



Online  
Parenting  
Programs

Class Guidebook

# Online High-Conflict Co-Parenting Class

*Resilience Inspired by Supportive  
Education (RISE)*

**6 Hour, 8 Hour and 12 Hour Classes**

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## Class Guidebook

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# Background

## Purpose of the Class

To provide a self-directed, asynchronous, online educational class for parents who are separating from or divorcing the other parent of their children or for any other reason not raising their shared children together and are doing so with high levels of conflict. Although there are no standard definitions for this population, a common assumption is that a couple that has taken two years or more after separation to reach a resolution or develop a parenting plan acceptable to both parents is considered to have high conflict. The RISE high-conflict co-parenting class provides education rather than casework, legal consultation, or therapy. The overall goal is to raise self-awareness among this population of parents, children, and other family members who will be raising the children in different households and to maximize positive skills and outcomes and decrease negative behaviors.

## Class Creator and Sponsor

The creator of the program is Judith A. Myers-Walls, Ph.D., Certified Family Life Educator. She has a Ph.D. in Child Development and Family Studies and over 40 years of experience in creating, delivering, and evaluating programs for parents and families. Most of her experience has been with the Cooperative Extension system, primarily in Indiana at Purdue University. She has written or edited 3 books, 20 book chapters, 32 peer-reviewed journal articles, approximately 40 Extension publications, and more than 15 curriculum packages.



For this class she worked in consultation with Safe and Sound (SafeandSound.org). Safe & Sound prevents and reduces the impact of childhood abuse, neglect, and trauma by strengthening families, building communities, and advancing healing, equity, and justice.

The sponsor of this program is OnlineParentingPrograms.com, which offers tools to courts and professionals that can help them provide innovative program solutions to support children and families facing challenges. The company is headed by Michelle Muncy, who brings more than 20 years of experience in marketing and design to her role as Planning Director and by Victor Vacaretu, who brings more than 15 years of technology experience to his role of Chief Technology Officer.

The company has been delivering online courses since 2011 and has reached over 250,000 parents, who have achieved an 87% class completion rate.



## Class Orientation/ Theoretical Base

### ***The RISE Approach to High Conflict***

Some researchers have identified three models used with parents in post-divorce high-conflict relationships.

- **Conflict Assessment Model:** This model focuses on the fact that parents can have conflicts ranging from minimal to severe. Programming attempts to identify parents' amount of conflict and design interventions to fit that level.
- **Divorce Impasse Model:** Parents in this model are seen as being frozen between joint (couple) life and separate lives. Intervention is aimed at providing education and skills to help parents make the transition from a "stuck" place to healthy, separate lives while co-parenting as appropriate.
- **High Conflict Personalities Model:** Here the emphasis is on the tendency of some parents to use conflict-based methods to solve problems, specifically relationship break-ups. Interventions use therapy-based strategies to encourage parents to use alternative problem-solving methods.

*RISE uses the assumptions connected to the Impasse Model, but applies them to any break-up, not limiting the model to divorce and its dissolution. It also uses some of the information from the Conflict Assessment Model.*

A fourth model we found to be useful is by Kenneth Waldron and Eileen McCarten and is called Lagging Skills. They believe it has immediate applicability when working with parents in high-conflict relationships because it highlights the fact that these individuals have simply not yet learned the skills needed to build positive and effective relationships and the natural conflicts that occur, such as identifying and processing emotions, perspective-taking, understanding individuals' different realities, and others. RISE uses this model as well.

