

# **The Several Benefits of UpToParents.org and ProudToParent.org in Divorce and Paternity Cases –and Simple Steps for Implementation**

Revised August, 2013

**Note:** This handout was created for judges’ use in presenting to colleagues about the UpToParents Family of Resources. The link to this handout can be accessed easily: it and the one-page guide [Suggestions for Judges Presenting about UpToParents.org and ProudToParent.org](#) are the last items on the “Professionals Corner” of [UpToParents.org](#).

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# ST. JOSEPH SUPERIOR COURT

60<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit



*Michael P. Scopelitis*

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**To:** Fellow judicial officers presiding over divorce and paternity cases  
**From:** Chief Judge Michael P. Scopelitis, St. Joseph (Indiana) Superior Court  
**Re:** Adopting the free *UpToParents.org* Family of Resources (English and Spanish)  
**Date:** May 8, 2013

For the past eight years (of my twelve years hearing family cases), I've had a front-row seat to the considerable help provided in divorce and paternity cases to families and courts by the free *UpToParents* websites. I'm now contacting you as part of my efforts to acquaint more courts with these innovative resources and how easily they can be implemented.

Created by a family charity, the websites are available without any cost, thus freeing up funds for other important family needs and court programming (including parallel live classes). And they assist both families and courts by reducing parent conflict and building parent cooperation.

The enclosed materials can help explain this opportunity. If you are interested, I would offer two suggestions.

- First, you and any judges and program people you think should lead this inquiry can look over the pages I've enclosed.
- Second, excellent assistance is available to courts and other professionals from the website creators at either [Info@UpToParents.org](mailto:Info@UpToParents.org) or 317-755-1265. This includes guidance on the simple implementation mechanisms that, once in place, automatically give parents this educational opportunity with no drain on court or staff time.

I want to emphasize again that these resources are **entirely free** and that no one (myself included) has any financial or personal interest in their use. I'm simply persuaded that these child-focused resources help many, many families as well as the courts handling their cases.

You have my best wishes for continued success in your work on behalf of families in crisis and transition. I have always considered these family cases singularly important.

**WAYNE SUPERIOR COURT NO. 2**  
**Wayne County Courthouse**

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LISA M. ROURKE  
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**To:** Fellow judges and other professionals responsible for family cases  
**From:** Judge Gregory Horn, Superior Court of Wayne County, Indiana  
**Date:** August 7, 2013  
**Re:** The free UpToParents.org websites

This spring I received, as I hope you did, a memo from St. Joseph County, Indiana Chief Judge Michael P. Scopelitis on the power of the free UpToParents.org websites. Please allow me to add my enthusiastic support to his message.

By local rule, our county requires all divorcing parents to complete this website work and take that work to their live co-parenting classes. The results, to say the least, have been excellent! Our co-parenting educators report that since we implemented the website requirement, parents show a much greater interest in the classes and the messages we hope to send. Maybe more importantly for you, we judges find parent conflict reduced and cooperation increased.

I know you are busy, so I want to be as brief as possible by focusing on just three (3) thoughts.

- A. I can confidently say there is a consensus among our Judiciary, GALs, co-parenting educators and, yes, even members of our local Bar, that if we had it to do over again, we actually would have started our county's use of UpToParents even earlier.
- B. Implementation was much simpler than we had imagined. Like other jurisdictions, we were helped both by the short introductory memos on the "Professionals Corner" link of UpToParents and by the generous help of the creators of the website.
- C. There is absolutely no reason I know of not to adopt these websites. For jurisdictions already using live classes in divorce cases, I believe these websites can exponentially multiply what parents arrive ready to learn and absorb. For jurisdictions without live classes, these websites may be the only good co-parenting education available for parents in divorce and paternity cases – and, AT NO COST!

In my view, we in the legal profession can sometimes fail to appreciate the true magnitude of what separated parents must achieve. With the UpToParents website resources, parents have free, ready, and inviting tools they can return to again and again to succeed in areas as diverse and emotionally challenging as these:

1. Maintaining parents' consistent presence in their children's lives—and supporting each other's presence in their children's lives.
2. Understanding the broad spectrum of harm that comes from parent conflict.
3. Defining parents' future relationship so that it is as safe and cooperative as possible.
4. Making all times when children see their parents together entirely safe and reassuring for the children.
5. Noticing the true commonality of parents' best interests and learning steps to meet those common interests.
6. Appreciating the need to deal honestly and constructively with grief and the other emotional challenges of separation.
7. Mutually supporting the children's good opinion of both parents.
8. Eliciting support from family and friends for the new respectful co-parenting relationship.
9. Solving issues in ways that protect the children (including understanding the proper and improper uses of the legal system).
10. Setting an example other families can profit from.

With this much change to understand and accomplish, parents, in my opinion, can only be helped by courts' use of UpToParents.

For any judge or other professional wishing to offer a presentation to colleagues about these websites, now there are a one-page memo of "Suggestions for Judges Presenting about UpToParents.org and ProudToParent.org" and a packet of handout materials at the end of the "Professionals Corner" of UpToParents.

Finally, I'm also enclosing an eloquent plea from Indianapolis attorney Ms. Stacy Prall. (I saw it recently on the "Professionals Corner" link of UpToParents.) You will note that she writes not just as a professional, but as a parent who was helped by UpToParents in her own divorce. I sincerely hope you and your bench and bar will consider her valuable perspective.

I strongly encourage you to consider adoption of these websites as a part of your domestic practice. I am convinced that these sites are most helpful in guiding parents in a more child-focused and solution-focused direction.

Thank you for considering these thoughts.

## Courts’ and Co-Parenting Educators’ Use of UpToParents.org

August, 2013

**Note:** An electronic copy of this article is available on Part II of the “Professionals Corner” link of [UpToParents.org](http://UpToParents.org). All underlined links can be opened from that electronic copy.

