

WHY CHOOSE EARLY NEUTRAL ASSESSMENT?



Advantages of using ENA:

- The process is a voluntary and client-driven; the team hears directly from parents.
- ENA provides parents realistic expectations of what's likely to occur should they go to hearing.
- ENA provides parents information regarding child development as it relates to parenting time plans.
- ENA is an early intervention and is neutral and confidential
- Research shows when parents reach resolution they are better able to resolve future disagreements.
- ENA is less costly both financially and emotionally.

The ENA process:

- The parties meet with a team of two members, one male and one female. One team member is a mental health professional, while the other is an attorney.
- Each parent addresses his/her concerns and states what s/he would like to occur regarding parenting time, decision making, and any other non-financial issues presented.
- The ENA team will present parenting time options given the parents' specific circumstances, the ages of the children, what the research says, and what is likely to occur if the case were to go to a hearing.
- After giving feedback, the ENA team facilitates parental negotiation in an effort to reach agreement that is put on the record in court that same day.

ENA costs: ENA costs \$400 per party; indigent parties may qualify for the state to pay their costs in some jurisdictions.

- **How does the ENA process work?**
 - A four hour meeting is scheduled at the court house.
 - A judicial officer (judge or magistrate) meets the parents briefly with the ENA team at the start of the session.
 - Each parent addresses his or her concerns and goals regarding parenting time, decision-making, and any other non-financial issues presented. If the parents have attorneys, they participate also.
 - The ENA team takes a break to discuss and then offers feedback and options to the parents to consider, given the parents' specific circumstances, the ages of the children, what child-development research says, and what is likely to occur if the case were to go to a hearing.
 - The parents take a break to consult with their attorneys (if any) and to thoughtfully consider the input they just received from the ENA team.
 - The parties, attorneys, and ENA team regroup to work together to construct a successful parenting plan for the children.
 - If the parents reach an agreement, they go directly to the courtroom with the ENA team to put their agreement on the record. The judge may ask some clarifying questions, and then adopt the parents' agreement as a court order in the case.

- **What topics are covered in the ENA process?** ENA addresses only non-financial Parenting Plan topics. In other words, it includes decision-making for the children, where they live and what their parenting time is with each parent, how the parents will share holidays and vacations, moving out of state, communication between the parents, special needs, and other issues regarding the children's best interests.

- **What is the future role of the ENA team in the case?** Nothing. After the ENA session is over, either a settlement is presented to the judge, to be adopted as a court order, or it is not. If the parties did not reach a full settlement during the ENA process, they are certainly able to continue their discussions and settle their case later. The process is neutral and confidential. The ENA team members will shred their notes and will not testify in the case.

- **How successful is ENA?** ENA has been *extremely* successful in Minnesota, where it began, and in Colorado counties where it has been introduced. When parents participate in shaping the solution for their children, they are more satisfied with the outcomes and more able to collaborate about future parenting decisions. Having experienced, neutral, professional assistance in building the parenting plan increases to likelihood of establishing a child-focused pattern early in the process, and avoiding expense and anger down the road.

- **Video:** To watch a 9 minute video of the Colorado judges from Adams County sharing their enthusiastic, positive experience with ENA, go to this link:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F4vQuj6IYzI>