LSPR 94.03
MANDATORY PARENTING SEMINARS

(a) Definition of Applicable Cases. This rule applies to all domestic cases including dissolutions, legal separations, and paternity actions (in which paternity has been established) where the parties are parents of children under the age of 18, and where a parenting plan or residential plan is required. The rule also applies to parties in an action seeking a major modification, as defined by RCW 26.09.260, of a previous parenting or residential plan or Decree or Order regarding custody.

(b) Parenting Seminars; Mandatory Attendance. Within 60 days after service of a petition or initiating motion on the respondent, or, in the case of a paternity action, after the entry by the Court of a finding of paternity, both parties shall participate in, and successfully complete, an approved Parenting Seminar. Standards for approved parenting seminars are set forth in sections (g), (h) and (i) below. Successful completion shall be evidenced by a certificate of attendance filed by the provider agency with the court.

The provider may also provide a separate class for petitioners involved in cases where the respondent has or is expected to default. The seminar shall also meet the standards in (g), (h), and (i) below as applicable, and shall also provide any additional information which may be relevant to this type of case.

(c) Permissive Application. In additional cases arising under Title 26 RCW where a court makes a discretionary finding that a parenting seminar would be in the best interest of the children, both parents, and such non-parent parties as the court may direct, shall also participate in a parenting seminar.

(d) Special Considerations/Waiver.

(1) In no case shall opposing parties be required to attend a seminar together.

(2) Upon a showing of domestic violence or abuse which would not require mutual decision-making pursuant to RCW 26.09.191, or that a parent's attendance at a seminar is not in the children's best interest, the court shall either:

(a) waive the requirement of completion of the seminar; or

(b) allow the parent to attend an alternative voluntary parenting seminar for battered spouses.

(3) The court may waive the seminar requirement for one or both parents in any case for good cause shown. Factors to consider include, but are not limited to, whether the action will be resolved by default, one or more parties reside out of the geographical area and availability of parent education programs where the parties reside, the ages of the child(ren), and whether the parents have arrived at an agreed parenting plan which is approved by the court.

(e) Fees. Each parent attending a seminar shall pay a fee charged by the approved provider. The seminars shall be conducted at no cost to the county.

(f) Failure to Comply. Non-participation or default by one parent does not excuse participation by the other parent. Respondent's refusal, delay or default will not delay the progress of the case to a final decree. Petitioner's refusal or delay will prevent the case from being set for trial or any final order affecting the parenting/residential plan being entered, except in cases where there is a co-petitioner or counter petitioner who is in full compliance. Willful refusal or delay by either parent may constitute contempt of court and result in sanctions imposed by the court, or may result in the imposition of monetary terms, default and/or striking of pleadings.

The Court shall also have the discretion to continue or strike motions brought by a party during the pendency of an action until the class has been completed.

(g) Provider Agencies. Approved Parenting Seminars shall be those offered by providers who comply with seminar content requirements as specified in this rule. Parties may use equivalent services offered by private agencies or religious organizations, upon approval by the Committee. The Committee will maintain a list of providers who have filed a statement of compliance with the Committee. If the providers' qualifications are challenged, they shall be notified by the Committee of the process to resolve any questions regarding their future approval. The provider will then have an opportunity to respond to any challenges to their qualifications.

(h) Seminar Content. The seminar content will be approved by the Committee, and shall include, at a minimum:

(1) the developmental stages of childhood;

(2) stress indicators in children;

(3) age appropriate expectations of children;

(4) the impact of divorce on children;

(5) the grief process;

(6) reducing stress for children through an amicable divorce;

(7) the long term impact of parental conflict on children;

(8) visitation recommendations to enhance the child's relationship with both parents;

(9) financial obligations of child rearing;

(10) conflict management and dispute resolution;

(11) communication skills for divorced parents;

(12) practical skills for working together; and

(13) the impact on children when stepparents and blended families enter their lives.

(i) Qualifications of Instructors. Parenting seminars shall be taught by a team of not less than two instructors, including one male and one female. Arrangements may be made for classes limited to one or two attendees, in which case two instructors are not required. Instructors should have the following minimum credentials and experience:

(1) a master's degree in social work, psychology or other related behavioral science;

(2) supervised experience in treatment of emotionally disturbed children, adolescents and their families;

(3) experience in providing a wide range of mental health services to children and families, with specific experience in the areas of separation/divorce, loss and grief, and blended families;

(4) extensive knowledge of child development, age appropriate expectations for children, and positive parenting;

(5) an ability to work with others (both groups and individuals) as part of a collaborative program; and

(6) strong oral communication skills.

When parties choose to use providers or religious organizations which have not previously been accepted by the Committee as a provider of parenting seminars, the court may modify or waive the foregoing qualifications for the instructors upon a showing of functional equivalency.

(j) Referrals for Other Services. During the seminar, referral resources will be made available to the parents and their children, including individual and family counseling,

drug/alcohol counseling, anger management counseling, parenting classes, etc. These services are optional, and the parties must seek their own funding resources.

(k) Parent Education Committee. The Parent Education Committee shall be a standing sub-committee of the Spokane County Superior Court and shall consist of at least one judge, one court commissioner, one or more representatives of local dispute resolution agencies, one or more marriage and family therapists, one or more private attorneys, and others as appropriate.