

Early Neutral Evaluations “ENE”

Dakota County District Court

An efficient, compassionate, and effective way to work through the dissolution and custody process.

What is Early Neutral Evaluation or ENE?

This program connects litigants with judges and neutral evaluators early in the court process to provide the opportunity to resolve issues surrounding their dissolution and/or custody matters. Parties can choose to participate in a Financial ENE (“FENE”) to resolve their financial disputes, a custody and parenting time (Social ENE or “SENE”) to resolve their disputes regarding their children, or both.

What are the benefits of ENE?

- Statistics show that parties who participate in ENE have many benefits:
- Focus is kept on the children if children are involved.
- Working through issues they are more satisfied with the final decision.
- Parties will spend less time in court.
- Parties spend less money on their dissolution.
- Dramatically reduces the amount of time to complete the dissolution.

How does the process work?

When papers are filed with the court, the parties (or their attorneys) will receive a notice to attend an Initial Case Management Conference (ICMC) where the process of ENE will be discussed to see if the parties wish to proceed. This conference will be set about 2-3 weeks from the case being opened with the court.

What happens at the ICMC?

The parties will hear options about different ways their case can proceed, either through the traditional litigation and trials or through ENE. If the parties choose to use the ENE process, they will select neutrals to help them resolve the issues in their case. If the parties choose to litigate the case will be set on for a pretrial, and additional parenting classes (if the case involves children) and mediation may be required.

What is the cost?

At the time of the first Conference (ICMC) the cost will be determined based upon the party's income (if a party does not have an attorney) or the rate charged by the party's attorney if the party is represented.

Do I need an attorney?

You are not required to have an attorney for the ENE process. As with any legal situation you may want to consult with an attorney for legal advice.

Who are the Neutrals?

For cases involving custody or parenting matters, the parties may choose from a list of neutrals who are either a male-female team or a single evaluator. The neutrals are experienced in family court. For cases involving financial issues, the neutrals are experienced family law attorneys or accountants. The neutrals will evaluate the case and encourage parties to find common ground.

Dakota County's List of Evaluators can be found at: [Minnesota Judicial Branch - Home | Minnesota Judicial Branch](http://www.mncourts.gov/Help-Topics/ENE-ECM.aspx#tab03County) (<http://www.mncourts.gov/Help-Topics/ENE-ECM.aspx#tab03County>)

Please note the court staff is limited to helping with procedures and cannot give you legal advice.

Resource

Judicial Branch's website: [Minnesota Judicial Branch - Home | Minnesota Judicial Branch](http://www.mncourts.gov/Help-Topics/ENE-ECM.aspx#tab03County)