

## FamilyCourtWebsite.org Transcripts of Judge Videos and PSAs

The following transcripts of the judge videos and PSAs on FamilyCourtWebsite.org may help jurisdictions consider content for their websites.

As with everything on presented on FamilyCourtWebsite.org, these are suggestions only. Every jurisdiction should exercise its own judgment about the topics and language that will best suit its purposes in serving the public.

For more assistance, feel free to contact [Info@Freedom22.org](mailto:Info@Freedom22.org).

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## 1. Introductory Welcome

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It's my pleasure to welcome you to FamilyCourtWebsite.org, a part of our county's firm commitment to make family cases about families.

Morguson County has launched a new initiative for families who find themselves with cases in our courts. As judges responsible for these cases, we're committed to making them about ensuring safety, reducing conflict, building cooperation, and protecting children. [Supers, Donnie?]

We invite not just parents, but grandparents, other extended family and friends, and the entire community to understand that these cases call for problem-solving in families, not more conflict.

By spending just a few minutes on this website, you will see the genuinely fresh approach we take to family cases. You can watch videos on such things as:

- Guidance and resources for parents in divorce, paternity, and other cases,
- Our firm stand against abuse and violence in families,
- Local attorneys' commitment to cooperation for the sake of families,
- Special resources for parents without attorneys.

In most family cases, parents win together—or lose together. If they build safety and cooperation and give their children a good place to live their one and only childhood, then everyone wins. If they make childhood a painful and dangerous place by remaining in conflict, then everyone loses.

We're proud and excited to be part of a process making family cases about winning for everyone, especially Morguson County's children.

## 2. Divorce/Dissolution Cases

Judge Stephenson: Hello, I'm Judge Elizabeth Stephenson of the Morguson Circuit Court.

Judge Jacobi: And I'm Judge Kenneth Jacobi of the Morguson Superior Court. We're here with some important messages to parents in divorce cases.

Our courts carry many responsibilities, none of them greater than ensuring that divorces are handled in ways that protect children and stop conflict. That's why it's absolutely necessary for you to know what the courts will require of you.

Judge Stephenson: People think of judges as having a great deal of power—and in some cases that's true. In cases of violence or alcohol or substance abuse, for example, parents may need to call on courts for protection, and we will act as decisively as possible there. We expect safety in families—and will enforce safety where necessary.

If there has been violence or abuse against you or any child in your family, or if there is any physical, emotional, or other danger to you or a child now, we will take that seriously. Please get counseling from a professional trained in family abuse for yourself and any child who's experienced or seen abuse. You can use the 24-hour Hotline of Morguson County Mental Health Services—or even call 911—at any time.

We will certainly expect anyone who's committed abuse to respect everyone's right to safety and to live by any order we enter for the protection of the family.

But in most cases where families go through the shock and pain of divorce, parents must protect themselves—and especially their children by ending their conflict.

Judge Jacobi: Judges and magistrates can't stop the damage that comes from parents' conflict or their negative talk about each other—talk that children hear as negative talk about them.

Judge Stephenson: Too many of our children have been badly hurt by parent conflict. If your children matter to you, and we know they do, you should know what the research shows—and what judges sadly see every day: That parent conflict is perhaps the most dangerous poison that can be put into children's lives, especially during children's confusion and fear over their parents' separation.

If you divorce, your children will not have what other children have: the protection of an intact family and a happy marriage between their parents. It will be up to you to make up for what they are losing. Children with the best chance at happiness and success have parents who relate with cooperation and courtesy.

Judge Jacobi: Perhaps nothing will ever be as important in the lives of your children as the peace and cooperation you build and use now.

The judges and magistrates of Morguson County have created a website to give you a head start on understanding what we expect of you and hope for you and your family. The website is [FamilyCourtWebsite.org](http://FamilyCourtWebsite.org), and you will find there a list of some legal duties of cooperation that you must follow—as well as additional problem-solving tools we hope you’ll consider using. On the website you can even watch a copy of this video.

Judge Stephenson: [Holding up a pamphlet.] We have also prepared a pamphlet that’s available from the clerk’s office, attorney offices, or by download from the [FamilyCourtWebsite](http://FamilyCourtWebsite.org).

