

Social Early Neutral Evaluation (SENE)

ENE is an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) process during which neutral evaluators assess the strengths and weaknesses of a case and provide feedback as to likely outcomes if the case goes to trial. SENE evaluators are experienced professionals with years of experience dealing with family law issues – evaluators may be attorneys, therapists, social workers, and/or mediators. An SENE addresses separate parenting issues including, custody labels and parenting time schedules. Typically, an SENE is conducted by a male-female team (preferably one attorney and one mental health professional) – although some counties allow an option to use only one evaluator. After the assessment is presented, the parties may choose to continue the SENE session working with the evaluators in order to further customize a settlement.

Participation in the process is voluntary. Evaluators are not decision makers and their evaluations are not provided to the judge. As the name suggests, the process is most effective early in the legal process before adversarial positions are deeply rooted. Finally, an SENE is not the same as mediation – the primary difference being that mediation does not include an assessment of likely court outcomes.

What to Expect...

First and foremost, expect that you will be talking for yourself, even if your attorney is with you – the evaluators want to hear from you.

1. Petitioner will have 20-30 minutes to present important details (*See below for guidelines*)
2. Respondent will have 20-30 minutes to present important details (*See below for guidelines*)
3. Petitioner will have 10-15 minutes to add information or respond to Respondent comments
4. Respondent will have 10-15 minutes to add information or respond to Petitioner comments
5. Evaluators ask questions
6. Evaluators consult and develop assessment (15-30 min.)
7. Evaluators present assessment and provide rationale and answer questions
8. Clients confer with attorneys
9. Facilitation/Negotiation
10. As possible, signing of settlement

How to prepare for your SENE presentation of important details...

1. Bring ONE photo of your child(ren) so we can see who we are all working for.
2. Relationship history: how you met, how long together, etc. (keep it short)
3. Who are your children?
 - a. Name, age, grade, personality
 - b. Interests: sports, activities, etc.
 - c. Your involvement with the kids
 - d. Your child(ren)'s adjustment to the separation/divorce
 - e. Special needs (if any): medical and/or academic
4. Safety and/or other concerns: chemical use/dependency, relocation, etc.
 - a. Frame in terms of child needs/best interests
 - b. Maintain a future focus
5. Outline your ***specific*** preferred outcomes: custody, schedule, holidays, transportation, education, etc. ***Be prepared to discuss alternatives.***