In addition, this program is based on the following theories:

- **Family Systems Theory:** What happens to one person in the family impacts all family members, and any actions or behaviors by any family member will influence and be influenced by other family members.
- **Human Ecology Theory:** Families live in an environment of nested layers of influence ranging from the individual to the family to the community and eventually a global context. It is important to take those contexts into account when determining the causes of behavior and making recommendations for changes.
- **Trauma and Resilience:** Experiences in childhood or later can create trauma reactions that change brain functioning and influence children's and adults' ability to manage later stresses and navigate developmental changes.
- **Attachment Theory:** Humans require close relationships with other humans to develop optimally. Both children and adults benefit from secure attachments, and both can suffer if close attachments are lost.
- **Developmental-Maturational Theories:** Children's (and adults') needs and abilities are determined to a large extent by their developmental or maturational level. It is important to build expectations for children's behavior based on that developmental level; adults can also facilitate and encourage children's movement to higher levels of development over time.
- **Adult Educational Theory:** Adults bring different needs and expectations to learning situations than children or individuals seeking degrees. Some key issues are that they enter learning with life experiences and want that to be recognized, they want to learn things they can use in their current lives, and they want insight and the ability to adapt the learning rather than rote memorization.

Many specific theoretical citations used in individual units are provided under Sources in the curriculum outline.



RISE attempts to maximize Self-Directed Educational Methods related to Adult Education with a Positive Focus on Resilience: Most of the class is based on the Divorce Impasse Model. We also use aspects of the Conflict Assessment Model by asking participants to report and assess their level of conflict (using carefully constructed tools) in an effort to match appropriate aspects of the class to them. The overall goal of this class is to teach strategies and skills that parents can use to move appropriately away from a couple relationship toward a parallel or co-parenting partnership. We recognize that the relationships may be negative and conflictual; therefore, we make every effort to facilitate appropriate optimism, belief in the ability to change, and resilience to create healthy environments for the children and the family.

### ***Adaptations in process***

#### ***Class Length***

The current class is outlined to be just over eight hours long. We also have guidelines for adapting the guidelines to six hours or 12 hours.

#### ***Versions for Different Family Situations***

In a desire to personalize the classes to the parents, we are creating four versions that will determine the terminology and content used for the class. The versions will be for:

- **Version 1:** were married, separating or divorcing from their co-parent
- **Version 2:** cohabitated or lived together, but never married
- **Version 3:** single, lived away from the other parent, share a child but have not been married or cohabited
- **Version 4:** those that identify themselves, their relationship or sexual orientation as something other than the above (LGBTQ+ community)

### **Targeted Modules for Co-Parents**

We also are working on modules that will be based on research about content and types of conflict in which co-parents may be involved. The modules will go into more detail focusing on three categories of conflicts:

1. **Conflicts of Interest**, in which the primary issues involve making decisions about sharing money, belongings, and time, and the needs are to teach skills of negotiation and making/responding to proposals;
2. **Conflicts of Beliefs and Values**, in which the primary issues are a lack of trust or belief in the other parent's abilities, and the needs are to help parents explore the advantages of forgiveness and learning how to effectively parallel-parent and concentrate on being responsible for own's own behavior and letting go of monitoring the other parent; and
3. **Intimate Partner Violence**, in which the primary issues are power-related and the needs are to keep parents and children safe from abuse and from being abusive.

### **Based in part on:**

Garton, N. (2017). *Conflict Analysis & Intervention Selection for Parenting Coordinators: Strategies for Success. Mediate*. Retrieved from <https://www.mediate.com/articles/GartonN1.cfm>

Note that this class can build on or be independent from the Co-Parenting/Divorce available from [onlineparentingprograms.com](http://onlineparentingprograms.com) since 2011. All of these classes are based in part on the insights from the following authors:

Bowers, J. R., Mitchell, E. T., Hardesty, J. L., & Hughes, R., Jr. (2011). A review of online divorce education programs. *Family Court Review*, 49, 776-787.

Bowers, J. R., Ogolsky, B. G., Hughes, R., Jr., & Kanter, F. B. (2014). Coparenting through divorce or separation: A review on an online program. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 55(6), 464-484.

Hughes, R., Jr., Bowers, J. R., Mitchell, E. T., Curtiss, S., & Ebata, A. (2012). Developing online family life prevention and education programs. *Family Relations*, 61, 711-727.

Myers-Walls, J. A., & Dworkin, J. (2016). Parenting education without borders: Web-based outreach. In J. J. Ponzetti (Ed.), *Evidence-based parenting education: A global perspective* (pp. 123-139). New York: Routledge.

