

Parenting During the COVID-19 Outbreak

Due to the widespread outbreak of coronavirus (COVID-19), California school districts throughout the state have issued emergency closures that could last weeks or even months. Many parts of California are under “shelter in place” restrictions. If you are a divorced or separated parent, this inevitably leads to additional co-parenting stressors and questions. Here are tips to prepare and protect your time with your kids:

1. Temporarily Update your Custody Schedule. Together.

This is not the time to worry about maintaining an equal timeshare or appearing “weak” to the other parent. The one thing the two of you have in common is love for your children, regardless of parenting differences, philosophies, and feelings about the other. Communicating and planning to ensure childcare is covered and that your children avoid as much exposure to the public as possible should be a mutual goal that brings you together.

For high conflict parents, you should be relying on your attorneys for guidance during this time, especially if your local courthouse is closed. Additionally, look into engaging the services of a private mediator (using videoconference technology) to help the two of you reach consensus.

2. Agree on Rules.

Reducing your family’s risk for contracting coronavirus means that when your child is in your care, you are taking precautions such as frequent hand washing, limiting crowd exposure, and avoiding unnecessary travel. Get on the same page regarding playdates, extracurricular activities, and contact with other children. As part of coparenting, you and your ex should establish rules that you both agree to follow to protect the health of everyone in the family.

Additionally, your children are likely going to be upset and have questions and concerns. You and your ex should present a uniform front in this regard and be able to reassure your children that you both love them and will do everything possible to keep them safe. Both of you should consistently enforce the agreed-upon rules regarding safety in your separate households. Good parents not only protect their children from COVID-19, but they also protect them from conflict. How to handle this pandemic should not be yet another source of fighting.

3. Make a Backup Plan.

What will happen if one of your family members contracts coronavirus? Have you confirmed that you both have the children’s medical cards? If you’re still legally married, have you double checked to make sure your medical insurance is still current? Who will care for the children if one or both of you cannot do so? Have you prepared for the possibility that you will be quarantined?

Stay calm. Help each other stay calm.

Now, more than ever, put your children's needs above your own feelings. This is not a game – you don't win or lose your child. We all know being a parent isn't easy, and now more than ever, we are called on to "parent up" and do the right thing.

4. Be Flexible.

If a parent agrees to give up time for the best interests of the children, do the right thing and figure out how to make up the lost time. Maybe the usual rules regarding diet and screen time need to be relaxed. Most spring break plans have been impacted, so perhaps next year spring break can be shared to ensure that both parents have "fun time" with the kids, or perhaps the time can be made up during another holiday. If there is nothing else learned from the current state of the world, it is that our "usual" way of doing things must temporarily change.

Have joint family time with both parents, with one parent joining in virtually. You can read books, watch movies, do arts and crafts, videogames, and all sorts of other activities together, even if not in-person. Ensure that the parent who isn't seeing the children per the usual schedule gets as much FaceTime, Skype, or phone contact as possible.

5. Get Help.

Whenever you make a change to your parenting time or custody schedule, it's important for these changes to be formally reduced to a written agreement. At the very least, this reduces the chances for misunderstandings and arguments. Many of you do not have access to emergency hearings right now, so it is vital to keep your parenting situation as stable as possible for the sake of your children.

If you have different ideas, use the children's pediatrician or other trusted individual to help guide your decisions. If you and your ex are still unable to reach agreements and have significant differences regarding your approach to the visitation schedule, make sure you seek the assistance of a divorce/custody attorney. Above all, remember your children should always be the center of your worlds, not put in the middle of your conflicts.

Have questions about the impact of COVID-19 on your child custody and visitation issues? We can help. We offer virtual online appointments with an attorney, or you are welcome to meet with your attorney in person when permitted by the county. Our caring lawyers can help you get together a parenting time plan that safeguards you and your children during this difficult time. [Contact us now.](#)