

Opinion | The COVID-19 pandemic requires urgent action by co-parents

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The COVID-19 pandemic requires urgent communication, co-operation and flexibility between separated and divorced co-parents.

Both co-parents and their child(ren) must isolate at home, like everyone else. This may require adjustments to existing parenting orders or arrangements.

Co-parents must immediately:

[1] self-isolate and socially distance not only themselves, even when the child is not residing with that co-parent, but at every other time – no visitors, no exposure from others – strictly engage in and comply with all COVID-19 preventative measures (every family member);

[2] flexibly and co-operatively modify existing parenting arrangements to protect the safety and well-being of every child, and those with whom the child may come in contact, by isolating the child, requiring the child to stay at home and minimizing the child's contact with any person other than the child's immediate family members, with whom the child primarily resides;

[3] minimize, if not eliminate, access exchanges for the child – children should isolate together and in one home – if parenting arrangements currently require a child to be residing in both homes on a back-and-forth basis, arrangements should be made to extend residency periods in each home, rather than engaging in regular back-and-forth – at a minimum, week-by-week altering residency should be implemented, if not longer;

[4] minimize, if not eliminate, exposure of children to anyone not within the children's immediate family, with whom the children are residing on a full-time basis – no playdates, birthday parties, shopping, or social visiting – provide regular assurances to the other co-parent that COVID-19 isolation and other required steps are being undertaken;

[5] facilitate and encourage regular and ongoing communication between a child and the other co-parent, unless to do so would be harmful to or threaten the safety or well-being of the child on a reasonable basis, even if this may not be required by existing Court orders, separation agreement or parenting plans;

[6] in addition to telephone, text and other traditional communication, download and implement virtual and online communication methods for every child to communicate with a non-residential parent, such as Facetime, Zoom, Hangout Meet, Skype, etc.

[7] if communication between co-parents is strained, utilize parenting communication platforms to achieve the COVID-19 containment objectives, such as