

**OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
SUPREME COURT OF VIRGINIA**

**OFFICIAL POLICIES FOR
PARENT EDUCATION SEMINARS IN VIRGINIA COURTS**

**Adopted by the Division of Dispute Resolution Services
Effective: January 2025**

STATEMENT OF INTENT: The following policies are intended to provide a framework for the development, approval, and administration of Parent Education Seminars in Virginia pursuant to Va. Code [§§ 16.1-278.15](#) and [20-103](#).

A. DEFINITIONS

"Parent Education Seminar", or "seminar" refers to an educational seminar as referenced in Virginia Code Sections §§ 16.1-278.15 and/or 20-103 for parties involved in contested child custody, visitation, or support cases.

"Train the Trainer" is a course held by the Office of the Executive Secretary which provides potential instructors with information about the legal requirements and best practices for conducting the parent education seminars.

"Parent Education Symposium" is an occasional gathering offered to all parent educators to network and have an opportunity for professional development.

"Parent Education Provider" is a qualified person or organization approved by the Office of the Executive Secretary of the Supreme Court of Virginia, 16.1-278.15 and 20-103, to offer Parent Education seminars. A Provider may be an instructor that is approved to teach the seminars, OR a Provider may be the organization that hosts other instructors approved to teach the seminar. Typical duties of the Provider and/or their agents include, but are not limited to, registration, intake, collecting course evaluations, distributing certificates of completion, reporting and record keeping, and financial transactions relating to the seminars.

“PE Seminar Instructor” is a person who has attended a Train the Trainer session and is approved by DRS to conduct the PE seminars. The instructor may be either an employee or volunteer for an approved Provider or the Provider themselves.

“Suitable Location for PE seminars” – the in-person seminar must be conducted in an environment that assures privacy and confidentiality in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Examples include: an office, an enclosed room in a library, church, community center, etc. Unsuitable locations include restaurant open areas, library reading sections, homes of attendees, etc.

B. INSTRUCTOR APPROVAL TO TEACH SEMINARS

1. Submit an application (the *Parent Education Seminar Instructor Approval Request Form*) to Dispute Resolution Services (DRS) and include resume and two letters of reference attesting to good character and qualifications.
2. Qualifications – all applicants must have recent experience or knowledge in parent education and / or divorce and separation issues, plus one or more of the following specialized areas:
 - a. Child development
 - b. Family abuse including domestic violence or child abuse
 - c. Group facilitation and teaching adult audiences
3. List educational and work history, relevant licenses, and certifications. This may include:
 - a. An undergraduate degree (preferred), especially in the social sciences or health but equivalent experience can substitute;
 - b. Licensed / certified mental health practitioner
 - c. Licensed clinical social worker
 - d. Certified court-referred mediator for family cases
 - e. Licensed attorney, especially with emphasis on Juvenile and Family Law
 - f. Parenting coordinator, or parent educator
 - g. Clergy who conducts marriage and family counseling
4. Self-reporting requirements. Applicants must disclose any offense that resulted in discipline, curtailment, or relinquishment of professional privilege or licenses.

Background information must include: age at the time; time which has elapsed since; and evidence of rehabilitation.

- a. Convictions of, guilty pleas to, or *nolo contendere* pleas to violations of the law as an adult, including traffic violations resulting in suspension or revocation of a driver's license and DUI offenses. Note specific code section(s) violated.
 - b. Disciplinary action related to a profession, or curtailment of professional privileges; including but not limited to parent education or mediation.
 - c. Relinquishment of any professional privilege or license while under investigation.
 - d. Pending charges of any of the above.
5. Attend a Train the Trainer session and observe a seminar conducted by DRS approved instructor.
 6. List approved curriculum. Must possess sufficient copies to distribute to each participant who attends the seminars in person. (See **Curriculum** section for more details.)
 7. To teach by webinar, applicant must notify DRS after attending the TTT, and submit to interview for evaluation of expertise and to discuss procedure.
 8. Applicant must return completed Profile form (Instructor or Provider) to DRS to be listed in the directory and/or on the court's website (if a Provider).
 9. If a period of 12 months or more elapses from the date an applicant takes the TTT and seminar observation to the submission of the appropriate Profile form, then the TTT must be re-taken.