Please read it carefully. Keep a copy and refer to it often. It covers such things as:

- children’s right to the best possible safe relationships they can have with both parents,
- the availability of divorce classes, counseling, and mediation that can help you,
- the requirement that you complete the work on the [UpToParents.org](http://UpToParents.org) website and attend a co-parenting class for divorcing parents,
- our policy of not allowing destructive use of court, and
- even our hope that you’ll relate as respectfully as possible, not just to protect your children, but to do no damage to any future wish you may have to save your marriage.

Judge Jacobi: Judge Stephenson has mentioned our policy of not allowing destructive use of court. We take this seriously. Under our new rules and policies, for example, except in cases of emergencies or danger, we require a conversation between the attorneys or parents to sincerely try to solve the problem before any motions are filed. The specifics of this requirement are available on the [FamilyCourtWebsite](http://FamilyCourtWebsite.org).

Judge Stephenson: If you haven’t already done so, be sure to do the work on the free [UpToParents](http://UpToParents.org) website. It can be a great help to you. Read and use the Commitments that you select from that website.

Our new rules even require that if you go to court, you bring a copy of your Agreed Commitments and Exercise Responses from that website.

If you go to court, you’ll also be required to bring a completed Parenting Plan Worksheet. The form for that worksheet is available on [FamilyCourtWebsite.org](http://FamilyCourtWebsite.org).

Judge Jacobi: The losses and challenges of divorce are huge. All of us are called on to act cooperatively—and, in the case of parents, even heroically. Some good news is that when you build peace and cooperation for your children, even you will be better off—legally, financially, and as a parent.

Judge Stephenson: We trust you will join us in making Morguson County a leader in protecting children, including the children whose lives have been impacted by divorce. And remember that when parents act cooperatively to protect their children, they also serve their own interests best. They not only save their children—they can make their own decisions, save money, and concentrate on building a better future instead of being stuck in a painful past.

Judge Jacobi: Judge Stephenson and I thank you for your time and attention— and for the devotion to your children so absolutely vital to them today.

### 3. Paternity Cases

Judge Jacobi: Hello, I'm Judge Kenneth Jacobi of the Morguson Circuit Court.

Judge Stephenson: And I'm Judge Elizabeth Stephenson of the Morguson Superior Court.

We're here with some important messages to parents in paternity cases.

Judge Jacobi: All of us know what's meant by the word parenting—loving, admiring, enjoying, protecting, and encouraging our children. By co-parenting, we mean the all-important teamwork between a mom and dad—whether or not they are married or living together. This teamwork is so important that you will hear us refer to you as co-parents.

Judge Stephenson: Paternity cases include all kinds of situations.

In some cases, the parents live together happily—with the child or children they have together. In other cases, the parents no longer have a personal relationship with each other—except that they are responsible to give their child a good and safe childhood.

But whatever your circumstances, you need to know some things we expect of you. To understand these expectations better, please do two things: visit our website at [FamilyCourtWebsite.org](http://FamilyCourtWebsite.org) and read a copy of our pamphlet, *Paternity Cases in Morguson County*.

You can pick up a copy of the pamphlet from the clerk's office or from attorney offices—or you can download it from [FamilyCourtWebsite.org](http://FamilyCourtWebsite.org).

Judge Jacobi: The expectations we lay out in the website can be summarized under four headings.

First, we expect there to be safety in all families, and we will act quickly and decisively to ensure safety. We also expect court orders to be observed without exception.

We certainly hope that there's been no violence or abuse between you or in the treatment of any child. But if so, or if there is any physical, emotional, or other danger to you or a child, we will take that seriously. Please get counseling from a professional trained in family abuse for yourself and any child who's experienced or seen abuse. You can use the 24-hour Hotline of Morguson County Mental Health Services—or even call 911—at any time.

We will certainly expect anyone who's committed abuse to respect everyone's right to safety and to live by any order we enter for the protection of the family.

Judge Stephenson: Our second expectation is that parents have safe cooperation between them, if that is reasonably possible. All children have a right to whatever safe relationship they can have with each parent AND each parent's support of the child's safe relationship with their other parent.

In some cases, it isn't safe for parents to try to have a cooperative relationship. Those parents may need to keep their interaction and conversation with each to a minimum as they raise their children from their separate homes. If this describes your circumstances, use the professional resources, including from Morguson County Mental Health Services, to achieve the safety you and your children need.

