

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE SEVENTEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
IN AND FOR BROWARD COUNTY, FLORIDA

Administrative Order 2016-4-UFC

ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER ESTABLISHING
EARLY CHILDHOOD COURT

- (a) Florida Rule of Judicial Administration 2.215(b) states the chief judge shall “develop an administrative plan for the efficient and proper administration of all courts within that circuit.”
- (b) Chapter 39, Florida Statutes, authorizes the establishment of an early childhood court to promote reunification and stable home environments for children from birth to age 5.
- (c) In accordance with the authority vested in the chief judge by Florida Rule of Judicial Administration 2.215, it is ordered:
 - (1) An early childhood court is established as authorized by Chapter 39, Florida Statutes.
 - (2) The dependency division judges at the time of the shelter hearing but no later than arraignment shall identify cases which may be appropriate for early childhood court using all of the following criteria:
 - a. The child is under the age of 5.
 - b. The child was allegedly exposed to abuse, abandonment, or neglect and sheltered from the parent.
 - c. The child and parent reside in Broward County.
 - (3) If the parent has substance use, substance abuse or co-occurring mental health disorder, they may be admitted to the early childhood court after a court hearing. The parent at the time of the court hearing shall provide information as to current treatment for the substance abuse or mental health condition(s) or be willing to participate in treatment for the substance abuse or mental health condition.
 - (4) A parent may not participate in early childhood court if:
 - a. judicially determined a sexual predator;
 - b. judicially determined a pedophile;
 - c. judicially determined to have caused severe physical or sexual abuse on a minor;
 - d. diagnosed with a terminal illness with less than six (6) months to live;
 - e. the child is diagnosed with a terminal illness with less than six (6) months to live;
 - f. the alleged perpetrator of an “egregious” act on the child;

- g. has a no contact order as to the child;
 - h. willfully failed to protect the child from the alleged abuse;
 - i. the alleged perpetrator of sexual abuse of a child; or
 - j. incarcerated for 6 months or longer.
- (5) Upon identifying a case meeting the eligibility criteria, the court shall:
- a. offer the early childhood court option to one or both parents;
 - b. explain that early childhood court is a voluntary program which offers wraparound, supportive services to a parent who seeks reunification with his or her child;
 - c. order a comprehensive assessment by the Early Childhood Court Child Parent Psychotherapist if the parent indicates a willingness to participate in the early childhood court program;
 - d. request that the parent and his or her attorney to sign the "Consent to Participate in Early Childhood Court " if the parent agrees to participate in early childhood court which shall include all terms of participation; and
 - e. set an early childhood court status hearing.
- (6) A case will be transferred into early childhood court upon acceptance by the Early Childhood Court Judge. Upon transfer to early childhood court the parent will attend status hearings and all other statutorily mandated hearings until completion of early childhood court tasks or termination from early childhood court.
- (7) Cases may be referred to a general magistrate as authorized by law and rules of procedure.

DONE AND ORDERED in chambers at Fort Lauderdale, Broward County, Florida on
January 13, 2016.

/s/ Peter M. Weinstein
Peter M. Weinstein, Chief Judge