*Click [Here](#) for Judge Michael P. Scopelitis’s two-minute explanation of why his jurisdiction is among those requiring use of these resources.*

Progressive judges and co-parenting educators realize that many parents come into their divorce and paternity cases with years of education in exactly the wrong ways to address their co-parenting challenges. Many parents have been persuaded by the popular culture and misinformed family and friends that personal and even legal battles are the preferred route to good outcomes when raising children between separate homes.

The free websites [UpToParents.org](http://UpToParents.org) (for divorce cases) and [ProudToParent.org](http://ProudToParent.org) (for paternity cases) are powerful tools to inform and inspire parents about the advantages of child-focused co-parenting. Parents can be referred to the sites as stand-alone resources or (as we think should be the standard) as preparation for live co-parenting classes. In either case, the sites are uniquely effective means of conveying the advantages of more peaceful and cooperative co-parenting. Simple referral mechanisms are available at [Sample Mechanisms Used by Courts and Co-Parenting Educators in Referring Parents to UpToParents.org](#).

*A free public tool with enormous promise for minimizing harm to children.  
Hon. Brent E. Dickson, Justice, Indiana Supreme Court*

We encourage all judges and co-parenting educators to try [UpToParents.org](http://UpToParents.org) as hypothetical parents in divorce (even a few minutes on the Commitments work and on the “Parents Corner” can suffice). Simply click on the **First-time visitors/Getting Started** icon and follow the simple directions—just 30 minutes can give a good sense of the power and simplicity of the work. *It can be especially helpful for judges and educators to task their staffs and program personnel to do this work and report back on their reactions.*

*Without question, the single most important thing parents can do to prepare for our divorce adjustment classes is to complete [UpToParents.org](http://UpToParents.org). We’d never again write or teach a co-parenting class without this as a required component.  
Michael Sheehan, Ph.D., Child Advocates in Divorce (CAID)*

More information on building better outcomes for families through the use of these websites is available from the following links.

1. [Three-Minute Video Introduction for Co-Parenting Educators](#)
2. [Professionals’ Introduction to UpToParents.org](#)
3. [The Paradigm Shifts to the Healing Divorce](#)
4. [Sample UpToParents Agreed Commitments](#) (in English and Spanish)

5. [Sample UpToParents Exercise Responses](#)
6. [Sample Feedback from Professionals and Parents about UpToParents](#)

These websites have proven to be a remarkable help to parents in mediation, parenting coordination, Collaborative cases, and other settings. But, there is no more logical place than as part of early co-parenting education—either as the entirety of that education or, as we think preferable, as a precursor to live co-parenting classes.

Presently about 40 American counties strongly recommend this work, and about 15 outright require it. Over 100,000 parents have already used these sites.

*UpToParents is the Google© of online education for separated parents. It's by far the best, it's universally available, and it's free. It sets the focus squarely on children and their needs. It's truly ingenious and transforming.  
Ann M. Schelle, MS, LPC, National Coordinator and Trainer of  
TransParenting (live co-parenting classes in over 150 locations)*

For counties not offering live classes to parents in divorce and paternity cases, automatic referrals to these sites are crucial, being the only available co-parenting education. For jurisdictions sending parents to one of these sites as a precursor to live classes, there is no call to change any class curriculum. These sites will serve as a powerful adjunct to, and excellent preparation for, classes already in place.

*I fully endorse these Commitments for use with all divorcing parents. Too often, the message to divorcing parents is that they should simply refrain from badmouthing the other parent. These Commitments communicate that parents have a responsibility to actively support and nurture the child's relationship with the other parent—and they stimulate parents to consider numerous ways to do so for their children.*

*Bravo.*

*Janet R. Johnston, Ph.D., author of [In the Name of the Child; Impasses of Divorce; and Through the Eyes of Children](#)*

Co-parenting educators are also welcome to play at their classes videos from the “Parents Corner” link. Two of the most popular are [3 Girls' Invisible Pain](#) and [Bonnie and Ross](#).

Based on what we have learned from work with several courts and jurisdictions across the country, we offer these four suggestions for simple and effective implementation of these tools.

1. **Feel free to ask for our assistance.** Not only have we helped numerous courts with implementation of these resources (and expended use after implementation), but we now have counting mechanisms that can track usage in any jurisdiction.
2. **A court rule or standing order has proven to be necessary to achieve any substantial compliance.** Probably due to the overload of advice received by separated parents (some of that being unhelpful advice from well-intentioned but misdirected family and friends), it turns out that only a few parents respond to a mere court recommendation to

use the websites. A court rule or standing order is necessary. With such a requirement, though, two additional benefit results: (a) parents get to these resources early and (b) courts and their staffs are relieved of the time-consuming management to make case-by-case referrals to them.

3. **The court requirement must be clearly communicated to parents – and preferably through multiple simple mechanisms.** The advisement can come via one or more of the following.
  - a. Pamphlets like those at [Model Divorce Brochure](#) and [Model Paternity Brochure](#).
  - b. Handouts like [Courts' and Co-Parenting Educators' Referrals to UpToParents and ProudToParent](#).
  - c. A website like that at [FamilyCourtWebsite.org](#) or [ElkhartFamilyLaw.org](#).

Some programs actually achieve 100% parent compliance, and we are happy to assist any jurisdiction with a goal of high compliance.

4. **Finally, some proof of compliance is important.** Our websites offer Certificates of Completion once parents have finished the work, and courts can require either the filing of these Certificates or their presentation at any live co-parenting class.

We encourage courts to consider joining those that make these free resources automatic referrals at the start of all divorce and paternity cases. For many families, the benefits are remarkable.

Finally, jurisdictions are now able to track their success in referring parents to [UpToParents.org](#), [ProudToParent.org](#), and [WhileWeHeal.org](#) via these two easy-to-use links.

1. [Create Usage Report by Geography](#)
2. [Highest Usage by Geography](#)

As always, interested professionals are welcome to contact us for further information.

