



Top Ten Guide for Separated Parents during Covid19

Separated parents experience both the joys and stressors of parenting. But additional pressures and stresses such as those associated with the Covid19 Pandemic can be hard to accommodate and provoke anxiety in parent and child alike.

The Family Law Section has compiled these **TOP TEN** suggestions to help separated parents navigate this difficult time.

1. Stay healthy

Model best practice habits (for kids, family and friends) to minimise the risk of spread of the virus – frequent and thorough hand washing and responsible social distancing. Simple routines become habit forming.

Guidelines are available at <https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/what-you-need-to-know-about-coronavirus-covid-19#protect-yourself-and-others>

Let the other parent know that you (and all members of the household) are following these guidelines – we all worry that others are not taking things as seriously as we should and assurances bring peace of mind and good will. As with all co-parenting, consistent messaging across households is ideal.

2. Be present and considered

This is a serious health challenge. Children will have heard much through their schools, networks and media.

Children are not necessarily able to accurately process all of this information in a way that allows for peace of mind. Older children whose studies and major social events such as school formals and celebrations have been cancelled may be unsettled and anxious. Younger children can readily become confused and scared by perceived magnitudes of risk.

3. Meeting your obligations

If your parenting matters are regulated by court order or agreement, you must still meet your obligations under those terms unless a reasonable excuse applies. If arrangements become unclear or cannot be met (eg: quarantine, travel restrictions or because schools close) use common sense to find solutions to challenges. If you anticipate a change, give the other parent plenty of notice and an explanation so they also have time to adjust.



4. Adapt

If schools are closed and changeover normally occurred after and at school or sporting events, nominate or start planning for another neutral and public location that will be suitable – and where social distancing practices can be maintained.

Sporting activities or activities parents planned to do with children during school holidays or weekends are unlikely to now be available. Think about whether you will be required to work from home and whether that is feasible when children are in your care.

If time arrangements with the other parent or important people cannot occur, find other ways to try to maintain the connection – including digital communications.

5. 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.

If a child is showing any symptoms, that information should be shared immediately with the other parent, and an agreed response implemented. Know what your own self-isolation plan will be so that you are able to share that with the other parent if necessary.

Try to engage openly and honestly with the other parent about your worries and if there has been a risk of exposure to the virus, be honest about that (at which point mandated responses will be required in any event, which will include isolation or quarantine and may include testing).

6. Be mutual

Think about how you would like the other parent to engage with you about these issues, and model that engagement. Make accommodations to the other parent if they are possible and good for the children – and expect such accommodations in return. If time can't occur at one point, suggest it occur at another point.

All parents and children will benefit from some mutually agreed give and take.

7. Be compassionate

Very few people can apply certainty to their planning in times of stress and may respond to data about risk in ways that may seem disproportionate to you – but understand that we do not have a playbook 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 are making the best effort possible.



8. Be solution focussed

At this time, more than ever, the need for parents and other adults concerned with the care of children to find compromise in the interests of children, is absolutely clear. 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.

9. Help out to the extent you can

People may lose jobs or experience a reduction in their income. This may impact what can be paid by way of 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 of these days should be, as far as possible, that both parents and households worked together to find a solution that was as good as possible for the children.

10. Be patient and positive

This situation is not going to resolve overnight. Changes to the way we work, socialise, communicate and parent will come in 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 beacon for your children at this time.

For more helpful links and practical advice see:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/managing-stress-anxiety.html>