



A Guide for Separated Parents during COVID-19

For Current Parenting Arrangements

If you have current parenting arrangements in place, including court orders about parenting, or a parenting plan, you should follow them unless you have a 'reasonable excuse' not to do so. A reasonable excuse could include a health professional directing you and the children to go into quarantine, or travel being banned.

You should not make decisions unilaterally without consulting the other parent. Discuss any issues that arise and try to reach an agreement together.

If you fail to follow parenting orders and do not have a reasonable excuse, the other parent can take you to court. The court can make orders, such as make-up time, and give penalties. The type of penalty will depend on how serious it is.

Communicate with Each Other

Communication with the other parent in the current environment is crucial. You should discuss issues and concerns regarding the current arrangements, and include contingency planning for future developments. These might include what you will do if a member of a household becomes ill. You should both always consider the safety and best interests of the child. This includes the importance of minimising the risk of infection to vulnerable members of the child's family and household.

Be Flexible and Solution Focused

If you cannot continue with your current arrangement because, for example, schools are closed and that is where changeover usually occurs, organise another public location that will be suitable – and where social distancing practices can be maintained.

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

Make accommodations to the other parent if they are possible and good for the children. If time with children can't occur at one point, suggest it occur at another point. 2

Remember to listen to the concerns of the other parent when attempting to reach new arrangements. All parents and children will benefit from some mutually agreed give and take.

Record New Arrangements

If you agree on new arrangements, even if they are just for the short term, you should put them in writing such as by email, text message or WhatsApp between each other. Additionally you can create an interim Parenting Plan that will form an addendum to your current arrangements. A Parenting Plan is a signed and dated agreement between parents.

What to Do If You Can't Agree

If you cannot agree on an acceptable solution, parents should keep the children safe until the dispute can be resolved. You will need to contact an organisation that offers Family Dispute Resolution online, and/or talk to a solicitor.

During this period of dispute, parents should make sure that each parent continues to have some contact with the children consistent with the parenting arrangements such as by videoconferencing, social media, or if that is not possible, by telephone.

Keep Up To Date with the Latest Advice

Advice regarding social distancing can change on a regular basis. Make sure you understand what you can and cannot do and adjust your arrangements accordingly.

Information sourced from:

- The Law Council of Victoria
- Victoria Legal Aid
- The Family Court of Australia 3

Additional Resources and Links

[Family Court COVID FAQs](#)

[Family Law Section 10 Tips for Managing Parenting in a Pandemic](#)

[Family Court Statement Parenting Orders and COVID](#)

National Coronavirus Helpline [1800 020 080](tel:1800020080) The line operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

[Health.Gov Health Alerts](#)