Evaluating your Co-Parenting Program.

 We have resources to help you evaluate your program and show your colleagues and stakeholders how effective and important your work is. Best of all, you get to pick your own level of evaluation, depending on how much you want to get out of it:

 1. No evaluation. You always have the choice to not evaluate your programs. If you do not evaluate, you may still depend upon our state Impact Reports, produced with the help of other Family Living Educators, to talk about the effectiveness of programs like your’s.

 2. Report your numbers reached. Every year, we will summarize the total number of co-parenting programs delivered across the state, and the overall number of parents and children affected by those programs. You can easily contribute your numbers to our totals.

 3. Use our end-of-session questionnaire. It is short (2 sides of one sheet of paper) and easy to complete, but carefully designed to deliver useful and convincing information on your program’s effectiveness, including some items in which the participants answer in their own words, providing first-person claims about the effectiveness of your teaching. Included with this evaluation are standard materials for sharing your results (a brief end-of-year report and press release, in which you can insert your own name, numbers, and quotes from participants.) Your results will also contribute to a statewide impact report.

 4. Conduct a follow-up survey. To see if participants have really used the skills we taught them, we wait a month or two and then use a questionnaire survey. As with the end-of-session questionnaire, this evaluation includes its own follow-through materials (press release, local report), and contributes to our statewide impact report. You do not have to conduct a follow-up survey with each class you teach. Even if you collect end-of-session evaluation data on every co-parenting group you teach, you do not have to collect follow-up data on all of them. Doing this every other month, or twice per year, could be enough. These follow-up data make your end-of-session results much more believable.

 5. Conduct an experimental field trial. This is our most rigorous evaluation, and produces results that can really establish the public value of your program (in lowered court costs and improved child support payments). This evaluation compares parents taking your program with those who don’t; one easy comparison group is all the parents who divorced in your county the year before you began offering co-parenting workshops. The outcome we measure is the rate of re-litigation (lawsuits about child custody, child support, or spousal support) in the first year or two following the divorce, using public records to collect the data. If our workshops are effective, then co-parents should be communicating better and avoiding the need for lawsuits. Some earlier studies have found that programs like ours cut the re-litigation rate in half. That’s right: half as many lawsuits. An impact like that can really get the attention of judges, county administrators, and newspaper editors. We have some standard procedures for this evaluation and can help you do it.