

NOTICE TO THE PROFESSION AND PUBLIC

GRANDE PRAIRIE PILOT PROJECT: FAMILY LAW PRE-COURT SYSTEM ENGAGEMENT

Effective October 21, 2024, the Court will initiate a pilot project in the Judicial Centre of Grande Prairie, to support the work of the Reforming the Family Justice System (RFJS) initiative and the Grande Prairie community. The goal is to reduce the risk of toxic stress experienced by families, particularly children, which is increased by adversarial legal processes. Family litigants will be expected and empowered to seek the skills and supports to address the social, relationship, parenting, financial and health needs that arise during family restructuring.

Effective October 21, 2024, before appearing before the Court of King's Bench in the Judicial Centre of Grande Prairie in any family law application to which Part 12 of the Alberta Rules of Court applies, all parties will be expected, with the assistance of Counsel if available, to take the following steps:

- a) Identify the social, relationship, parenting, financial, and health challenges the family is experiencing;
- b) Obtain appropriate supports, including building necessary skills, to help families address their social, relationship, parenting, financial and health issues;
- c) Work to reach appropriate agreements about their family matters including legal issues, with or without the assistance of resolution tools and Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) processes.

Parties are expected to seek assistance with their family challenges. In Grande Prairie, they can do so through the Family Resource Network Hub at this link:
<https://www.familyeducationsociety.org/>.

In any family law application, the judge will ask the parties or their Counsel what they are hoping to get help with, what they have been able to agree to, and what remains to be addressed.

The discussion will include:

- a) Questions to help the judge distinguish between the non-legal family challenges (which are the social, relationship, parenting, financial or health challenges that occur in family situations) and the legal issues which arise from rights and responsibilities under the law;
- b) What supports and skill-building assistance they have obtained, so it can be determined whether further directions are needed;
- c) Whether they have obtained legal advice, or sought assistance to resolve their legal issues, so it can be determined whether further directions are needed.

Counsel or the parties will also be asked whether there are concerns relating to safety and the potential for harm to any children, or to the parties. Evidence relevant to this concern should be set out in an Affidavit.

Where there is a harm or risk of harm (including the potential for children to experience Adverse Childhood Experiences, or ACEs), the judge will make decisions to promote safety including measures to reduce the risk of toxic stress on children.

Where there is no harm or risk of harm (including the potential for children to experience ACEs), the judge will determine whether there are any matters that are urgent or important and may make decisions as appropriate and available on the evidence.

The judge hearing an application may make an order:

- a) Requiring parties to pursue skill-building and supports for non-legal challenges;
- b) For a resolution process to be used to resolve legal issues;
- c) For an Interim Order, where appropriate, to reduce the opportunity for ongoing disputes pending final resolution;
- d) For a final resolution by Binding JDR (if agreed, see Rule 4.18), Streamlined Trial, or full trial, supported by a procedural order to ensure timely resolution.

Consent Orders are encouraged, as these represent agreement on legal issues and on the social, relationship, parenting, financial and health challenges the family has been able to address.