

FCW Judges on Paternity Script

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.

We bring you these messages for one reason: the children of Morguson County—your children and ours—face more serious risks and challenges than ever before. Compared to just 20 years ago, our children are much more likely to experiment with dangerous drugs and alcohol, to drop out of school, to run away, or even to end up incarcerated. Yes, our children are locked up—in our Juvenile Detention Facility, in Boys and Girls School, and in various mental health and delinquency centers—at more than 4 times the rate of 20 years ago.

More than anything else, the quality of your parenting and your co-parenting will say if your children will succeed.

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 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.

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, we will take that seriously. Please get counseling for yourself and any child who's seen or suffered abuse.

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. 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.

But if it's safe to do so, cooperation between co-parents is 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: Recall also that a child's heart is a breakable thing. As judges, we see this every day in the cases of so many badly hurt children. Far too many of our children have lost their way because we asked the impossible of them—to feel good about themselves while growing up in the middle of parent conflict.

Research shows that nothing is as dangerous to children as conflict between their parents—and nothing is as great a comfort to them as cooperation between them.

For more information on having the best possible relationship with your co-parent, visit FamilyCourtWebsite.org

Judge Stephenson: Our third expectation is quite specific. Within 30 days of the finding of paternity in your case, you must complete the work on the Proud To Paernt (dot) org website and register for the Proud To Parent class. Please see our pamphlet and website about the details of completing that website work and registering for that class.

On the "Parents Corner" link of ProudToParent, you can even listen to excellent audio articles on succeeding as co-parents.

Judge Jacobi: Our fourth and final expectation has to do with how you solve issues that come up as children are raised. Remember that almost all issues that arise in raising children 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: Whenever it would be safe, children will want need respectful and cooperation between their parents. Our court rules even require that, if it is safe to do so, you (or, if you're using attorneys, then your attorneys) must speak to sincerely try to solve any problem before it is brought to court.

Again, FamilyCourtWebsite can tell you more about this and our other expectations of respectful interaction.

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