



For children to thrive, they need calm reassurance from the adults around them. Helping every child have a safe harbour is always important, particularly where parents share caring responsibilities across two households (due to separation or divorce). In this resource we want to help you to navigate the choppy waters of co-parenting that may be occurring during the COVID-19 pandemic.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I HAVE CURRENT SAFETY CONCERNS?

If you think your child is at risk of immediate harm, then as always you must take action and report the matter to the police or child protection service in your state/territory. You also can seek support from your local Family Relationship Centre. They can help you work out what are safety issues, and how to get help to protect your children from harm.

Parent Resource - March 2020

Shared Parenting in the time of COVID-19

IDEAS YOU MIGHT LIKE TO TRY

How can I communicate?

Talk – don't just type. Pick up the phone and talk to the other parent(s) or better still- try a video platform like Zoom, Skype or Facetime so you can pay attention to body language and facial expressions.

Find the positives. Acknowledge the positive intent behind what the other parent is suggesting – even if you may not agree yet on what they've proposed, and you want to suggest an alternative.

Make a 'praise sandwich'. Try to deliver your alternative suggestions by first, recognising and acknowledging a positive; then, explain your concerns, and say that you'd like to find a way to discuss (at a convenient time) and finally come back to another positive.

How can I act?

Practice kindness. Show them. The best lesson you can teach your kids is to model with the other parent how you would want them to treat others – their siblings, their friends, and even their future life partner.

Acknowledge different views of risk. Many parents believe their way is the right way and fail to recognise alternatives. This is likely to be heightened in discussions around whether to send your kids to school/daycare during this time. Consider that the parent with whom you disagree can also have the best interests of the child at heart and won't intentionally place them at harm.

Hold tight to the rudder. Acknowledge the uncertainty, but try to put aside your anxiety. Even when it's stormy out there – and hey, COVID-19 is a unique and unsettling circumstance! Believe that you can steer the boat through this and into calmer waters.

Create new routines. Many routines have changed and may need to change again. Discuss transitions between households and prepare your children for hand-over as best as you can. Even where routines are different across houses, having stable, predictable routines is reassuring for children.

How can I take a team approach?

Be flexible. Recognise that variations (within an overall broad theme) are fine – maybe even good. Where it's important to you (i.e., you believe the science of soap over hand sanitizer), but you disagree with another parent – can you agree to disagree? Kids can soon learn – we always keep our hands clean. When in this house, we do X, and when in that house, we do Y. No matter which way or how we do it, both ways help us keep our hands clean. When it comes to new 'rules' around personal hygiene, talk about some different ways of achieving the same goal – of having clean hands before eating or preparing food, whether it is using sanitizer or using soap and water for 20 seconds and singing Happy Birthday!

More resources

For more ideas and practical tips to support you and your family during this time, check out the websites of leading mental health organisations and parenting experts:

[Co-parenting on Raising Children Network](#)

[Caring across households on My Forever Family](#)

[Parenting plans for shared care on Relationships Australia](#)

[Family law and COVID-19 on The Conversation](#)

[Mental health and wellbeing tips on AusMentalHealth](#)

[Online safety on eSafety Commission](#)

[Co-parenting apps on Babyology](#)

[Parentline](#)

To shop... or not to shop with kids.

Have you discussed and agreed on whether kids should accompany you? Even if you agree that shopping is best done at times when kids are with another parent, what if there's a need to top-up groceries when they are with you? Can you agree to check in with the other parent – who may offer to go for you, or prefer to care for kids while you shop.

How can I reflect?

Imagine 'as if'. Being able to mentally prepare for conversations 'as if' the other parent wasn't your former partner; as if you never had any arguments or conflict; 'as if' they were a 3rd party such as a teacher or sports coach.

Use time travel. It's not just Hermione Granger who has a time-turner. Like the Time Lord, Dr Who, you can have your own "Tardis"... in your mind! So crank up the Tardis, twist the time turner a few times and ask yourself: would I be happy for my kids to hear a voice recording of what I am about to say to their mum or dad in 10 or 15 years' time, when they are an adult?

Ask myself... Would I be proud of what I said, and how I said it? Did I model respectful behaviour for my children? Or do I wish I'd approached things differently? If the latter, then stop and reflect. Consider how to act differently next time.

How can I connect?

Connect with your own feelings. Recognise that you may be feeling anxious, angry, hurt, or sad about the way the virus is affecting your life. Your kids—and their other parent(s)—are likely to be feeling this too. There's a lot of negatives going on: not being allowed to do the things they want, and constantly having to follow instructions about not touching things; missing out on spending time with friends or celebrating birthdays. Its no-one's fault this is happening!

Seek support. Seek support before you need it! Connect with your extended family and friendship network. Parents care for their kids best when they are supported. Make time to nurture yourself and ensure your own needs are met – when they are with you, as well as making the most of time children are with the other parent to recharge. The #COVID19 pandemic has many of us feeling unsettled and uncertain. During this time, we are likely to need a little extra support from friends, family, and from services. Let's be kind, stay connected, check in with each other, and seek professional support when needed (or even better be proactive and seek help before you need it!).