Myers-Walls, J. A. (2021). *Court-mandated parents and families*. In S. Ballard and A. Taylor (Eds.), *Family life education with diverse populations, 2nd edition* (pp. ??). Newbury Park: Sage.

## Target Audience

This program is designed for parents of children aged birth to 18+ who are separating from or divorcing the children's other parent or for some other reason will not be raising their shared children together. Some limited information is provided on young-adult children because some families may have older children in addition to those aged 0-18. Some participants may have completed other divorce education classes and found themselves still struggling to come to an agreement, while others may be directed to this class before taking any other classes. Parents may either have been officially married or may have cohabiting before separation. Some may have never lived together. Attempts have been made to include:

- Both mothers and fathers. Although there are many references to mothers and fathers in the class, attempts were made to make the materials applicable to same-sex couples as well, and same-sex examples are included.
- Biological parents and adoptive parents.
- Parents who initiated the separation ("leavers") and those who did not want it or were surprised (the "left").
- Parents of children with special needs.
- Couples who were together for a long time and those whose relationship was brief.
- Information is provided for identifying child abuse and neglect and intimate partner violence. Some information is also provided regarding the impacts of substance abuse or mental illness. Basic guidelines are provided for those situations, but it is critical that additional services be provided by professionals in those fields to deal with the underlying problems.

There are other groups that might benefit from some parts of the program, but they will find that much of the program does not fit them. It is important to recognize that sections of the program will not feel appropriate for them, and they will not feel their needs are being addressed at numerous points.

- Parents who never had any kind of relationship (e.g., "one-night stands").
- Parents whose divorce or separation was final years ago, and are adjusting the parenting plan or other arrangements.



These courses are NOT designed for the following audiences. It is not dangerous to expose these parents to this program, but it will not meet their unique needs. The program cannot be considered research-informed if used for these groups. It is important for anyone in a position to recommend or mandate participation in the classes to understand that it is not appropriate to include these groups in their recommendations or mandates.

- Grandparents or other relatives raising children when the parents cannot.
- Parents of children born after rape or incest. They need therapeutic support.
- Parents who live apart from each other for work or other reasons unrelated to their relationship and are still in a committed relationship.
- Parents who are working through the negotiations of co-parenting with few difficulties.

The courses will be most successful for participants who:

- Have some contact with their children; that is, their children live with them, or they have regular contact with the children who may be living with another parent, family member, or in a foster situation. They also should have some contact with their co-parent, although it may not be face-to-face. It is possible to benefit from the program without regular contact, but the learning will be less effective, because participants will not have a chance to practice the skills immediately.
- Are literate at the fifth-grade reading level or higher (English or Spanish) and competent with basic computer skills and have access to an Internet-connected device, or they can partner with someone who will assist with reading and managing the connections.
- Have access to enough resources to meet their own and their children's basic needs. That means, if they do not have a home (or at least temporary shelter) or enough food or other necessities, those needs should be met first so that the participants can concentrate on family relationships and co-parenting. Such families may benefit from this program later and sometimes simultaneously with the meeting of those basic needs.
- Are mentally stable enough to participate in a psychoeducational experience. That is, they are in touch with reality enough to care for their children and are not currently an immediate danger to themselves or their children.
- Are provided with enough time to complete the program, practice the skills, and reflect on insights and ideas in between sessions.

## Presentation Methods

- The reading level is between 4th- and 5th-grade levels throughout the course.
- Activities and frequent reflection and processing of the materials are included in each unit. We ask participants to assess their situation and set goals at multiple points in the curriculum. Such an approach simulates some of the advantages of face-to-face programming while building on the advantages of online capabilities.
- A positive, strengths-based focus characterizes the materials. We believe that participants are more likely to make changes and feel confident about their ability to provide a positive atmosphere for their children if the materials help them identify and build on their strengths rather than reminding them of their failures or potential risks of their situation. Although we provide some information about dangers and risks, we try to help participants find the resources that exist in themselves and their environment that will help them make positive outcomes more likely for themselves and their children.
- Language and learning methods have been examined for cultural inclusivity.
- Participants are given hints for what to look for in videos and other special presentations. This lowers the likelihood of them becoming passive recipients of the information. They also answer questions after most videos to reflect on what was useful and encourage interactive learning.



