

TIPS FOR CO-PARENTING DURING COVID-19 QUARANTINE



The COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic brings extra pressures that can be hard to manage and cause anxiety in both parents and children. We have gathered some suggestions that can help separated parents work through this difficult time.

STAY HEALTHY

Show your kids, family, and friends the ways to reduce the risk of spreading of the virus. Wash your hands often and thoroughly, keep the recommended distance when out and about (social distancing). Model simple routines as these will become habit forming.

Let the other parent know that you (and all members of the household) are following these guidelines. This shows that you are taking

things seriously and may give you all peace of mind. As with all co-parenting, it works best if you are consistent in each home.

Read the government health guidelines about coronavirus (COVID-19) [here](#).

BE PRESENT AND CONSIDERED

This is a serious health challenge. Children will have heard lots of information through their schools, networks, and media. Children may not be able to process the information in a way that they understand. If you are in an amicable situation with the other parent have conversations with your children about how you will explain situations to them, it is good to be using clear similar language in both homes if you can, especially with younger children.

Older children whose studies and major social events such as school formals and celebrations have been cancelled may be unsettled and anxious. Talking about this with them when they are ready is best. Younger children can easily become confused and scared. Ensure you sit your children down and explain what this means for them, use language that is relevant to their age or stage of development. Younger children may benefit from you sitting down with them in a 'play' space and acting the situation out using their toys. Yes, this is a serious situation but also try to inject some positives and humour in your explanations. Ensure you let the other parent know the words you have used and how you have explained COVID-19 to your children so they can replicate this if needed.

MEET YOUR OBLIGATIONS

If a court order or agreement is in place for your parenting matters, you must still meet those terms unless there is a good reason. If arrangements become unclear or cannot be met because of quarantine, travel restrictions because schools close, or for another reason, use common sense to find practical solutions to challenges if it is safe to do so. Give the other parent plenty of notice and an explanation so they also have time to adjust.

Also see The Law section below

ADAPT FOR HANDOVERS

Start planning for another neutral and public location that will be suitable for changeovers if the usual school or sporting activities are now not available. Make sure social distancing practices can still be maintained. Activities parents planned to do with children during school holidays or weekends are likely to be cancelled. Think about whether you will be required to work from home and how that will happen when children are in your care.

If children won't be able to see the other parent or other important people, find other ways to try and maintain the connection – including digital communications. Facetime and Facebook messenger are popular platforms.

BE OPEN

Try to be on the same page with the other parent about the things you will each do in your respective households (and in your wider communities) to limit exposure to the virus and to shield the children. Have an agreed response plan for if your child shows any symptoms. Immediately tell the other parent. Have your own self-isolation plan ready and share it with the other parent if necessary. Try to engage openly and honestly with the other parent about your concerns.



If there has been a risk of exposure to the virus, be honest about that. Government mandated responses will be required if you have been exposed and will include isolation or quarantine and may include testing. It is important to have an agreed plan in place if a parent or a child start to display symptoms, ensure this plan also considers if the child is sick and can't/shouldn't travel to the other parent's house. These conversations can be challenging but are much easier before an event/sickness happens then during or after.

BE COMPASSIONATE & KIND

Very few people can be certain about planning in times of stress and may respond in a way that seems unreasonable to you. Try to remember that no one really has a guidebook for how to plan for or respond to this crisis. Being calm in times of high stress is hard – but you are more likely to reduce the conflict if both parents are making the best effort possible. Modelling kindness and compassion will show your children that even in times like these we can be kind.

Note: If you feel like the other parent is acting in a controlling and manipulative way that is harming you ensure you gather evidence for this as this will be required when returning to Court, also reach out for help **1800RESPECT**

HELP WHEN YOU CAN

People are losing jobs, and some are experiencing a reduction in their income. This may impact child support or the contribution to other expenses. Try to be understanding of the situation the other parent is in – financial worry will probably exist in both households. The message and legacy at the moment should be 'in the child's best interest', as far as possible, both parents and households should work together to find solutions that fit

with both household's financial capacity and fulfilling children's needs.

