Co-Parenting DURING A PANDEMIC

Rapidly changing circumstances and recommendations during the COVID-19 pandemic can make it difficult for families to chart the best course for shared parenting responsibilities.

Children are perceptive to and affected by your emotions and preserving your child’s overall wellbeing is top priority. The only thing that is clear is that both parties, no matter what frustrations arise, should make every effort to work together in a compassionate and civil manner.

Being flexible with your standing parenting agreement during this time will help the family unit function more smoothly. Sticking to a plan which never accounted for a pandemic will no doubt allow avoidable problems to arise, remember everyone is facing these struggles without prior guidance or experience.

Helpful Parenting Plan Adjustments

- If you notice strain on your co-parent, offer to take the kids on “their” time without holding it against them or expecting reciprocity.
- Make sure to secure documentation of changes to the parenting agreement in any concrete form, such as emails or texts.
- If both parents are working remotely, agree to more evenly share parenting time while the kids are home from school.
- If you or your co-parent is at a heightened risk of exposure, have an open and honest discussion about how this could temporarily impact the custodial schedule. Discuss options and agree on if/then scenarios which could arise.
- If both parents are working outside of the home, agree on a designated caregiver who is not a risk for your children or themselves.
- Communicate any changes in scheduling promptly so conflicts can be handled proactively.
- If a child’s parent is infected but not incapacitated by the illness, it may make sense for the child to remain with that parent during the infectious period, in hopes of limiting further community spread.
- Try utilizing a shared calendar to stay on top of unusual schedules. Keeping kids in the loop and explaining what is going to happen and why will help diminish anxiety of the unknown.
What if i feel my co-parent is a risk?

Some parents may have fears over what would happen if they were forced to limit their children’s exposure by suspending their co-parent’s time. It’s as important to be honest about any exposure you’ve had as it is to never assume anything about the other parent’s exposure. Both can be equally detrimental in very different ways.

When considering a temporary suspension of parenting time, ask yourself if there’s clear evidence that a parent or household member:

- Is infected with Coronavirus
- Was directly exposed to the virus
- Has traveled to a high-risk area
- Is not following recommended transmission reduction practices

If there is no proof that any of these situations apply, and there is not a government issued quarantine or shelter in place protocol in effect, it may be difficult to justify the suspension of parenting time, especially if the other party is not in agreement.

If you still feel your child is at risk, remember failing to comply with court orders always poses legal risk. It’s important to first make every attempt at reaching a compromise. If your co-parent feels that distancing is an unfounded request, it would be wise to consult with your attorney or ask to meet through an online mediation company before making final decisions.

If unagreed actions taken during this time are brought to the attention of the courts down the road, a judge will have to decide if the matter was truly in the best interest of the child. If a parent’s concerns were found to be unsupported, there could be repercussions. It is uncertain if there will be leniency granted due to the nature of the time.

If you do reach an agreement to limit face to face parenting time due to concerns of exposure, ensure regular contact is maintained. Remember, your child’s wellbeing is your number one responsibility and they still need that parental interaction.

It’s imperative that respectful, solution focused communication is ongoing. This crisis offers the chance to bring your best to the forefront, to rise to the occasion and model the sort of behavior you hope your children will learn. Give them the gift of cohesiveness when their lives are in flux and anxiety is high. Be intentional on laying the foundation for a healthy working relationship with your co-parent, your future will thank you.