But if it's safe to do so, cooperation between co-parents can be the best plan. Work things out. Remember that parents have a common goal: to give their children a good childhood so they can have good lives. A great deal of your children's happiness and success will be the result of the relationship you have with your co-parent.

Judge Jacobi: Our third expectation is quite specific. Within 30 days of the finding of paternity in your case, you must complete the work on the UpToParents.org website and register for the Proud to Parent class by the link on FamilyCourtWebsite.org or but calling 574-555-2882.

By rule, you must complete the work on UpToParents.org and take your printed Commitments and Exercise Responses from that website work to your Proud to Parent class. You must complete that work and your class within 120 days of the finding of paternity in your case.

Judge Stephenson: Our fourth and final expectation has to do with how you solve issues that come up in raising children. Remember that almost all these issues are personal ones for parents to solve, not legal ones for courts to solve. Unless yours is a dangerous situation that requires court supervision, you as parents are the best persons to decide things like:

- a child's schedule,
- guiding and protecting that child, and
- dealing with the thousands of challenges of raising someone who'd rather play than do homework.

We do not allow destructive use of court. We won't allow anyone to senselessly attack you though the legal system and we won't allow you to do so to others.

Remember that while court is available to assure safety in families, children can't really be raised by courts, let alone by expensive legal battles that often leave parents feeling worse about each other.

Judge Stephenson: We trust you will join us in making Morguson County a leader in protecting children. And remember that when parents act cooperatively to protect their children, they also serve their own interests best. They not only save their children—they can make their own decisions, save money, and concentrate on building a better future for their children and themselves.

Judge Jacobi: Judge Jacobi and I thank you for your time and attention—and for the devotion to your children.

#### 4. Juvenile Delinquency

Hello, I'm Judge Kenneth Jacobi.

If you are the parent or guardian of a child in a delinquency case, please consider these three thoughts.

First, we want to treat all children, parents, and guardians fairly. If your child denies a charge, acquaint yourself with the legal protections we have in place, including the right to counsel.

Second, if a child has committed a delinquent act, our goal is to help, not punish, this child. We are as interested in what you, your child, the courts, and the community's resources can do to help your child as we are in your child's delinquent act.

Third, we want you to be as positive a force as possible in your child's life, including in these proceedings. We welcome your ideas about what is best for your child. And we hope you'll be open to suggestions from the courts, caseworkers, and others as all of us team up to help your child.

Let's work together to make all children's futures as excellent and well-supported as possible.

Thank you.

## 5. Violence or Abuse

Hello, I'm Judge Elizabeth Stephenson of the Morguson Superior Court.

Safety in families is of the highest concern to all judges in Morguson County.

If you have suffered any violence or emotional or verbal abuse—or if any child in your family has—I have four thoughts for your serious consideration.

First, be sure that your immediate circumstances are safe. Remember that violence in families is often followed by periods of regret and promises that it will not be repeated, but those promises are often broken. Our community has a variety of resources to help. If you believe that violence or abuse could occur (or reoccur) in your family, you should contact any of the following:

- A local attorney.
- The prosecutor's office
- The YWCA Women's Shelter, or
- The Morguson Mental Health Center or even 911.

Don't be afraid to ask for help from these experienced persons.

Second, use the courts if necessary. While judges strongly recommend cooperation between parents when that's a safe option, safety must be assured first. A local attorney, the prosecutor's office, the YWCA, and the Morguson Mental Health Center can all advise you on the protection orders that can help.

Third, get counseling—for yourself AND any child who has suffered or seen violence or abuse. Please do so as soon as possible. When homes and personal relationships are touched by violence or abuse, it's simply too confusing and painful an experience for survivors to sort through on their own. Things stand the best chance of improving when families use competent professionals.

Fourth, and finally, remember the impact on your children. Children are badly hurt just by knowing that violence has occurred. They will need counseling—and they will need to know you're doing everything possible to make their world and yours safe.

Please call for help today. Thank you.

## 6. Our Cooperative Family Law Rule

The judges of Morguson County are committed to making sure that all family cases are about families—and the best interests of all family members.