# Class Learning Objectives

## Primary Objectives

This version of the course is based on the following concepts and conclusions from the research literature on parenting after a break-up, separation, or divorce:

- Divorce, separation, and parental break-ups represent potential risk factors for adults and children. These risks are multiplied when conflict is frequent and displayed in front of the children.
- Parents can lower some of the risks for their children. The skills to lower the risks can be learned.
- Uncontested custody and partnership dissolution cases are healthier for families than contested ones. While cooperation and communication are preferred, if parents cannot do so effectively and without conflict, they must disengage.



Specific Objectives as presented to participants in each unit.

### **Unit 1: Understanding Difficult Break-Ups**

*At the end of this unit, you should be able to:*

- Define high-conflict break-ups.
- List several kinds of high-conflict break-ups.
- List some ways that your break-up is high conflict.
- Identify stuck places in your legal path.
- Identify stuck places in your emotional path.
- List some ways that your break-up has gone well or is improving.
- Set goals for yourself in this class.

### **Unit 2: Taking Care of You**

*At the end of this unit, you should be able to:*

- List childhood events that are related to problems with health and coping later in life.
- Describe ways that difficult childhood events have had positive outcomes in your life.
- Outline steps in the grief process after a break-up.
- Identify the stages you have completed in the grief process.
- Describe how going through hard times is related to building strong, resilient families.
- List at least 3 ways you will work to help your family become stronger and more resilient.

### **Unit 3: Taking Care of the Children**

*At the end of this unit, you should be able to:*

- Describe how children react to parent break-ups and conflict.
- List some ways that childhood events might affect your children.
- Demonstrate how to talk to your children about your break-up and about positive relationships and your family.
- List some ways to help your children grow or stay strong after a break-up.
- Describe how to get help for your children when they need it.
- Make a plan for building resilience with your children.

## **Unit 4: Tools for Co-Parenting**

*At the end of this unit, you should be able to:*

- List the co-parenting tools you have and the tools you want to develop.
- Use a process to build on any successful co-parenting experiences.
- Identify several ways to stop conflict and manage anger.
- Outline the steps in making decisions with your co-parent.
- Describe when parallel parenting is a good idea.
- List several ways to keep yourself and your children safe.
- Choose the co-parenting tools that fit your relationship.

## **Unit 5: Moving Ahead**

*At the end of this unit, you should be able to:*

- Describe why a detailed parenting plan is important for co-parents with high levels of conflict.
- List the items you would like to have in your parenting plan.
- Explain how your values are included in your parenting plan.
- Outline how your plan meets your needs and the needs of your children.
- List several ways that plans can deal with transportation and communication.
- Describe how supervised parenting time is handled.
- Identify how your plan is prepared to deal with expected and unexpected changes.



# Class Materials

All classes are available for review online. Contact [OnlineParentingPrograms.com](http://OnlineParentingPrograms.com) to obtain administrative access for reviewing the courses. There is no instructor manual because the course is self-directed. Videos and other learning materials can be seen online. Below is a description and outline of what topics are included online.

## Content Outline

Welcome Section – This section includes a discussion of feelings about being recommended or mandated to participate in this program. It also includes guidelines and instructions for using the program. This section is not timed.

Each content unit begins with a pre-unit assessment (multiple-choice questions) and an introduction to the unit that includes some description of the importance of the topics covered and a list of objectives (What You Will Learn). All units include text, videos, narrated slide presentations or videos, links to outside sources, and reflective journal entries that must be completed by the participant to advance. Each unit ends with a brief description of what is coming in the next unit and a post-unit assessment that includes the same questions as the pre-assessment along with a video quiz and formative evaluation questions. Participants must provide the correct answers to the content-related items to be allowed to move forward. Correct answers are explained after users have a chance to respond. Other items do not have right-or-wrong answers but instead assess attitudes and personal experiences. Final elements in each unit are additional resources that might be helpful for anyone wanting more information on the topics and the sources that were used.