C. PROVIDER/PROGRAM RESPONSIBILITIES AND DUTIES

1. Have suitable/approved location to conduct PE seminars in confidential setting, see **Definitions**.
2. May request to be listed in one primary jurisdiction with a physical location and up to three (3) additional adjacent jurisdictions. (See **Court Listings** for an explanation of 'adjacency.')
3. Client intake process prior to registration must comply with TTT manual, and include discussion on:

- a. Parties' ability to pay fee of up to \$50, total, including materials. (*Va. Code § 16.1-278.15*)
 - b. Parties' preference or ability to be in the same seminar as the co-parent on the same date; alternatives must be provided.
4. Provide instructors with approved curriculum for use in teaching the seminars. (See **Curriculum** section for more information).
5. Seminars must be offered in-person at an approved location a minimum of once a quarter.
6. All current and future instructors must be approved and in good standing with DRS. (See Instructor Approval section for more details.)
7. Be responsive to DRS and provide information requested in quarterly reports.
8. Create or obtain PE seminar evaluation form that instructors can provide to seminar participants.
9. Create and distribute Certificate of Attendance to verify seminar completion. Certificate must include the name of the Provider/Organization; curriculum in use; date; name of participant and instructor who led the seminar.
10. Keep website listing information correct and current, including contact name, phone number and email address. Notify DRS of any changes in instructors, location, curriculum, etc.

D. INSTRUCTOR RESPONSIBILITIES AND DUTIES

1. Seminar must be offered at a minimum of 4 hours and be interactive; it may not be a video. The instructor must be prepared to answer participant questions. See **Curriculum** for content.
2. Provide each participant with a copy of the approved curriculum, an evaluation form (to be collected and retained for 12 months), and a Certificate of Attendance.
 - a. This material may be sent electronically, e.g. by pdf, when the seminar conducted is virtual.
3. In the seminars, maintain an atmosphere that is conducive to learning whether conducted in person or via webinar. This includes:
 - a. Encourage interaction between participants in an online format.
 - b. Provide technical support to those in need.

4. May deny certificate or require makeup of any participant that misses critical sections.
5. May refuse admittance to any participant more than 15 minutes late.
6. May remove any participant from any seminar, for cause, to include:
 - a. unruly or disruptive behavior or failure to follow ground rules given at the beginning of the seminar, after a second warning.
 - b. in a webinar, if the participant refuses to keep the camera on, or is pre-occupied with other activities such as jogging, driving, cooking, childcare, etc.
7. If seminars are not conducted for over one year, to resume activity an instructor must attend a refresher TTT session, at no cost, and be reapproved by DRS.

E. COURT LISTINGS

1. Providers are approved for all courts in the Commonwealth, regardless of court listings.
2. May request to be listed in one primary jurisdiction with a physical location and up to three (3) additional adjacent jurisdictions.
 - a. “Adjacent” means that the localities share a physical border, or one can drive directly from one to the other. *E.g.: Northampton County is adjacent to Virginia Beach and Accomack, but not to Northumberland or Hampton.*
 - b. At least one locality must be adjacent to the physical location. *E.g.: a provider in Hampton could be listed in Chesapeake and Norfolk, but not in Henrico and Richmond.*
 - c. Localities contained entirely by another locality may list the surrounding county without counting against the total. *For example, a provider in Harrisonburg may be listed in Rockingham County and up to 3 additional, adjacent localities.*
 - d. May request to be listed in more than four localities but approval is contingent upon the number of providers already in the requested localities, and additional factors as determined by OES-DRS.

F. CURRICULUM

1. An approved curriculum must cover the four (4) topics required by the Code of Virginia, §§ 16.1-278.15 and/or 20-103, specifically:

- a. The Effects of Separation or Divorce on Children
 - b. Parenting Responsibilities
 - c. Financial Responsibilities
 - d. Options for Conflict Resolution
2. Must contain an agenda, lesson plan, and sufficient material to be covered in four hours and may not be straight lecture or utilize more than short segments of video for illustration. Group exercises and interactive elements are encouraged.
3. Providers must use a curriculum approved by DRS. Providers may:
 - a. Purchase an approved curriculum
 - b. Use another organization's approved curriculum with their expressed, written authorization
 - c. Develop their own curriculum with input from the PE Coordinator
4. A curriculum may not contain material that is factually incorrect or in violation of copyright law; it must be free from language that is insensitive, pejorative, or possibly offensive.

G. COMPLAINTS TO DRS

1. All complaints will be investigated by DRS. Remedial steps for instructors / providers may include, but are not limited to:
 - a. Recommendation of a refresher TTT or another appropriate corrective action
 - b. Removal from the list of approved providers.
2. A Provider may be removed for cause, including but not limited to, the following infractions:
 - a. unprofessional conduct upon complaint of participant
 - b. failure to report quarterly statistics for more than two consecutive quarters
 - c. failure to have an approved curriculum
 - d. failure to have trained instructors
 - e. failure to make seminars available in-person, at least once a quarter
 - f. failure to follow Code requirements regarding length of seminar, fee for seminar, and/or not offering sliding scale for those unable to pay \$50.

3. An Instructor may be removed for cause, including but not limited to, the following infractions:
 - a. unprofessional conduct
 - b. lacking familiarity and expertise of the material in the seminar
 - c. giving unsolicited advice or opinions not approved as curriculum
 - d. teaching in a format that is not approved
 - e. failure to attend a refresher training if required for cause