

Finding a New Balance: Co-Parenting Through Separation in a Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic presents unique challenges to parents who co-parent their children. Not only are schools closed, but so are many places where co-parents have found common ground for custody exchanges and access visits. Co-parents need to try to work together to navigate this stressful time. Below you will find some useful tips for co-parenting during this time.



Keep adult talk for adults: Any concerns about custody, access visits, court, lawyers, child support, co-parenting and any problems between you and your ex-partner are considered adult talk. Be sure that children are not in the room or within earshot when talking about these issues.

Talk with children about what is going to happen: Whenever possible, give your kids advanced notice about any changes to upcoming custody and access visit schedules. Children thrive when there is predictability and consistency.

Keep your language neutral when talking about your former partner: Talking negatively about the other parent can put children in the middle and make them feel torn or conflicted. Share that it's not good to say bad things about anyone.

Validate your child's feelings: Kids may feel anger, sadness, frustration, disappointment, etc. It's okay to have many feelings at once. For example, a child may feel happy to spend time with one parent at home, but also feel upset that they cannot see their other parent. Both feelings are okay.

Tips for you:

- Be healthy and model proper hand washing. Maintain physical distancing and self-isolation practices.
- Be mindful and try to maintain a calm attitude. Do your best to convey to your child your belief that everything will work out in time. Answer your child's questions in a factual manner that is appropriate for their age and development.
- Try your best to be compliant with Court Orders and Parenting Agreements to the greatest extent possible. It is reasonable to expect temporary changes to parenting schedules.
- While your children are not around, talk to another adult for support, such as a friend, relative or a counsellor, or write your feelings in a journal.. Your feelings are just as important, and sharing it with others may help you to understand the situation.

Tips for supporting your children:

- Try finding one or two positive things to say about your co-parent to the kids (i.e. your father/mother works very hard).
- Watch your non-verbal reactions when your child talks about the other parent. Children are skilled at reading our reactions.
- Make visitation as safe and predictable as possible for children given the circumstances.
- Share information regarding the date and location for next visit with your child and discuss their feelings about the visit or circumstances. Avoid sharing any anger, resentment or frustration you may feel toward your co-parent.
- Talk to your children about the situation and try to understand their feelings of confusion and uncertainty.
- Share the information of the child's feelings with your co-parent if you can. If it is safe to do so, ask your child to express their feelings to their other parent.