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## Some Unique Advantages of the UpToParents Family of Resources as Online Co-Parenting Programs

August, 2013

The UpToParents Family of Resources include (1) [www.UpToParents.org](http://www.UpToParents.org) (for divorce cases); (2) [www.ProudToParent.org](http://www.ProudToParent.org) (for paternity cases); and (3) [www.WhileWeHeal.org](http://www.WhileWeHeal.org) and [www.NoDivorceToday.org](http://www.NoDivorceToday.org) (for cases of separation and reconciliation).

These websites feature several powerful advantages in the field of co-parenting education.

- 1. Open-platform availability with no cost to parents or courts.** Two powerful advantages follow from this free availability of these sites. First, parents have unlimited, around-the-clock, and permanent access to the extensive content on UpToParents.org. They can view—at any time and as often as they like—dozens of excellent videos and articles on the “Parents Corner” link. Additionally, parents can, and often do, invite their co-parents, the children’s grandparents, and other close friends and families to view these materials to elicit their support for better family functioning.  
  
Second, the free UpToParents.org resources avoid the imposition of a number of financial costs and burdens on families and courts themselves. Fees for other programs can be as high as \$30-60 per parent (or \$60-120 per family). Not only are courts burdened with consideration of waiver petitions, but family and court resources become less available for other useful programming such as parallel live classes and mediation.
- 2. In addition to the award-winning curricula for parents in divorce cases and paternity cases, a carefully crafted separate curriculum ([WhileWeHeal.org](http://www.WhileWeHeal.org) and [NoDivorceToday.org](http://www.NoDivorceToday.org)) offered at the start of the work for parents interested in considering reconciliation or a “No-Divorce-Today Separation.”** The curricula on all four sites are freely available in both English and Spanish, with one-of-a-kind instant translation between languages.
- 3. Unparalleled engagement of parents through such strategies as (a) personalized use of children’s names and circumstances, (b) 15 instances of feedback specifically tailored to each parent’s actual responses, and (c) unequaled video, audio, and interactive content.** The narrow curricula in other programs are far surpassed here by an inspiring look at (i) one’s own children’s losses and the dangers to them from parent conflict and (ii) how responding to those children’s needs can be parents’ best way of serving their own interests as well.

4. **A process of self-education and personal restoration.** This relationship- and skills-based curriculum shines a bright light on matters that most parents care deeply about but that can quickly become invisible in divorce. These include children’s huge losses, pain, and risk factors from divorce and parent conflict as well as specific ways that parents can immediately respond appropriately for the sake of children and parents alike.
5. **Powerful written exercises specific to the children and family involved.**
6. **Accommodation of different learning styles, levels of language skills, and family circumstances.** These co-parenting websites are the only ones to employ a unique “layering” curriculum allowing parents to learn according to their particular learning styles, whether that be written pages, videos, interactive articles, or journaling.
7. **Voices of actual children and parents in professionally produced videos.** Examples from the Parents Corner include [3 Girls' Invisible Pain](#) and [Bonnie and Ross](#).
8. **A singularly complete curriculum with over twice the subject matter of other programs, all made possible by a unique interactivity holding parents’ interest.**
9. **Over a decade of testing and improvement with over 100,000 parents in educative and mediation settings.**
10. **A merging function that blends parents’ work into a set of “Agreed Commitments,” a clarifying picture of co-parents’ common interests and goals.**
11. **Complete freedom from the commercial links in other programs that can create both distraction and resentment.**
12. **Superior testing, upkeep, and improvement.**
13. **Exceptional support for courts, other professionals, and parents.**
  - (a) “Professionals Corner” link with explanatory memoranda to courts and others.
  - (b) “Parents Corner” link with dozens of videos and articles that parents, grandparents, and other family members regularly describe as eye-opening and powerful.
  - (c) “Mediate with” link showing how this work can dramatically assist mediation.
  - (d) Unlimited assistance to courts in implementation and education.
  - (e) Telephone and email support for parents and professionals.

## Feedback about the UpToParents Family of Resources

### Sample Opinions from Professionals

- A. ABA Dispute Resolution Section’s “Attorney as Problem-Solver Award”
- B. Association of Family and Conciliation Court’s “Irwin Cantor Innovative Program Award”
- C. “UpToParents is the Google© of online education for separated parents. It’s by far the best, it’s universally available, and it’s free. It sets the focus squarely on children and their needs. It’s truly ingenious and transforming.” *Ann M. Schelle, MS, LPC, National Coordinator and Trainer of TransParenting (live co-parenting classes in more than 150 locations)*
- D. “A free public tool with enormous promise for minimizing harm to children.” *Hon. Brent E. Dickson, Chief Justice, Indiana Supreme Court*
- E. “Without question, the single most important thing parents can do to prepare for our divorce adjustment classes is to complete UpToParents.org. We’d never again write or teach a co-parenting class without this parent preparation as a component.” *Michael Sheehan, Ph.D., Child Advocates in Divorce (CAID)*

### Sample Opinions from Parents

- 1. The least judgmental, most child-centered and encouraging set of information I've seen, and I've worked as a pastor, therapist, and educator for many years. Great work!
- 2. It was wonderful. Very supportive of children without making parents feel scolded. The wording made me feel you with me every step of the way. I have already recommended you to three people, including my divorce lawyer.
- 3. I didn't realize how my daughter was feeling until seeing this website.
- 4. It is a fantastic website that I think ALL divorcing parents should visit. It really puts everything into perspective and reminded me who is really important through this process.
- 5. This was life-changing for me. I am a physician and my marriage of 17 years is ending. I firmly believe this website helped me prevent significant damage to my beautiful children.
- 6. I loved it. I cried and I laughed through the whole thing. Sometimes in the midst of a painful divorce you forget why you had children and why you were together. It helped me realize that life goes on and how we start our day is how our children are going to start theirs.
- 7. One word—FANTASTIC. Loved the easy to use and understandable concept of the site. The information and personal touches (i.e., using David's name). Having the comments and answers from other parents and children. These really made this program hit home. It has started a new way of thinking for me.
- 8. Loved it—it gave me a whole new perspective on who we should be focusing on.
- 9. The emphasis always going back to the kids was AWESOME.
- 10. I love the website. It is very helpful. I'm an attorney, and I'm going to recommend that all of my divorce clients go to the website.
- 11. It has changed my attitude toward my soon-to-be ex-wife; I had had NO idea the damage I was doing to our son by treating his mom badly.

