



SUPPORTING PARENTS WITH SHARED CARE

Many families who share the care of kids across households may be finding effective communication challenging in the light of COVID-19.

This tip sheet identifies ways to support shared parenting families to communicate in healthy ways.

When supporting families we use the metaphor of safe harbours from the Parenting Research Centre. This metaphor encourages us to empower and support families rather than using a narrative of good or bad parenting.

What are some of the unique impacts upon shared parenting in the shadow of COVID-19?



Practitioner Resource - March 2020

Shared Parenting in the time of COVID-19

KEY FACTORS TO CONSIDER

Heightened anxiety: There are often rough waters to navigate after separation and divorce. But things are likely to get even more unsettled. In the troubled sea of COVID-19, adults providing care across households may be worried about their own health and that of their children. They might be preoccupied with a range of concerns: unemployment, loss of income, lack of physical support from extended family and friends (due to physical distancing measures), state and territory border closures (that prevent children from moving between parents' homes), and extra responsibilities such as distance learning from home. For these reasons it's extra important for all parents to try and stay calm and work together as a team where possible. What can you do to help parents build a team spirit?

Distance: Shared parenting arrangements work best when the two shared households are reasonably close. But some families are distant which makes shared parenting harder in the best of times. It is even harder during the COVID-19 lockdown conditions. Remember all children benefit from a close relationship with all their parents and this can be achieved using technology such as Facetime, Skype, letters or emails. What can you do to support families and make communication across distances easier?

Communication breakdowns: When parents are under stress, communication breakdowns may be more common. One parent might want to maintain high standards on specific issues, such as healthy eating. Parents might need to relax some principles when there are physical health risks and social responsibilities that have an immediate priority. What can you do to help parents resolve this?

Family safety
Safety never should be compromised. If you think the children are at risk of immediate harm, then as always you must take action and report the matter to the statutory child protection agency or police in your state/territory.

Use this resource with the Parent Resource on Shared parenting in the time of COVID-19



Children’s wishes at this time: Children might be distressed by the choices the other parent is making. Be alert to signs of this reaction, such as children expressing their anxiety by not wanting to participate in ‘hand-over’ and stay with the other parent. How can you help parents manage this effectively?

Competing priorities: Are parents able to separate out their own preference from what is a clear government mandate for personal hygiene, maintaining physical distance, or self-isolation? Is each parent open to the possibility that the other parent might dislike their parenting choices? Some situations might be difficult to navigate, such as the amount of access children may have to television or technology at this time. Parents might have different opinions when thinking about how to maintain their children’s education. How can you help parents manage their competing priorities?

Different views of risk: Many parents may view their way as the right way and find it difficult to recognise alternatives. For example, in the current environment, a parent might be inflexible about their choice about keeping the children home or sending them to child care or school. One parent can think that the other parent is deliberately putting the child at risk instead of acknowledging that the other parent has a different view of the risks. In this situation, parents need help to reframe the dilemma, exercise some empathy and adopt to the other’s perspective. How can you help parents find a reasonable compromise?

When talking with families and offering support, are you able to find out what the underlying issue is? Remember it might change over time too! We need to support all parents— but particularly those sharing the care of children across households— to raise thriving children.

Author: Professor Daryl Higgins
Series Editor: Dr Sheridan Kerr
Remember, we are #InThisTogether.

Please let us know if this resource has helped you to be a lighthouse for your child or if you have any ideas for improvement

INSTITUTE OF CHILD PROTECTION STUDIES

Covid Support Series - Parent Paper 1

email: ICPS@acu.edu.au

URL: safeguardingchildren.acu.edu.au/practice-tools

© Australian Catholic University 2020 (CC BY 4.0)

DOI: 10.26199/5e8bb29cd9312

