



Being a Parent and Changing Co-habiting Relationships

Relationships are being tested as Victorians stay at home to help limit the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19). Without the relationship downtime normally provided by workplaces and social activities, concerns about a spike in the number of couples considering divorce are emerging as couples feel the pressure of spending more time being confronted with relationship problems. For some, the option of separation and divorce will be clearer now than ever before.

To help couples maintain healthy communication and interaction between themselves and their children during this difficult time, Relationship Matters has produced a list of tips to help manage the journey towards separation and divorce while stuck under the same roof.

But firstly, it's important to recognise where you are in this journey – it can be heart breaking and lonely. Weeks or even days ago, it will probably feel like you shared everything – ideas and thoughts, time with your kids, a social life and a bed. Now, it's awkward when you accidentally refer to each other by the affectionate names you once had for each other or when the very sight of each other induces uncomfortable feelings. Or if you've managed to accept the change, the acknowledgment of your former partner as being your co-parent can feel surreal. For most couples, co-habiting is one of the toughest parts of separating.

Tip #1

Sit down together and create rules for communicating interacting under the one roof. The clearer you are about your agreed expectations the less room there will be for resentment. Work out who will cook and when – the same goes with cleaning, paying bills and shopping for groceries. Will you parent together or on separate days – if you have children together it's important that you maintain a united front. How much will you communicate, and by what means?

Tip #2

Decide together what you'll tell your friends, acquaintances and extended family. Will you continue, for now, to present yourselves as a couple? Will you make your long-term plans public? Remember: whatever you say, it your kids will know.

Tip #3

It is normal if one of you wants more interaction than the other. If your co-parent doesn't want to engage with you in a conversation, let them be.

Tip #4

Sometimes, with the pressure to stay married off the table, the two of you may get along better than you have in years. It'll help if you remind yourself that your troubles haven't gone into spontaneous remission; this is a temporary lull.

Tip #5

If you find that you're both co-operative with one another, it's fine to continue co-parenting in the same old way. But if problems emerge, be prepared to negotiate for a change in the way you do things.

Tip #6

If there is conflict, try dividing time with the kids (a weekly schedule where one parent agrees to most of the parenting). And when you're not with the kids, make yourself as scarce as possible.

Tip #7

Be prepared for overlaps in parenting and be prepared to make requests to avoid confusion and resentment. For example, if your child asks you to help with homework, check in with your partner to let them know that you are willing to lend a hand – don't just take over because your co-parent might feel resentful.

According to the Victorian Government, it is likely that Victorian's will continue to stay at home for months. If you plan to tell your kids, reassure them and tell them that you are both working on the particulars together. The first things they will want to know are who is moving? When? Where? When will we see you both? Can I stay in my school?

Most couples (regardless of their level of conflict) need help navigating these early stages of separation and divorce and long period of co-habitation delays the process of emotional separation. Relationship Matters can help you as a couple and as individuals during these challenging early weeks.

Need more support?

Relationship Matters aims to promote healthy, respectful and fulfilling relationships within the Victorian community. We offer Mediation, Counselling and a range of Skill Enriching Relationship Programs to support all relationships.

Relationship Matters recognise relationships in all their diversity and our services are offered to individuals, couples and families regardless of, gender, religious affiliation, race, cultural heritage, sexual orientation or economic circumstance.

If you need support, please contact us on 1300 543 396 or visit relationshipmatters.com.au