12. Initially, I thought it was just some silly thing I had to do for my attorney. However, once I got going on it, I realized it wasn't for my attorney at all. It was for me and, more importantly, my children. It really opens your eyes.
13. So easy to use. It should be mandatory for the process. Love the information.
14. I wish my ex-wife and I had done it long ago. I believe everything between us would have gone so, so much better. It helped immensely.
15. WOW! Very well thought out & user friendly. My daughter was born after her mom and I split up. Ellie is now 10 years old, and we have been in dispute for the duration. I wish I had found this sooner.
16. The website is so needed. I started to cry when I read the first commitment with my kids' names in it. Thank you for helping us through these heart-wrenching times. I wish I could have seen this earlier.
17. I loved it—absolutely loved it!! I am so thrilled and proud of my local court that they have mandated this website. I only wish it would have been here 15 years ago.
18. Very, very insightful, thought-provoking, and useful. Cried my way through much of it, actually. Wish I'd had it earlier. I have really acquired a new orientation on how I want to proceed with my soon to be ex-wife.
19. At first I didn't believe this was necessary but then I started. It was hard for me growing up in a broken family, and I don't want that for my little girl. I wish my parents could have used this website. It might have helped me grow up easier.
20. It is a fantastic website that I think ALL divorcing parents should visit. It really puts everything into perspective and reminded me who is really important through this process.
21. Utterly in awe. I've taken court-ordered co-parenting classes, and the information and focus here has reached a place in me that is hard to explain.
22. A great, wonderful, eye-opening experience. Thank you so much for helping me find myself again and helping me be a better parent to my son. How stupid I feel now to have let this bitterness go this far. Words cannot describe how this website has changed the way I feel about life and myself.
23. ABSOLUTELY A PHENOMENAL TOOL! Children are the only truly defenseless ones in a divorce, and this website is a great tool to help protect them.
24. Great combination of exercises, checklists/commitments, video/audio tracks, and attachments to read and save!
25. This is a thorough website that really helps parents put themselves in their child(ren)'s shoes. I am a teacher and will recommend this site to my students' parents as needed.
26. The Parents Corner is great—I consider it a gift for the parents and for the children.
27. Fantastic! When you are in such pain, it is hard to remain focused on the fact that your children should be your primary concern. This website helped me to get my children back into the primary place they should occupy and give my anger a backseat.
28. It made me very aware of MY responsibilities toward our children. Given the interactions between my husband and myself recently, the encouragement that "I will act as an adult no matter how I am treated" was quite empowering.



# UpToParents.org

## Our Agreed Commitments to Jenny and Robert

Date Merged: 4/9/2013 6:54:04 AM

- Date I first read these Agreed Commitments all the way through (and started regularly referring to them) \_\_\_\_\_
- Date I gave a copy of these Commitments to at least one other important person in this process (for example, a counselor, mediator, attorney, or key family member): \_\_\_\_\_
- Date we as parents read and discussed these Commitments with each other, if necessary with the help of a counselor, clergy person, mediator, or other trusted person: \_\_\_\_\_
- Name of the supportive person I have asked to be my "coach" in observing these Commitments: \_\_\_\_\_

|              |  |
|--------------|--|
| Section I    | Conflict between Us Puts Jenny and Robert in Danger.         |
| Section II   | Protecting Jenny and Robert Is Up To Us.                     |
| Section III  | We'll Win Together, or We'll Lose Together.                  |
| Section IV   | Helping Jenny and Robert Will Help Us.                       |
| Section V    | Some Times Belong Totally to Jenny and Robert.               |
| Section VI   | Supporting Jenny and Robert's Relationships with Both of Us. |
| Section VII  | Our Parenting Partnership Is the Key.                        |
| Section VIII | Solving Issues in Ways that Protect Jenny and Robert.        |
| Section IX   | Better Places for Our Energy.                                |
| Section X    | Putting Our Commitments into Action Today.                   |

We, Sarah and Jason, agree to make protecting Jenny and Robert our highest priority by observing the following:

### SECTION I: CONFLICT BETWEEN US PUTS JENNY AND ROBERT IN DANGER.

1 We'll remember this is Jenny and Robert's one and only childhood.

*Never will a time come when the most marvelous recent invention is as marvelous as a newborn baby.  
—Carl Sandburg*

2 We know that Jenny and Robert's one and only childhood is forming many of the gifts and problems they will carry into adulthood.

3 Jenny and Robert will experience any attack between us as an attack on them.

Click [HERE](#) to see some devastating thoughts of children caught in conflict.

*Children have no defense against their parents' anger.  
—Dr. Ross Campbell*

4 We realize conflict between us (their parents) can bring many bad things into Jenny and Robert's lives. Here are just a few:

1. blaming themselves
2. fear and depression
3. hiding their feelings
4. failure in school
5. drugs and alcohol
6. dangerous relationships.

The studies are absolutely clear on one point: Conflict between parents is the best predictor of a child's later maladjustment.  
—Dr. Anthony L. Berardi

5 Parent conflict is so dangerous to Jenny and Robert, that each of us must disengage from any conflict the other parent creates. Jenny and Robert don't need someone to win a fight; they need someone to stop a fight.

6 We know that often children of divorce don't say anything about their hurt. We put ourselves in Jenny and Robert's shoes and fill out **Exercise A** below asking about them and how they're doing.

## SECTION II: PROTECTING JENNY AND ROBERT IS UP TO US.

7 We notice and care about Jenny and Robert's deep losses from this divorce, including:

- losing the hope of growing up in one home with both parents,
- feeling that there was something they were supposed to fix,
- living a "life of leaving," leaving behind one of us each time they're reunited with the other, and
- wondering what else in their lives can go wrong.