# Class Content Chart

## Unit 1: Understanding Difficult Break-Ups

- Are You Stuck?
- Factor 1 - History
- Factor 2 - Balance
- Factor 3 - Issues and Values
- Your Adjustment to the Break-up
- Level of Conflict
- Types of High-Conflict Parenting – Review
- Your Path
- Legal Steps
- Legal Steps - Practice
- Your Legal Path
- Your Emotional Path
- Your Emotional Path - Practice
- Progress and Conflict

## Unit 2: Taking Care of You

- Your Childhood Path
- The Childhood Path - Following the Family Stories
- Your Childhood
- Grief and Break-Ups
- The Grief Process - Step 1
- The Grief Process - Step 2
- The Grief Process - Step 3
- Resilience
- Belief Systems
- Connections and Working Together
- Communication and Solving Problems
- Resilience – Practice



### **Unit 3: Caring for the Children**

- Children's Reactions to Break-ups and Conflict
- Children's Losses and Grief
- Children, Trauma, and Sensitive Periods - Part 1
- Children, Trauma, and Sensitive Periods - Part 2
- Helping Children Cope - Stress Management
- Helping Children Cope - Apologizing to Children
- Apologizing to Children - Practice
- Helping Children Cope - Build Resilience

### **Unit 4: Tools for Co-Parenting**

- Tools for Co-Parenting
- Tool #1: Building on Success
- Tool #2: Managing Conflict and Anger - Part 1
- Tool #2: Managing Conflict and Anger - Part 2
- Tool #3: Decision-Making - Part 1
- Tool #3: Decision-Making - Part 2
- Tool #4: Finding Safety
- Tool #5: Communication - Part 1
- Tool #5: Communication - Part 2
- Tool #5: Communication - Part 3

### **Unit 5: Moving Ahead**

- Balance in Planning
- Your Values
- Find Balance
- Planning to Share Children
- Living In Multiple Homes
- Making Changes - Part 1
- Making Changes - Part 2
- Building Your Plan - Part 1
- Building Your Plan - Part 2

# End-of-Class Test

When participants complete the RISE class, they are given an exam of multiple-choice questions. Those questions are randomly selected by the computer from a bank of questions that cover each of the 5 units. It is necessary to get at least 75% right to pass the class and earn a completion certificate.

If participants do not pass the test, they will be given a chance to review the class and then repeat the test. (After participants complete any section of a class, that section is available to them to access without restrictions of time or sequence.) Each administration of the test will include a different set of randomly selected questions from the question bank. Participants can repeat the final exam as many times as necessary to achieve a passing score.



# Evaluation Plan

The overall class outcome evaluation plan includes:

1. A full-class pre- and post-assessment,
2. The final exam, and
3. Items from the single-unit pre- and post-assessments and from the assessments in Unit that measure relationship characteristics.

Formative evaluation data are collected by way of an overall formative evaluation at the end of the course. The final formative piece is called Feedback on This Program and is included after the Final Exam. All items in the full-class pre- and post-assessment are collected when the participant first participate in the class.

Some pre-course forms can be seen in the Welcome section under Intake Forms. These forms ask about demographic information, the parent's perceived knowledge level in several topic areas, plans for dealing with disagreements, and self-assessed coping by the children and the parents. Many of those items are asked again at the end of the class. In addition, questions about parent confidence, comfort, perceived learning, goals, and behaviors are asked before and after individual units and will be included in the evaluation as well. A self-assessment of the couple relationship is included in Unit 1 and asked again in the post-class assessment.

Many parts of the pre- and post-course assessment tool have been developed in conjunction with a team of professionals from across the country who are also conducting programming for parents who are divorcing, separating, or for other reasons not raising their children together. The data collected by the various groups will be compared to analyze for broad evaluation outcomes. See *Divorce Education Assessment Collaborative* (k-state.edu).

Previous outcome evaluation results for our other classes are available upon request.





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