

# Frequently Asked Questions About Mandated Parent Education Seminars

Based on Virginia Code requirements found in: [16.1-278.15](#) and [20-103](#)

## **Who must attend?**

The parties to any petition where child custody, visitation or support is contested. These parties may be the child's natural or adoptive parents, or any other person with a legitimate interest as defined in Virginia Code [20-124.1. Definitions](#)

## **Why is a parent education seminar required?**

The period of separation or divorce is a difficult time for both children and parents. When parents are more aware of the effects of separation and divorce on their children and their parenting responsibilities, they will be more child-focused in the development of their parenting plans. This in turn leads to a greater willingness to explore mediation, rather than litigation, as a means of determining custody, visitation and support. Mediation, with its emphasis on communication and finding common ground, lends itself to a more effective co-parenting environment, as opposed to the bitterness that often follows litigation.

## **When must I attend?**

Within the 12 months prior to your court appearance, or within 45 days thereafter.

## **What exactly is a parent education seminar?**

A class that addresses, among other topics, the effects of separation or divorce on children, parenting responsibilities, options for conflict resolution and financial responsibilities.

## **How long is the parenting seminar?**

A minimum of 4 hours.

## **How much will I have to pay?**

Not more than \$50. The fee is based on your ability to pay, so it's possible you will pay less.

## **Who conducts the seminars?**

They are provided by qualified individuals or organizations approved by the Virginia Supreme Court's Office of the Executive Secretary. All providers must attend special training before they are eligible for approval.

**How do I find a seminar?**

All approved providers are listed here: [Parent Education \(vacourts.gov\)](http://vacourts.gov) See the information under "Find a Parent Education Seminar." Please note that all courts accept a certificate of completion from any approved provider regardless of location.

**Can I attend a seminar online, or do I need to attend in person?**

Many approved providers offer webinars, so you can attend from your own home, as long as you have a decent Internet connection. You can find a list of seminars offered via webinar by clicking on the webpage link directly above.

**Do I still need to attend a seminar if I decide to try mediation?**

Yes. In fact, parent education and mediation go hand-in-hand. The Virginia Code specifically mentions that whenever possible, parties shall attend a parent education seminar before participating in mediation to resolve contested custody, visitation or support issues. You can find out more about mediation here: [Mediation \(vacourts.gov\)](http://vacourts.gov)

**I don't have any communication with my child's other parent. Do I still have to attend a seminar?**

Yes. The focus of the seminar is on how you can help your children through effective co-parenting from separate homes. The seminar will assist you and your co-parent in identifying new ways to communicate, while keeping your children out of the middle.

**Do I have to attend this seminar with my co-parent?**

No. You may attend the same seminar if you are comfortable doing so, but you may also attend separately.

**What if my co-parent does not attend the seminar?**

That is up to the judge. In some courts, the judge may hold the party in contempt of court or impose other sanctions for failure to attend the seminar.

**There have never been any complaints about my parenting. Why do I need to take this seminar?**

The requirement to attend a seminar is not a judgment of your parenting ability. The seminar focuses on how parents can lessen the negative effects of separation and divorce on their children – a skill even the best parents need to learn.

**Is anything I say during the seminar admissible in court?**

No. Nothing you say or ask during the seminar can be used as evidence during any subsequent court proceeding. The only exceptions are statements by a party admitting to criminal activity, such as child abuse or neglect.