Our new Rule for Cooperation in Family Cases helps to lay out our expectations for everyone involved in any family case, including any divorce, paternity, or juvenile delinquency case.

You should carefully read that new Rule—which you can find on [FamilyCourtWebsite.org](http://FamilyCourtWebsite.org). It spells out many of the things now required of parents in these cases, including their:

- completion of some excellent free website work,
- attendance at a short class on co-parenting children between separate homes,
- and safe and respectful interaction.

Read this rule carefully to know what the Courts expect of you—and to be part of a new day for Morguson County children and families.

## 7. ProudToParent Class for Nonviolent Divorce and Paternity Cases

This is Judge Elizabeth Stephenson of the Morguson Superior Court.

I wish to welcome you to the ProudToParent Class, an opportunity for parents in divorce and paternity cases to hear and discuss important messages on ways to succeed in the sometimes difficult task of raising children after parents separate.

While this class is required for all parents in nonviolent and non-abusive divorce and paternity cases (and must be completed within the early time limits of our court rule), our hope is that you will look on the class as a chance to help both your children and yourself. By considering the messages in this class, you'll have:

1. The chance to choose a simpler and less expensive path through your case,
2. The chance to put your energies and resources into creating a better future instead of arguing the past,
3. The chance to make your own decisions instead of giving decision-making to outsiders, and
4. The chance to make your life better by focusing with your co-parent on a common goal of making your children's lives as good as possible.

If there has been violence or abuse in your relationship with your co-parent (or against any child), you should substitute the Children's Garden Class. You will see a link for this on FamilyCourtWebsite.org.

Be sure to use whatever other good resources you think can help you. This certainly can include the many helpful links on [FamilyCourtWebsite.org](http://FamilyCourtWebsite.org) and [UpToParents.org](http://UpToParents.org), and it can also include good counseling, a good book on co-parenting, and even spending time with acquaintances of yours who co-parent well after separation.

You should use these steps to complete this requirement.

1. Do an excellent job on [UpToParents.org](http://UpToParents.org) as soon as possible and print out your Certificate of Completion, chosen Commitments, and Exercise responses. You can refer to these often to help in your co-parenting.
2. Use the link on FamilyCourtWebsite.org or call 574-555-2822 to schedule your ProudToParent class. In dissolution or divorce cases, the class should be completed within 120 days of the filing for dissolution; in paternity cases, the class should be completed within 120 days of the court's finding of paternity.
3. Take your completed work from [UpToParents.org](http://UpToParents.org) (including your Certificate of Completion, chosen Commitments, and Exercise responses) to your class. You'll need these with you to enter and get credit for completing the class.

The judges and magistrates of Morguson County wish you the best in creating the parenting partnership that your children will need in the years ahead—and that will make your life as good as possible as well.

## 8. Children's Garden Class for Parents in Cases with Issues of Violence or Abuse

I'm Judge Kenneth Jacobi of the Morguson Circuit Court. I want to take a few minutes to welcome you to our county's class for co-parents who are survivors of domestic violence or abuse—or whose children have been subject to domestic violence or abuse.

All Morguson County's judges want to be of help to you. The needs here are very real and sometimes complicated.

We are aware that some of the principles that work for persons involved in other separations—ones where there is no history or threat of violence—do not apply in families with violence. Your circumstances may simply not be ones where you can safely or constructively use strategies that work for other families—strategies like lots of communication, cooperation, and mutual accommodation.

We hope that you will be open to the many messages in this class. There will be important lessons on topics like:

1. Resources you should know about for your immediate protection,
2. Longer-term help like counseling, books and video instruction, and support groups, and
3. Help your children may need.

We strongly encourage you to use this class along with counseling for your particular circumstances. The effects of domestic violence are almost always too confusing for survivors to sort them out for themselves and their children. Please reach out for the best help—and keep reaching out.

Be sure to speak to your class instructors about any questions you have and any help you feel you need. You can pose questions during your class or in conversations or emails between and even after the last of your class sessions.

Finally, be aware that the courts of Morguson County strive to be fully available to protect families from violence and the threat of violence. Work with anyone and everyone you feel may be able to help you, including your class instructors, your counselors, your attorney, and the police. Thank you.

