

## **Ask the Experts: A Focus on the Changing Landscape of Parent Education Programming for Divorcing and Separating Parents**

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Understanding what works and for whom is a primary goal of many researchers, practitioners, and educators working in the divorce education space. Over the years the number of and diversity of divorce education programs has expanded; however, we still have limited understanding of if these programs are effective, in what ways they are effective, and what type of families should be receiving what type of programs. In the [July, 2024 special issue of \*Family Court Review\*](#), we sought to explore these issues, compiling a selection of articles that focused on (1) the things that actually help parents in divorce education programming or the contexts that create barriers or help to amplify the benefits of programs, (2) what is known broadly about the effectiveness of divorce education programming, and (3) areas of innovation in the area of divorce education, meeting the needs of a growingly diverse set of parents.

Despite our desire to better understand the diversity of experiences for parents, it is important to note that many programs would fit under the distinction of universal programs (those that are designed to be taken by all parents or most parents with minor children seeking a divorce), and in many cases this is done through necessity based upon state policy, statutes, or decision-making undertaken at the state or local court level. Universal programs commonly share a set of common goals, such as to increase parents' capacity for coparenting quality and reduce their need for further litigation. In our paper (see [Ferraro et al., 2024](#)), we sought to explore a set of preexisting contextual factors and how they intersected with short-term programmatic goals that were shared across multiple programs. We leveraged aggregated data from multiple programs to be able to better generalize results. We found that perceptions of program utility were tied to intentions to cooperatively coparent; however, perceptions of utility were conditional based upon baseline perceptions of adjustment. What this means is that program effectiveness was not shared the same for all participants. Those that felt that they were already in a good place and had the skills necessary to deal with the divorce or separation did not see the same gains as those that started off in a less confident place.

Another interesting finding surrounded intentions to relitigate. The perceived effectiveness of the programs was not tied to intentions to relitigate, but rather pre-existing contextual considerations were the drivers of their perceived likelihood to work within the legal system to handle disputes. The presence of intimate partner violence and the nature of the coparenting relationship at baseline (what the relationship was like before they entered the program) were the biggest drivers of post-test intentions around relitigation. The results of the study demonstrate that programs do generally have the capacity to improve intentions around coparenting and to help shift

perceptions about participants' ability to navigate the divorce and separation. However, targeted reduced relitigation may be beyond what these programs can reasonably accomplish. There may be some benefit to considering tailored programming or triage for parents to better match their needs with specific parenting programs.

To learn more about this study and some of the other great work at the forefront of divorce education, please check out the special issue!



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