Ramsey County Department of Court Services - Domestic Relations

SOCIAL EARLY NEUTRAL EVALUATION ("SENE")

A SENE:

- Is a form of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) that may be recommended by the Court.
- Is a expedited and confidential evaluative process designed to facilitate prompt dispute resolution in Family Court custody and parenting time cases.
- May be ordered by the Court at any time between the Informational Case Management Conference ("ICMC") and the pretrial settlement conference.
- Offers the evaluative impressions of experienced Ramsey County Department of Court Services - Domestic Relations ("DR") staff to parties involved in custody and parenting time disputes based on case presentations made by the parties and a limited amount of information gathering.

BENEFITS OF AN SENE:

- Both parents will hear a knowledgeable, neutral opinion as to the likelihood of each parent's respective requests about custody and parenting time being successful at a trial.
- Your case can be resolved quickly and fairly.
- You can save money, time and heartache.

THE SENE PROCESS:

- A male/female ENE team ("the team") of experienced DR staff is assigned to the case.
- The first meeting with the team typically occurs within 7 days of appointment by the Court, and the ENE must be completed within 30 days.
- Attorneys and parties meet with the team, and each is asked to present the important issues in the case.
- Unless more information is needed, the team provides immediate feedback about each party's case, and settlement possibilities are discussed.
- The team may gather additional information as necessary, and may re-interview the parties, interview the child/ren and gather limited collateral data. If so, a second meeting with the team may be held for the team to provide its' assessment and recommendations.
- The team may communicate with the Court during the ENE for the limited purpose of facilitating case management, and obtaining direction from the Court on how to address an issue that needs further assessment.
- If a full or partial settlement is reached, the team sends a copy of the agreement to the Court.
- If the case does not settle through the ENE process, the team may identify important issues that need additional study. The team will inform the Court that the case did not settle, but *will not* report the content of the ENE to the Court. With the parties' written consent, the team may suggest another ADR process to the Court, such as mediation, that may be helpful in reaching settlement.
- The Court may consult with the parties and their attorneys to decide the next step, which may be mediation and/or expedited evaluation of the certain issues, or a full custody evaluation.
- ENE team members may not be called as witnesses. The recommendations of the team and any statements of settlement or compromise made in the process are confidential, and not communicated to the Court or admitted into court.