

## Getting Divorced During the Coronavirus Outbreak

In the wake of the Coronavirus pandemic, most divorce and family law matters in California have been designated as non-essential. This means that many currently scheduled hearings are being moved, court filing hours are being reduced or altogether canceled, and access to court resources are limited, and for some, completely unavailable. No one knows what will happen over the next few weeks, which is sure to create even more uncertainty and stress for all of you currently in the middle of family law proceedings (or considering starting a divorce).

### 1. Be Creative.

Although the state may deem divorce proceedings as non-essential, the reality is that those in the middle of a contested family law matter know that they cannot just push a pause button on their lives. Issues such as custody and support need at least temporary solutions. Fortunately, in addition to working with an attorney who can provide you with guidance at this time, you have additional options like private judging and private mediation.

Additionally, now is the time to leverage available technology. Meetings can be conducted via videoconference or telephone. Most documents can be electronically signed, and many counties now accept electronic filings. Don't assume that your case must come to a complete standstill.

### 2. Strategize.

Interest rates are at an all-time low, so now is the time to negotiate deals on the buyout of real property. For those who need to resolve stock division, plan strategically for shares versus cash. Also, remember that any solid strategy requires education! This means that you need to have all relevant information related to finances, assets, and debts.

The absolute best educational tool for summarizing your finances, assets, and debts is, undoubtedly, your financial disclosures. Yes, the disclosures, which no one likes to do, are not only legally required to obtain a divorce but also extremely helpful in sorting out your property.

If your attorney has been hounding you for your financial disclosures, outstanding discovery, or getting documents together for reimbursement claims or some other case-related issue, get going! If you're going at this self-represented, often times you feel like you're going a million miles a minute trying to "do it all." Use this time to slow down, catch up, and educate yourself. Take a look at our forum.

### 3. Reevaluate priorities.

Like most major life events, the state of the world is probably making you rethink certain choices.

This is a good time to take a look at your own actions during your divorce, not for judgment and criticism, but for honest self-reflection. Maybe the fight you just had to initiate really wasn't worthwhile. Perhaps your goals need to be realigned. Perform a cost-benefit analysis to your chosen course of action.

We cannot "have it all" right now (we probably never could, but most of us liked to at least pretend). If you need court intervention/assistance, it is only available in very limited situations. California does not believe your issues are as important as public safety (harsh, but true). If you can't get the help you want, is it possible that you can think of something else to get what you need?

#### **4. Create a safety plan.**

Unfortunately, domestic violence perpetrators are unlikely to stop, even in a pandemic. Please educate yourself as to your options during this time. Some courts are continuing to provide options for the filing of restraining orders, while other counties refer you to local law enforcement to seek emergency protective orders. If you must leave your home due to physical safety issues, where can you go?

Have you communicated with the other parent regarding the outbreak? Are the two of you on the same page as far as how you will protect your children? Many of you have jobs that require interaction with the general public (medical, law enforcement, food services, etc.) – should the parenting plan be temporarily changed to minimize the children's exposure? What is your emergency plan for the kids if someone in your household, including you, is infected?

#### **5. Exercise compassion.**

Regardless of your personal opinions on COVID-19, and whether or not you believe it is exaggerated, propaganda, or a true emergency, it is obvious that our world is in crisis and in completely new territory. Now is the time to connect with people and recognize that we are all in this together.

So when I say exercise compassion, I mean it for everyone, including your ex. Maybe your ex is considered high risk, or perhaps their loved ones are personally affected by the outbreak. Now is the time to remember that this is the person you once loved and wanted to be the parent of your children. Even though your relationship is now completely different, it is still a relationship. The choices you make during this crisis can positively impact the direction of your case, or it can drive you further apart.