as a family with a divorce.***

No one “wins” in divorce, and any crusade for “victory” will cause more conflict, expense, and damage to children. In all likelihood, a good result is possible for you only if you work for a good result for the entire family, including your children and their other parent.

See [FamilyCourtWebsite.org](http://FamilyCourtWebsite.org) for more information on our expectation of cooperation.

2. ***Please acquaint yourself with the Morguson County Rule for Cooperation in Family Cases.***

That Rule for Cooperation will apply in your case. Copies are available at the Clerk's office and [FamilyCourtWebsite.org](http://FamilyCourtWebsite.org) Specific parent obligations in the Rule include:

- contacting the Domestic Relations Counseling Bureau (574-xxx-xxxx) within 15 days of the initial petition,
- completing important website work from [UpToParents.org](http://UpToParents.org), and
- taking that work to a mandatory co-parenting class

3. ***In addition to the required website work, we recommend that you fill out a Parenting Plan Worksheet (PPW) as soon as possible.***

Children's needs increase dramatically when parents separate. We strongly suggest that you use the PPW form attached to the Rule for Cooperation to build agreements on the decision-making and living arrangements that can protect your children. While we hope you will not need court hearings, note that the Rule for Cooperation requires parents to bring their completed [UpToParents.org](http://UpToParents.org) work and a current PPW to any court hearing

4. ***Because of its emotional and financial costs, many parents are well-advised to consider if divorce is necessary for them.***

In divorce, parents must divide assets and double many expenses. Added to this financial burden are the even greater emotional costs to members of the family. If there is no emergency, you may wish to use counseling and other resources to see if your marriage can be saved.

5. ***We expect all parents and attorneys to remember that parent conflict is gravely dangerous to children and to conduct themselves in ways that reduce conflict.***

Dozens of studies show that parent conflict seriously hurts children. We expect parents, whenever it is safe to do so, to relate courteously for the sake of all members of the family, including especially the children.

*Conflict between parents is the best predictor of a child's later maladjustment. —Dr. Anthony L. Berardi*

6. ***We expect all parents and attorneys to remember that children need the best possible safe relationship with both parents.***

We expect everyone to support whatever safe relationship the children can have with each parent.

*Children have no defense against their parents' anger. —Dr. Ross Campbell*

7. ***We do not allow inappropriate use of court.***

We will not allow you to be victimized by hearings or other proceedings that simply embarrass you or hurt your best interests. We also will not allow you to make such use of the legal system against anyone else. Remember also that divorces are no-fault cases and are heard by experienced judges, not juries. Those judges are entirely unimpressed with attempts to make divorce about faultfinding or blame.

8. ***The Courts are available in dangerous cases like domestic violence, but we expect parents and attorneys to understand that legal battles in other cases may actually hurt.***

- Most issues families face in divorce are not really legal issues and have no legal answers.
- While parents' cooperation can build better alternatives, a judge can only pick from the bad alternatives available in the middle of parent conflict.
- Going to court or submitting to evaluations almost always creates hurt, fear, distrust, and financial costs far outweighing any benefits.

9. ***Carefully consider using any counseling or other help to move forward successfully.***

Separation and divorce are confusing and emotionally devastating experiences, whether parents divorce or reconcile. Seek the help you need to create a better future.

10. ***Protecting your children is likely your light out of hurt and fear.***

There is a good guiding light almost all parents can use in divorce: ***parents who do what is best for their children almost always do best for themselves.*** Parents who build peace, courtesy, and cooperation for their children are the very ones who can use their money and emotional resources building a better future rather than arguing the past.

*If parents will agree on one thing, they'll agree on everything, if that one thing is, "What do we want our children to look like at 25?"*  
—Patrick Brown