These losses are enough—we don't add parent conflict to their burdens.

One hundred years from now it will not matter what my bank account was, how big my house was, or what kind of car I drove. But the world may be a little better because I was important in the life of a child.  
—Forest Witcraft

8 We know that our cooperative relationship as their parents is Jenny and Robert's best protection from the hurt and dangers in their lives. It's peace and cooperation between us, their parents, that they care deeply about.

9 Jenny and Robert's only job is to be children. And they can't be children unless we're adults.

- Jenny and Robert are not our witnesses or allies in any of our disagreements; it's our responsibility to reach good agreements for them.
- Jenny and Robert are not our spies to find out about each other's personal life.
- Jenny and Robert are not our whipping posts; it's not their job to listen to us criticize each other.
- Jenny and Robert are not our messengers to deliver checks, bills, messages, or anything else.
- Jenny and Robert are not our counselors or confidants to help us with our hurt.

- 10 When Jenny and Robert try to take on any of these responsibilities, we smile and say:  
"Mom and Dad have that all taken care of. You just get back  
to being great kids—you do it so well."

Children of divorce are like kids bobbing facedown  
in a river. What a tragedy that some of their parents stand  
on the riverbank arguing how the children got there, why  
their swimsuits don't match, or who is going to pay  
for the hospital bill if a rescue is ever mounted.

—Dr. Timothy A. Onkka

- 11 It will be up to us:

- to make it clear to Jenny and Robert that the divorce had absolutely nothing to do with them;
- to shield Jenny and Robert completely from the legal and financial details of the divorce;
- to show Jenny and Robert that while we're not together, we'll always be their parents, we'll always love and support them, and we'll do so together.

### SECTION III: WE'LL WIN TOGETHER, OR WE'LL LOSE TOGETHER.

- 12 No one wins in divorce, and any crusade for "victory" just damages parents and children more.

The most important measure of how good  
a game I played was how much better  
I helped my teammates play.

—Bill Russell

- 13 We remember that we have the same children—and that we'll win together if we give Jenny and Robert a good childhood, or we'll lose together if parent conflict poisons their childhood.

Our task now is not to fix the blame for the past,  
but to fix the course for the future.

—John F. Kennedy

- 14 We avoid Divorce Myths that could hurt us. For example:

- We know this isn't a competition; it's a time to cooperate for Jenny and Robert's sake.
- We know judges can't give us a good divorce; that's entirely up to us.
- We know that building peace for Jenny and Robert won't hurt us; building peace for them will save us.

You can click [HERE](#) to watch a 6-minute video on the [9 Myths That Fool Almost Everyone](#) – or you can watch this video later from the "Parents Corner" link.

### SECTION IV: HELPING JENNY AND ROBERT WILL HELP US.

- 15 While the worst tragedy of parent conflict is that children are so badly hurt, parents become victims of their own conflict as well.

16 Parents who build peace and cooperation for their children get to:

- Live in a better future rather than being stuck in the past,
- Put their energy and money to good use, and
- Protect their children and themselves.

Those who bring sunshine to the lives  
of others cannot keep it from themselves.

—James Barrie

17 Our own happiness depends on how well we focus on Jenny and Robert and the future, instead of our disagreements and the past.

Parents who agree about one thing will  
agree about everything, if that one thing is, "What do  
we want our children to look like when they're 25?"

—Patrick Brown,  
Attorney and therapist

## SECTION V: SOME TIMES BELONG TOTALLY TO JENNY AND ROBERT.

18 Separated and divorced parents have dozens of chances each week to talk when their children aren't around. There's no excuse for them to argue around their children.

For a short video on this all-important protection for Jenny and Robert, see [The Child Safety Zone](#) (2:21 video).

19 Any and all times that Jenny and Robert see us together or hear us speaking belong to them. They are for exchanging Jenny and Robert, other "child tasks," and showing them that their world is safe. We read and sign the Child Safety Zone Pledge.

For parents with more than one child together, click [HERE](#).

For parents with a daughter together, click [HERE](#).

For parents with a son together, click [HERE](#).

20 In truth, we very much want to protect Jenny and Robert. We complete **Exercise B** below for ideas on how to best handle all times Jenny and Robert see us together.

## SECTION VI: SUPPORTING JENNY AND ROBERT'S RELATIONSHIPS WITH BOTH OF US.

21 Jenny and Robert have an absolute right to good relationships with both of us. The best parent is both parents.

We don't see things as they are,  
we see them as we are.

—Anais Nin

22 We look at all possible ways—large and small—to support Jenny and Robert's good relationships with both of us. We start today by:



- Stopping all criticism of each other.
  - Using respect and courtesy, regardless of how we feel we've been treated.
  - Celebrating things they get to do with each of us.
  - Regularly—at least every other day—encouraging Jenny and Robert to call their other parent when they're with us.
- 23 To Jenny and Robert, we call each other "Mom," "Dad," "Mommy," or "Daddy," not "your mom," "your dad," "your mother," or "your father."
- 24 We complete **Exercise C** by making a list of 10 specific compliments and good memories about each other to share with Jenny and Robert. When we speak to Jenny and Robert about each other, these are the things we speak about.

## SECTION VII: OUR PARENTING PARTNERSHIP IS THE KEY.

- 25 To Jenny and Robert, we will always be family; when they think of their family, they'll think of us.
- 26 We stop wasting energy blaming each other or having old arguments. To move forward, we accept each other as we are and build a partnership based on our mutual love for Jenny and Robert and our parenting strengths.

*The weak can never forgive.  
Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong.  
—Gandhi*

- 27 We communicate and decide together the important questions in Jenny and Robert's lives. We never decide alone any important matter in Jenny and Robert's lives. This includes decisions about:

- Education
- Religion
- Medical care
- Counseling
- Schedules
- Discipline
- Anything that either of us thinks calls for discussion and decision.

