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As if co-parenting isn't complicated enough, enter COVID-19 to really shake things up. In the past few months, we have experienced the rapid and unprecedented effects of this global pandemic. Staying home in your pajamas all day used to make you feel lazy; now, it makes you a contributing, socially responsible member of society.

In all seriousness, these are difficult and very uncertain times. School and daycare closures, working from home, layoffs, health and financial fears, and social distancing are just some of the reasons co-parenting might seem difficult, or even impossible, right now. So what can separated or divorced parents do to minimize the impact of COVID-19 on themselves as co-parents, on their relationship and interactions with one another, and on their children?

Stay tuned...

Communicate

Now, more than ever, co-parents need to work together, set aside their differences, and focus on their children's best interests. Regardless of the interpersonal difficulties you may have faced in the past, civil and respectful communication is now necessary. Be open and honest with one another about how the pandemic might affect your parenting approach.

Try to be a united front for your children. How will you discuss the pandemic with your children? How will you implement appropriate social distancing? What other measures can your respective households adopt to ensure your children are receiving consistent and supportive messaging about the pandemic? If your children are school-age, you could discuss educational activities to be done in each household, or simply brainstorm and agree upon some ways to keep your children occupied from home.

Your business closed or you got laid off? Communicate. Work in an essential service and don't know what to do about childcare during your parenting time? Communicate. Have health concerns for your children relating to COVID-19? Communicate. The take away message? Maintain open and respectful communication about parenting through this difficult time

Follow Court Orders & Agreements

Continue to comply with Court Orders and Agreements as much as possible. They remain binding. Do not attempt to use the pandemic as an excuse to withhold parenting time or otherwise impede contact between children and your co-parent. Courts do not look favourably upon such behaviour. Further, it is important for children to maintain consistency in routine and to enjoy close and loving relationships with both parents.

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That said, there are exceptions. One exception might be the circumstance in which a member(s) of one or both parents' household displays symptoms of COVID-19 or meets other risk factors such as recent travel. A child who is immunocompromised may also require certain extra precautions. Co-parents can get creative in coming up with ways to maintain contact with their children should physical visitation not be an option. Daily Skype, FaceTime, and telephone calls are one way to achieve ongoing contact. You can also discuss makeup time to be scheduled when the pandemic clears. You should attempt to work together to safeguard the health and wellbeing of yourselves, your children, and your respective households.

For a summary of recent custody and access decisions pertaining to COVID-19, [click here](#). For a summary of currently-available Court and non-Court processes for family law clients, as well as a summary of how we can help, [click here](#).

Be Realistic

Many people are facing financial hardship due to COVID-19. Payors of child support should make every effort to continue making support payments. Consider stricter budgeting and eliminating discretionary spending. Keep in mind, social distancing means we are no longer eating out, traveling, or maintaining gym memberships. In some circumstances, however, it may not be possible for payors to meet their support obligations. If a payor is genuinely unable to sustain their child support payments, they should communicate that to the recipient parent immediately.

Recipients should try to be accommodating, understanding financial hardship is affecting everyone. Reduced support may be an unavoidable reality, but hopefully, it is only temporary. This difficult time requires cooperation and flexibility from both parents in order to ensure children's best interests are being met.

Be Considerate

I'm going to put this bluntly: don't be a jerk. These uncharted times are stressful and confusing for everyone, including your ex. This is not the time to be airing dirty laundry or making petty jabs at one another. Your children are depending on you for hope and guidance through this strange and difficult time. I get it, civil communication and cooperation with your ex may not come easily. That's okay. But right now, it's time to table your differences and work together to ensure the safety, stability, and wellbeing of your children.

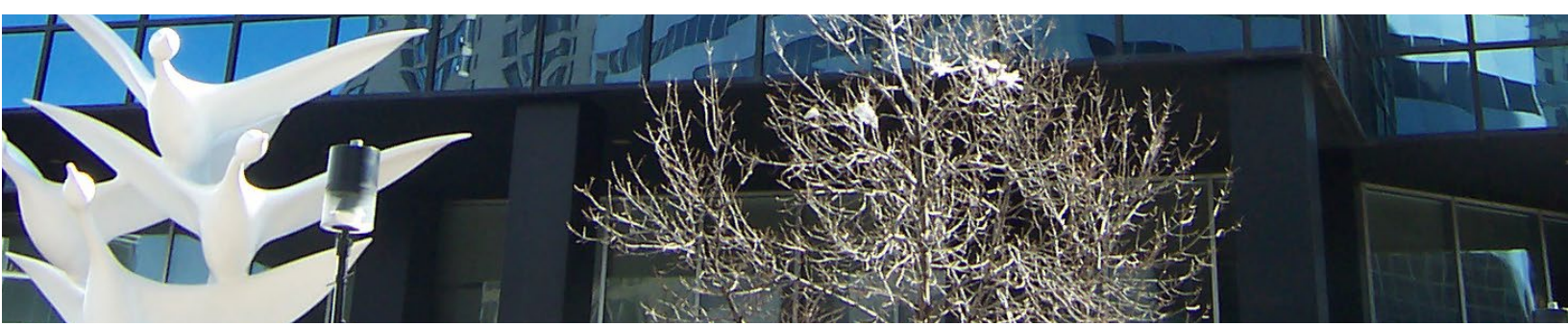
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Need advice?

If effective communication and cooperation is just not possible, we would be happy to offer strategies to achieve positive outcomes for your family. McKercher LLP has family lawyers in both our Saskatoon and Regina offices available to assist you remotely. We are pleased to offer Collaborative Law services. If you are an existing client, please contact your lawyer. If you are new to us (welcome!), please contact Renee Dust at r.dust@mckercher.ca to arrange a consultation. Please note consultations can only be arranged after a conflict check is cleared.

Thanks for reading – stay safe!

We acknowledge there are some circumstances in which communication and cooperation between co-parents may not be possible. If you or someone you know is experiencing domestic violence, please call or text 211 for services and support in your area.

For more information and resources regarding Family Law in Saskatchewan visit www.familylawsask.com

About the Author:

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About McKercher LLP:

McKercher LLP is one of Saskatchewan's largest, most established law firms, with offices in Saskatoon and Regina. Our deep roots and client-first philosophy have helped our firm to rank in the top 5 in Saskatchewan by Canadian Lawyer magazine (2019/20). Integrity, experience, and capacity provide innovative solutions for our clients' diverse legal issues and complex business transactions.



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