

# Executive Summary: A Qualitative Interview Study Regarding Barriers and Facilitators of Engagement in Two Online Education Programs for Separating or Divorcing Parents

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Children experiencing parental divorce or separation are at risk for a variety of emotional and behavioral problems. Improving co-parenting and parenting quality attenuates the link between parental separation and child adjustment problems. Thus, many U.S. courts have implemented educational parenting programs, usually brief and in-person, for separating parents. However, parents and courts are concerned about access to such programs (e.g., transportation, time, childcare).

To address such barriers, courts have begun to implement online parenting programs, which are assumed to be more accessible, though there are no data relevant to this issue. We found that only 47% of parties sent a court order to access a website, to learn if they were court-ordered to complete an online parenting program, did so (i.e., estimates of 51% of divorced parents and 28% of unmarried parents based on data from the last six months of the project). Among those who accessed the court website and were assigned to a program, 81% participated in the program (i.e., estimates of 83% of divorced parents and 63% of unmarried parents, based on data from parties who consented to a related study).

Thus, the current qualitative interview study was implemented to explore barriers and facilitators to participation in online parenting programs that parents were court-ordered to pursue. We interviewed 61 parents who had received a court order, 30% of whom participated in the parenting program and 70% of whom did not. Their responses were coded to capture themes. While many parents reported positives of the online parenting programs (e.g., convenience, privacy, and benefits from the programs such as improved communication), others reported barriers to program participation, including barriers previously associated with in-person programs (e.g., inconvenience) and new barriers associated with the online programs (e.g., technology problems). Unmarried parents were particularly likely to mention technology, length concerns, and confusion as barriers.

Improving understanding of such barriers and facilitators may help courts consider how to better assist families during the separation process and offers insights on how courts might better implement orders for services like parent education to improve compliance.