

ANOKA COUNTY FAMILY COURT EARLY NEUTRAL EVALUATION PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Early Neutral Evaluation (ENE) is a confidential, voluntary evaluative process designed to facilitate prompt dispute resolution in custody, parenting time (visitation), and financial matters. The program offers the evaluative impressions of experienced professionals to parties engaged in custody, parenting time, and financial disputes. Feedback is provided to parties and their attorneys based on case presentations and a limited amount of information gathering. The ENE process is typically completed within one month. A party may choose to end the ENE session at any time.

1. For Social ENE (SENE), there are two neutral evaluators assigned to the case, one male evaluator and one female evaluator. This is a minimum of a four (4) hour session.
2. For Financial ENE (FENE), there is one neutral evaluator assigned to the case. This is a minimum of a three (3) hour session.
3. There is a cost for participating in Early Neutral Evaluation. Each person pays a fee and the amount of the fee is determined by his or her income or attorney's hourly rate.
4. Attorneys and parties typically meet with the ENE neutral(s) within 7-10 days after a court referral to ENE. Each attorney or pro se party is asked to identify the important issues in the case with the party giving more explanation and reason to support his or her perspective and opinion on each issue. Unless it is necessary to gather additional information, the ENE team provides immediate feedback about each party's case. Settlement possibilities are discussed and areas needing further scrutiny are identified.
5. The ENE neutral(s) may gather additional information as necessary and may interview parties, interview child(ren), or gather limited collateral data.
6. The attorneys and parties may need additional sessions to complete the ENE process. Settlement options for full and partial agreements are discussed. If the case does not settle, the neutral(s) identifies critical issues that may need additional study.
7. After the ENE process is complete, the evaluator(s) submit(s) an ENE Evaluator's Report to the court indicating whether full or partial or no settlement is reached. If a full or partial settlement is reached, a copy of the agreement also is sent to the judge. Evidence produced during the Early Neutral Evaluation process that is not otherwise discoverable shall remain confidential. Impressions or opinions made by the Early Neutral Evaluator(s) or any other neutral or expert who participates in the process shall remain confidential. The ENE neutral(s) may not be called as a witness with respect to the information obtained or the recommendations made during the ENE process.
8. If the case does not settle, a scheduling order, including a pretrial hearing date, is issued.