## 9. Prolonged Conflict and Our Level II Class

This is Judge Kenneth Jacobi of the Morguson Circuit Court.

I want to take a few minutes to introduce you to our county's Level II co-parenting class. This class is designed for parents with lengthy conflict but without violence or active abuse.

We commonly require this class for parents who are in court more than once.

It's part of our effort to show parents who are struggling with their co-parenting how they can save money, live in the security of making their own decisions, move to a better future, and help everyone in their family by one thing.

And that one thing is building the good relationship between separated parents that will benefit both their children and themselves.

Unfortunately, there are many unhelpful messages actually encouraging separated and divorced parents to remain in conflict. These messages may come from television, misinformed family and friends, and sometimes even the legal system. They may be fed further by parents' own hurt and preoccupation with past failings.

But wherever these messages come from, they hurt children and parents alike.

In this class, you will have an opportunity to pick a different path—a better path. It's one where you can see all the ways that you and your children will be better off when you make a better decision. It's a decision to:

1. Notice and reduce children's losses rather than stay focused on one's own hurt and claims of rights.
2. Build the future rather than argue the past.
3. Learn to relate as well as possible together rather than blame each other.

The decision to have a bad breakup is often not a logical decision. Certainly many smart people, ones who are capable in many other areas of their lives, that make exactly that decision. But it's an illogical one. It's one that puts:

1. Wasting money and energy above preserving money and energy,
2. Arguing about the past over building the future, and
3. Hurting children and oneself over helping children and oneself.

I hope you'll notice in this class the many ways in which even by making better choices yourself—regardless of what your co-parent decides to do—you can be the hero your children need. Even one restrained and responsible parent can give children that all-important gift of a

safe sanctuary where they are free to love and miss both parents and to go about the many tasks of growing up happy and healthy.

Consider using this class along with other help. That may include counseling, many of the links on [FamilyCourtWebsite.org](http://FamilyCourtWebsite.org) and [UpToParents.org](http://UpToParents.org), and even time with people who have achieved a good co-parenting partnership after their separations.

If you are sent to this class, all the Morguson County judges hope you will take advantage of it as an opportunity to build a better future—for yourself as well as for children who have no choice but to live in the world you create for them.

## 10. Parenting Plan Worksheets (PPW)

Hello, I'm Judge Elizabeth Stephenson of the Morguson Superior Court.

All the family judges in Morguson County make a priority of helping parents build the highest level of cooperation they can for the sake of their children.

This cooperation is essential in the lives of ALL children, but ESPECIALLY in cases like divorce, paternity, or delinquency.

On FamilyCourtWebsite.org, you will find a link to a Parenting Plan Worksheet. This is a form calling for a great deal of thought by parents on how they will be working together for the sake of their children.

Parents, if you are separated or divorced or never married to each other, you will hear us refer to you as "co-parents," not as "parties" or "litigants" in a lawsuit. The term "co-parents" signals the common goal you have of giving your children a good and safe childhood.

The Parenting Plan Worksheet is a sort of checklist of tasks you should consider as you think about the challenges of raising children between separate homes. Give this PPW your closest attention.

If there is safety and basic cooperation between you and your co-parent, you may choose to fill it out together. Otherwise, fill it out alone.

I thank you for everything you do to give your children the best start possible to their lives.

## 11. Friends, Family, and Others

Sadly, every day we see cases where families—and especially children—are horribly damaged because friends, grandparents, and other onlookers thought it was their job to unnecessarily run down one parent or the other—or to keep unnecessary conflict going.

These onlookers probably aren't intentionally hurting the children, but that's exactly what they're doing.

If there has been violence or abuse in this family, you can consider asking to speak with the counselors working with the survivors. You may receive useful suggestions about what to do to help in those difficult circumstances.

But in most cases, what may be called for is restraint, courtesy, and a focus on children's need for peace in their world. Some good news is that every day we also see families who are helped by friends, grandparents, and other extended family who lead the way in being respectful and courteous.

Some day not long from now, all of society will see that it's wrong to inject useless parent and family conflict into children's lives.

Because you care about these children, stop to consider how you can be a voice for respect, cooperation, and courtesy.