Click [HERE](#) to read about "Joint Legal Custody."

*Being brave is the hardest thing.  
—Annie Rose, age 6*

- 28 If we are still married and believe our marriage is worth saving, we get some good counseling to help us start over. We can use [www.NoDivorceToday.org](http://www.NoDivorceToday.org) to focus on making any separation as peaceful and constructive as possible.
- 29 If our marriage can't be saved, we peaceably make room for the new relationships that come into each other's lives. But in all circumstances, we build a peaceful world for Jenny and Robert.

## SECTION VIII: SOLVING ISSUES IN WAYS THAT PROTECT JENNY AND ROBERT.

- 30 We don't sweat the small stuff. We remember that peace in Jenny and Robert's world is more important than almost any disagreement we could have.

The first rule of holes:  
if you are in one, stop digging.  
—Will Rogers

- 31 Legal battles in divorce make sense in very few cases, usually only ones involving violence in the family. In fact, most of our issues (like how we'll give Jenny and Robert quality time with both of us) aren't even legal issues.

Your children are not your children. They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself. You may give them your love but not your thoughts, for they may have their own thoughts. You may house their bodies but not their souls, for their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, a place you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.  
—Kahlil Gibran,  
The Prophet

- 32 We recognize that very little good can be expected from most legal battles.

- A judge can only pick from the bad choices left in the midst of parents' conflict, while parents can actually create better choices by ending conflict.
- Resolutions aren't available from courts; instead, legal battles tend to lead to more legal battles.
- Healing isn't available from courts; in fact, legal battles almost always create more resentment, hurt, and distrust.

I think we saved our children the day  
we realized we couldn't raise them  
in a lawsuit, only in a family.  
—33-year-old father of two

- 33 We recognize that a great deal of harm can be expected from most legal battles.

- Legal battles encourage parents to see each other as enemies—the last thing families need.
- The scars left to families—and particularly children—from legal battles are often permanent.
- Legal battles drain finances and energy parents need for other things.

If we still believe a legal battle is a good idea, we can be guided further by these videos with Judge Michael P. Scopelitis:

- [Some Common Effects of Unnecessary Family Litigation](#) (3:32 video)
- [How Do Divorce Lawyers Divorce?](#) (3:05 video)
- [Rely On Your Legal Rights - Or Should You?](#) (7:02 video)
- [Who Do Those Judges Think They Are?](#) (4:00 video)

## SECTION IX: BETTER PLACES FOR OUR ENERGY.

- 34 We relate to Jenny and Robert with even more joy, closeness, and admiration.

Parents' highest obligation is to enjoy their children.  
—Dr. Timothy A. Onkka

- 35 No matter how long our grieving takes, we are honest in facing our own losses from our divorce. And we never use anger as a way of trying to deny those losses.

Click [HERE](#) to see Finishing Your Grieving.

No one ever told me that grief felt so much like fear.

—C. S. Lewis

36 When we are finished choosing our **Commitments**, we can visit the "Parents Corner" on this website for short interactive and video articles on:

- Understanding Your True Challenge
- Putting That Understanding to Work Today
- Inviting In Your Co-Parent
- The Law, You, and Your Family
- Interested in Saving Marriage?
- Special Resources and Insights to Succeed.

37 We complete **Exercise D** below to describe how we wish to be relating two years from now.

If a child is to keep his inborn sense of wonder, he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement, and mystery of the world we live in.

—Rachel Carson

## SECTION X: PUTTING OUR COMMITMENTS INTO ACTION TODAY.

38 We save Jenny and Robert—and ourselves—by permanently setting the example of two parents who have moved from competitive parenting to cooperative parenting.

### SHIFT FROM COMPETITIVE TO COOPERATIVE PARENTING

#### COMPETITIVE PARENTING

- Servicing adults' anger and fear
- Arguing the past
- Giving decision-making to others
- Chasing win-lose competition

#### COOPERATIVE PARENTING

- Protecting children
- Building the future
- Re-assuming decision-making
- Building win-win cooperation

39 We insist that all adults in Jenny and Robert's life also work together for the sake of family peace. Each of us copies and teaches these **Commitments** to at least one other important adult in Jenny and Robert's lives.

Things didn't really get better until we insisted our families respect our decision to move forward. Things improved so much then. I think they wanted to do better, but they needed to hear it from us.

—37-year-old mother of two

40 Mistakes and slips happen. When our co-parent is discourteous or angry, we don't join in with our own discourtesy and anger. Those are just the times that Jenny and Robert will need one parent to be heroic, self-controlled, and focused on their needs.

For a while when my spouse was pouring conflict into our children's lives, I used that as an excuse to fight, too. I finally realized that the worse my co-parent was doing, the better I had to do. Not only did my kids love me for being the bigger person, but my spouse started doing better too.

—32-year-old parent of three

41 Every day we do something to grow a little stronger:

- Time with good friends,
- Time with a healthy group,
- Time with people with good divorces,
- Volunteer work, a hobby, or a class,
- Having some fun,
- Counseling,
- Exercise,
- and, of course,
- Enjoying and celebrating Jenny and Robert!

42 We use our 8 Hidden Keys to immediately make our lives better.

- Living by the Child Safety Zone.
- Keeping Jenny and Robert out of adult roles. Sharing
- 10 good things about their other parent. Celebrating
- what they can do with their other parent. Cheerfully
- encouraging calls to their other parent. Promptly
- sharing child-related information.
- Staying out of unnecessary legal combat.
- Enjoying and admiring Jenny and Robert.

You're almost finished with your Commitment work! Click [HERE](#) to watch the 5-minute video **8 Hidden Keys No One Has Told You About**—or you can find this video later from the "[Parents Corner](#)" link.

43 We become teachers of these lessons in building peace for children and families. Each of us within 24 hours tells at least one other person about [UpToParents.org](#).

