

EARLY NEUTRAL ASSESSMENT

- **What is ENA?** ENA is the Early Neutral Assessment program, offered in many Colorado judicial districts to help parents reach informed agreements about the parenting plan for their children, with the input of a professional team.
- **Who is on the ENA Team?** The ENA team is composed of two neutral team members from different professional backgrounds. One is a man and one is a woman. One is a psychologist or other mental health professional and one is a lawyer. Both professionals have many years of experience working with families and divorces and the legal system.
- **Why choose Early Neutral Assessment?**



- The process is voluntary and client-driven; the team hears directly from parents.
 - ENA provides parents realistic expectations of what is likely to occur if they go to a hearing and let a judge decide their case.
 - ENA provides parents information regarding child development as it relates to parenting time plans for their child.
 - ENA is an early intervention and is neutral and confidential.
 - Research shows when parents reach resolution they are better able to resolve future disagreements.
 - ENA is less costly both financially and emotionally.
- **How much does ENA cost?** ENA costs \$400 per party; low-income parties may qualify for the state to pay their costs in some jurisdictions.
 - **Who participates in ENA?** The two parents (or the parties in the case) and their attorneys (if the parties are represented), and the two ENA team members meet together to build a parenting plan. A judicial officer (judge or magistrate) comes to the beginning of the meeting. If the parents are successful in reaching an agreement about the parenting plan, then the participants go directly into the courtroom and put the agreed plan “on the record” with the judge.

- **How does the ENA process work?**
 - A four hour meeting is scheduled at the court house.
 - A judicial officer (judge or magistrate) meets the parents briefly with the ENA team at the start of the session.
 - Each parent addresses his or her concerns and goals regarding parenting time, decision-making, and any other non-financial issues presented. If the parents have attorneys, they participate also.
 - The ENA team takes a break to discuss and then offers feedback and options to the parents to consider, given the parents' specific circumstances, the ages of the children, what child-development research says, and what is likely to occur if the case were to go to a hearing.
 - The parents take a break to consult with their attorneys (if any) and to thoughtfully consider the input they just received from the ENA team.
 - The parties, attorneys, and ENA team regroup to work together to construct a successful parenting plan for the children.
 - If the parents reach an agreement, they go directly to the courtroom with the ENA team to put their agreement on the record. The judge may ask some clarifying questions, and then adopt the parents' agreement as a court order in the case.

- **What topics are covered in the ENA process?** ENA addresses only non-financial Parenting Plan topics. In other words, it includes decision-making for the children, where they live and what their parenting time is with each parent, how the parents will share holidays and vacations, moving out of state, communication between the parents, special needs, and other issues regarding the children's best interests.

- **What is the future role of the ENA team in the case?** Nothing. After the ENA session is over, either a settlement is presented to the judge, to be adopted as a court order, or it is not. If the parties did not reach a full settlement during the ENA process, they are certainly able to continue their discussions and settle their case later. The process is neutral and confidential. The ENA team members will shred their notes and will not testify in the case.

- **How successful is ENA?** ENA has been *extremely* successful in Minnesota, where it began, and in Colorado counties where it has been introduced. When parents participate in shaping the solution for their children, they are more satisfied with the outcomes and more able to collaborate about future parenting decisions. Having experienced, neutral, professional assistance in building the parenting plan increases the likelihood of establishing a child-focused pattern early in the process, and avoiding expense and anger down the road.

- **Video:** To watch a 9 minute video of the Colorado judges from Adams County sharing their enthusiastic, positive experience with ENA, go to this link:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F4vQuj6IYzI>