You can be the healing power that helps a family most. There's a lot you can do. With one of the parents' permission, you can look over and discuss their chosen Commitments and other work on the UpToParents.org website. Pick up a copy of the Morguson County Judges' pamphlet for parents in divorce or paternity cases. Consider becoming a voice for those values.

A fragile and deserving child may be much better off for your being a voice for peace, respect, and goodwill.

## 12. Family Attorneys' Pledge of Cooperation

Hi, I'm Judge Elizabeth Stephenson of the Morguson Superior Court.

Our county is privileged to have several attorneys who recognize that good outcomes in family cases like divorce and paternity cases usually require cooperation, not competition, between parents.

I'm happy to be able to invite you to read the Morguson County Family Attorneys' Pledge of Cooperation. It's a document that was carefully drafted, studied, and now signed by attorneys committed to helping families work.

I think you can learn a lot about what will help your family by reading the work of these dedicated attorneys.

Thank you.

### 13. Judge Public Service Announcements

#### PSA I.

Judge 1: Morguson County faces a challenge it cannot ignore—protecting children when families come apart.

Judge 2: Too many parents have assumed that separation and divorce are a time to fight. They're not. They're a time for parents to rise above their hurt and give their children the peace they desperately need.

Judge 1: Visit [FamilyCourtWebsite.org](http://FamilyCourtWebsite.org) to see how giving your children peace is also your best light out of your own hurt.

#### PSA II.

Judge 1: In Morguson County, over half our children grow up with parents who are divorced or living apart. These children already know the sadness of being separated from one parent each time they're reunited with the other. Isn't that enough?

Judge 2: Don't these children deserve at least the protection of respectful interaction between their parents? If you're divorced or separated, visit [FamilyCourtWebsite.org](http://FamilyCourtWebsite.org) to see how you can—and must—build peace to save your children.

#### PSA III.

Judge 1: At no time has Morguson County seen more danger in the lives of its children. Never have our children shown such out-of-control rates of depression, dropping out, drug and alcohol use, and running away.

Judge 2: The cases we see show that nothing pushes children to failure as fast as conflict between parents. If you're a separated or divorced parent, visit [FamilyCourtWebsite.org](http://FamilyCourtWebsite.org) today to see how you can save someone's one and only childhood.

#### PSA IV.

Judge 1: As judges, we're sometimes asked why rates of children's incarceration, dropping out, pregnancy, drug and alcohol use, and running away are all higher than ever. The single biggest factor is one thing: conflict between parents.

Judge 2: Parents, if you're separated or divorced and in conflict with each other, you're on the perfect path to your children's destruction. Rediscover the hero in you who would do anything to protect your children: Visit [FamilyCourtWebsite.org](http://FamilyCourtWebsite.org) to see how you can—and must—save your children.

## PSA V.

Judge 1: Why are some children able to concentrate in school, pursue their goals, and succeed—while others fall helplessly behind? Often the simple answer is that children who succeed aren't held back by the devastation of parent conflict.

Judge 2: Our County must do better. If you're a separated or divorced parent, visit [FamilyCourtWebsite.org](http://FamilyCourtWebsite.org) to see how you alone can protect your children.

## PSA VI.

Judge 1: The time must come when it is unacceptable to dump parent conflict into children's lives. As judges, we are committed to turning around the idea that it's acceptable to injure children by parent fighting.

Judge 2: Whether you're a separated or divorced parent—or a friend or family member to such a parent—go to [FamilyCourtWebsite.org](http://FamilyCourtWebsite.org). Join us in saving our children.

## PSA VII.

Judge 1: The judges and family bar leaders of Morguson County have commenced a new campaign to help children whose parents live apart. We are committed to a new day of maximum safety and cooperation for these children.

Judge 2: Visit [FamilyCourtWebsite.org](http://FamilyCourtWebsite.org) to see how you may be able to play an important role in building peace for these deserving children—a peace their entire family can benefit from.

## PSA VIII

Judge 1: Morguson County is committed to being a national model for the safe and cooperative way judges and attorneys handle divorces, paternity cases, and other family matters.

Judge 2: Visit [FamilyCourtWebsite.org](http://FamilyCourtWebsite.org) to see how a family case you're involved in might be handled in the best ways possible—for children and for their entire family.

Judge 1: See how your awareness can be part of a national model for doing better for fragile children.