You can watch it later from the "Parents Corner," but you can also take 6 minutes now to watch an interesting discussion on how we see opinions changing dramatically on the acceptability of parent conflict: [Cigarettes, Seatbelts, and Separations](#) (6:22 video).

## Our Pledge

We, Sarah and Jason, have each signed onto these Commitments (1) because we see them as important to Jenny and Robert and (2) because we have pledged to observe them from now on for their sake.

These Commitments are not for the purpose of taking each other to court or attacking each other should we slip in observing any of them. They are more important than that. They are our essential guides--ones we have chosen--to help us in protecting Jenny and Robert. If we slip in observing them, we will only work harder. We will love Jenny and Robert all the more. We will do better and better.

We will read, use, and build on these regularly--until we have made their messages second-nature. If necessary, we will review these Commitments with a counselor, mediator, or clergy person to help us protect Jenny and Robert.

Sign: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Jason

Sign: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Sarah

## Sample Mechanisms Used by Courts and Co-Parenting Educators in Referring Parents to [UpToParents.org](http://UpToParents.org)

The attached documents show simple mechanisms for referring parents to [UpToParents.org](http://UpToParents.org) in divorce cases and [ProudToParent.org](http://ProudToParent.org) in paternity cases. There are variations in the manner by which counties make such referrals. These four show merely the most common ones.

For an example of a program with nearly a 100% rate of pre-class website completion, we are indebted to Anne Schelle, National Coordinator and Trainer of TransParenting. Ms. Schelle and her home county (St. Joseph County, Indiana) have three simple components in place.

1. Immediately upon the filing of a divorce case, the parties receive a simple order and notice that if they have any minor children together, they must sign up in person at a court office for a required co-parenting class. The same order and notice advise that they will be required to complete [UpToParents.org](http://UpToParents.org) and copy and bring their completed work to their assigned class.<sup>1</sup> (The county requires an in-person registration so that a quick domestic violence screening can be completed and victims/survivors can be referred to classes with a safety rather than cooperation orientation.<sup>2</sup>)
2. When parents call the class to which they are referred (depending on whether there has been a history of domestic violence), they are reminded to do the required website work and copy and bring their work to their class. Parents' telephone numbers are taken to allow for the final component of the referral.
3. Approximately three days before the class, each parent receives a one-minute telephone call reminding them of the time and place of the class and the website requirement.

Courts and co-parenting educators with questions or comments on such referral practices are welcome to contact us.

Charlie and Barb Asher  
Freedom 22 Foundation  
6376 Dawson Lake Drive  
Indianapolis, Indiana 46220  
[info@UpToParents.org](mailto:info@UpToParents.org)  
August, 2013

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<sup>1</sup> Even this referral mechanism can be strengthened with notices in publications like a divorce pamphlet and website similar to [FamilyCourtWebsite.org](http://FamilyCourtWebsite.org).

<sup>2</sup> This domestic violence screening is not an essential part of referring people to [UpToParents.org](http://UpToParents.org), but we strongly endorse its adoption in order that victims/survivors of domestic violence are not sent to classes promoting cooperation, communication, and accommodation unsafe to them and their children.

**A. *SAMPLE DIVORCE CLASS EDUCATOR’S HANDOUT REFERRING PARENTS TO UpToParents.org***

***Special Notice to Parents Referred to a “Parenting as Partners” Class in Morguson County***

Here’s an important *head start* for your upcoming “Parenting as Partners” class.

Do the work on [www.UpToParents.org](http://www.UpToParents.org). You may choose either the English or Spanish version from the drop-down box on the homepage. Once you finish, print out your completed work (including the Commitments you chose and your Exercise responses) from the Conclusion Page and take it to your class.

This website work is required by the Court, *and* it will help you understand some of what will be discussed at your class.

The website also has a “*Parents Corner*” link you can use to reach interesting video and interactive articles that can help you.

If you don’t have Internet access, you can use any public library branch or the computer of a friend or family member. Get started soon on the website work, as it can take between 1-3 hours to complete.

*Remember to take your finished website work (Commitments and Exercise Responses) to your class.*

Thank you.

Judge Cheryl Montgomery  
Morguson Circuit Court

***B. SAMPLE CLASS EDUCATOR'S HANDOUT REFERRING  
NEVER-MARRIED PARENTS TO ProudToParent.org***

**To:** All parents in paternity cases in Morguson County

**From:** *ProudToParent* class presenters

**Re:** Welcome. And some work that will help you!

We look forward to having you in our two upcoming 2-hour workshops.

Here's an important *head start* to understand some of what will be discussed at your workshops. Do the work on [www.ProudToParent.org](http://www.ProudToParent.org). You may choose either the English or Spanish version from the drop-down box on the homepage.

Once you finish, print out your completed work (including the Commitments you chose and your Exercise responses) from the Conclusion Page and take that work to your class.

This website work is required by the Court, *and* it will help you understand some of what will be discussed at your class.

If you don't have Internet access, you can use any public library branch or the computer of a friend or family member. Get started soon, as it can take between 1-3 hours to complete.

*Remember to take your finished website work (Commitments and Exercise Responses) to your class.*

Thank you.

### ***C. GENERAL ORDER OR RULE FOR CHILD-FOCUSED WORK IN MARRIAGE DISSOLUTION CASES***

In order that parents in marital dissolution (divorce) cases have the best opportunity to protect themselves and their children, the Court orders as follows.

- (1) In any dissolution of marriage proceeding where the spouses have one or more minor children together, within twenty-one (21) days of the filing of a petition for dissolution the parents shall each complete the work on the [UpToParents.org](http://UpToParents.org). Both English and Spanish versions are available from that webpage.
- (2) Also within twenty-one (21) days of the filing of a petition of for dissolution, parents with one or more minor children shall file with the Court a copy of the “Certificate of Completion” available from a link on the Conclusion Page of the website once the website work is complete. The “Certificate of Completion” must be attached as an exhibit to a pleading entitled, “Certificate of Completion of [parent’s name] from UpToParents.org” and reading in substance, “Attached is a copy of the Certificate of Completion showing that on [date] [name of parent] completed the Commitments work on [UpToParents.org](http://UpToParents.org).” Blank forms of this pleading are available in [identify office].