BE PATIENT AND POSITIVE

This situation is not going to resolve overnight. The way we work, socialise, communicate, and parent will change over the next few weeks and months. Make a conscious effort to embrace the good and joyful moments in each day, stay connected by phone or social media to friends or family who can support you, and remember that you are the example for your children at this time.

TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS AND CO-PARENTING (PARENTING ORDERS)

If you or your ex-partner are currently travelling or intend to travel internationally with children in the near future, you may wish to consider the following:

- » Is each parent clear about the scope of the travel in the parenting order or previous agreement?
- » That the travelling parent is aware of the current travel restrictions with respect to the countries they and the children are travelling to and from?
- » What is the quarantine period imposed in the destination country? Has that been communicated to the non-travelling parent?
- » What information has been shared between the travelling and the non-travelling parent? Both parents should have a copy of relevant travel documents, children's travel insurance, passports, visas and travel itinerary in case of emergency.
- » The travelling parent should be aware of the children's vaccinations and medical history in case medical assistance is required while travelling.

- » The travelling parent should carry enough medication or prescriptions for the children if the travel period is extended due to quarantine.
- » Decide upon a practical place for the children to live on their return to Australia during their 14-day quarantine period. Fines and penalties now apply to those who do not self-isolate.
- » If travel has been postponed what can be put in place for the travelling parent to travel with the children at an alternate time?

THE LAW

At present the Family Courts are unlikely to have sufficient resources to hear and determine urgent applications regarding international travel arising out of the COVID-19 pandemic. If the children will be travelling with a parent, it is critical to have travel agreements regarding children in writing.

This is critical when travel plans change, and the travel becomes outside of the original scope of your agreement or parenting order.

If an agreement can be reached about new parenting arrangements, even if they are to be adjusted for a short period of time, then have it in writing, even if by way of email, text message or WhatsApp between each other. This will be particularly important if there are later family law hearings and will assist all concerned, including the Court, to understand what agreement may have been reached.

Parents and carers can mediate their differences through lawyers. Electronic mediation services are available from the Courts and through local Bar Associations and Law Societies during these restricted times. Visit their websites for more information.

The Family Relationships Advice Line can provide information, advice and telephone-based Family Dispute resolution services to assist parents and carers to discuss any issues that arise & help come to an agreement. The Family Relationships Advice Line can be contacted on 1800 050 321

It is important that if parenting orders cannot be strictly adhered to and are varied by the parents, that the purpose and the spirit of the Orders are respected when considering altering your arrangements, and that they are acting in the best interests of the children.

There is a specific form for consent, where new arrangements are outside the terms of an order. Consent order applications can be filed electronically with the Court. This process is quick and is usually conducted without a hearing.

If you are uncertain about the impact of current or upcoming international travel on your parenting agreement or orders, you could seek legal advice.

You can contact the Family court Family Relationships Advice Line (FRAL) who can help with free legal advice and information about services available to assist anyone with family relationship issues.

Call **1800 050 321** or **+61 7 3423 6878** if you are overseas.



FOCUS ON SOLUTIONS

More than ever, parents and other adults concerned with the care of children need to find compromise in the interests of children. Courts will increasingly have limited availability, dispute resolution services may be hard to access, and common sense coupled with respectful engagement may be the surest path. It's an opportunity to find new ways to solve old problems.

WHERE TO ACCESS FURTHER HELP:

Stepfamilies Australia
www.stepfamily.org.au

Family Relationships Advice Line
1800 050 321

Lifeline **13 11 14**

Raising Children
www.raisingchildren.net.au

Family Relationships Advice Line (FRAL)
1800 050 321 or
+61 7 3423 6878 if you are overseas.

SOURCES

HG Lawyers
<https://www.hopgoodganim.com.au/page/knowledge-centre/blog/covid-19-coronavirus-and-co-parenting-%E2%80%93-do-travel-restrictions-impact-your-parenting-orders>
Family court
<http://www.familycourt.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/fcoaweb/about/news/mr260320>

Adapted from the Law Council of Australia – Legal Aid