*[Alternative (2) where parents are sent to a class and completion of the website work is confirmed there]:*

- (2) *Also within those twenty-one (21) days, parents shall contact the office of [insert] at [insert phone number, address, and email address] to make arrangements to attend the co-parenting class entitled [insert name]. Parents will attend the class assigned for them, which shall be no later than 60 days following the filing of the petition for dissolution. The office of [insert] may determine whether parents are referred to the same class or different classes. Parents shall bring copies of their Commitments and Exercise responses (available from links on the Conclusion page of [UpToParents.org](http://UpToParents.org) once a parent finishes) to their co-parenting class. Parents will receive credit for completion of the class only upon bringing that work to the class.*
- (3) If parents have any hearings:
  - (a) Before any hearing, they shall merge their chosen Commitments from their website work into a set of Agreed Commitments and read and bring those Agreed Commitments to all hearings. Parents can use the “Frequently Asked Questions” link of [UpToParents.org](http://UpToParents.org) to achieve this merging.
  - (b) If more than a year has passed since they did the website work, parents shall redo the work on [UpToParents.org](http://UpToParents.org), merge their newly chosen Commitments into a set of Agreed Commitments, and read and bring those Agreed Commitments to all hearings.
  - (c) If parents fail to cooperate to merge their Commitments, they shall each bring a copy of their separate Commitments to all hearings.
  - (d) Parents should be prepared to discuss their Commitments at any hearing.



**D. GENERAL ORDER/RULE FOR CHILD-FOCUSED WORK  
IN ALL PATERNITY CASES**

In order that parents in paternity cases have the best opportunity to protect themselves and their children, the Court orders as follows.

- (1) Within five (5) business days of the finding of paternity, the parents shall each complete the work on the [ProudToParent.org](http://ProudToParent.org) website and copy their completed work (both the chosen Commitments and the Exercise responses). Both English and Spanish versions are available from that page.
- (2) Also within five (5) business days of the finding of paternity, the parents shall file with the Court a copy of the “Certificate of Completion” available from a link on the Conclusion Page of [ProudToParent.org](http://ProudToParent.org). The “Certificate of Completion” must be attached as an exhibit to a pleading entitled, “Certificate of Completion of [parent’s name] from ProudToParent.org” and reading in substance, “Attached is a copy of the Certificate of Completion showing that on [date] [name of parent] completed the Commitments work on [ProudToParent.org](http://ProudToParent.org).” Blank forms of this pleading are available in [identify office].

*[Alternative (2)—where parents are sent to a class and completion of the website work is confirmed there]:*

- (2) *Also within five (5) business days of the finding of paternity, parents shall contact the office of [insert] at [insert phone number, address, and email address] to make arrangements to attend the co-parenting class entitled [insert name]. Parents will attend the class assigned for them, which shall be no later than 60 days following the finding of paternity. The office of [insert] may determine whether parents are referred to the same class or different classes. Parents shall bring copies of their Commitments and Exercise responses (available from links on the Conclusion page of [ProudToParent.org](http://ProudToParent.org) once a parent finishes) to their co-parenting class. Parents will receive credit for completion of the class only if they bring that work to the class.*
- (3) If parents have any hearings:
  - (a) Before any hearing, they shall merge their chosen Commitments from their website work into a set of Agreed Commitments and read and bring those Agreed Commitments to all hearings. Parents can use the “Frequently Asked Questions” link of [ProudToParent.org](http://ProudToParent.org) to achieve this merging.
  - (b) If more than a year has passed since they did the website work, parents shall redo the work on [ProudToParent.org](http://ProudToParent.org), merge their newly chosen Commitments into a set of Agreed Commitments, and read and bring those Agreed Commitments to all hearings.
  - (c) If parents fail to cooperate to merge their Commitments, they shall each bring a copy of their separate Commitments to all hearings.
  - (d) Parents should be prepared to discuss their Commitments at any hearing.

*Attorney, Parent, and Voice for UpToParents.org*

One of the most helpful resources during my divorce process was the free UpToParents website. I hope more courts will adopt a policy to refer all divorcing parents to the website.

Although I am a litigation attorney in a large national law firm, I do not practice family law and had never heard of UpToParents. My county required divorcing parents to attend a live class on co-parenting after divorce, and the sign-up materials recommended that we prepare for the class by first completing UpToParents. The website work moved me greatly and reinforced the importance of a child-centered, conflict-free divorce.

The website includes more concrete suggestions about co-parenting after divorce than can be part of any half-day class, but, just as important, does so in a way that makes parents want to make better choices for their children's sake. It appeals directly to the deep wish of most parents to do well for their children.

UpToParents invites parents to make commitments to their children and draws parents in by personalizing the work with their children's names. I believe nearly all parents will be moved to make better choices by selecting the commitments they will make to their children. Here is a sample of the commitments I made to my children:

- We'll remember this is Robert's one and only childhood.
- We know that Robert's one and only childhood is forming many of the gifts and problems he will carry into adulthood.
- We remember that we have the same child—and that we'll win together if we give Robert a good childhood, or we'll lost together if conflict between us poisons his childhood.
- To Robert, we will always be family; when he thinks of his family, he will think of us.

Rather than seeking to replace the mandated classes, UpToParents supports them by its promotion of the child focus that helps parents get the most out of their classes. And, because UpToParents is available without cost, parents' and courts' finances are preserved for live classes.

My wish for my own county as well as other counties is that the tools on UpToParents be required and not merely recommended. Very few of the parents in the class I attended had done the website work, and several were openly bored and put out at having to attend the class. I'm confident their attitudes would have been different had they been required to complete UpToParents.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my experience and learn more about UpToParents. I am honored to volunteer my voice for UpToParents and hope that more families will be referred to it. I welcome any inquiries judges and other professionals may have.

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