

PARENTING DURING COVID-19 STAY AT HOME ORDER

With the court closed for all except emergency ex parte hearings and hearings on requests for orders under the Domestic Violence Prevention Act, all are encouraged to follow these shared parenting guidelines.

Parents should comply with all CDC and local and state guidelines and model good behavior for your children, with intensive hand-washing, sanitizing surfaces and other objects that are frequently touched, and maintaining social distancing. It is important to be informed by staying in touch with reliable media sources and avoiding unreliable rumors. However, it is equally important not to leave the news on all the time, as this may create unnecessary anxiety in yourself and your children. Encourage your children to ask questions and to express their concerns, and answer them truthfully at a level that is age-appropriate.

Parties should follow their existing custody and visitation orders/parenting plan as closely as possible during this time, in order to provide consistency and stability that is in the children's best interests.

COVID-19 is not a reason to deny parenting time. Unless otherwise ordered by the court, parents are considered able to care for their children and to make decisions regarding the day-to-day aspects of parenting while the children are in their care, whether they are the primary custodial parent or not. Day-to-day care includes following California and county public health directives regarding social distancing and sanitation-related measures.

Although there is no school in session, to the extent the school schedule dictates parenting time, you should operate as though the school schedule remains in effect. This is true for spring break, summer, etc.

If your custody orders/parenting plan require parenting exchanges or parenting time to occur in a public place, make sure that the location is permitted under the current health and safety guidelines. If it is not, agree to change the place to a large park or open area where parents and children can maintain social distancing and avoid surfaces that others come into contact with (such as park play equipment). If compliance with the current orders is not possible under the current restrictions, parenting time should be conducted virtually via videoconferencing (including FaceTime or Skype) or by telephone.

If parenting time is ordered to be supervised, and the supervisor is unavailable due to COVID-19 related issues, the parties should work collaboratively to ensure parenting time continues to occur in a manner that promotes the children's safety and wellbeing, such as finding an alternative supervisor. If that is not possible, the parenting time should be conducted virtually via videoconferencing or telephone.

Parenting time requiring children to travel may not be appropriate at this time. If the parent is unwilling or unable to travel to where the children are to exercise parenting time, the parenting time should occur virtually via videoconferencing or telephone.

First responders must remain available for true emergencies and for support related to the COVID-19 outbreak. Please do not call them for parenting-related disputes unless there are real, immediate, and significant safety-related issues.

Unless the parents are restrained from communicating with each other, they are encouraged to communicate with each other about the precautions they are taking to protect themselves and the children from COVID-19. Try to reach agreement on what precautions are appropriate. So long as precautions are being taken, a parent may not deny parenting time based upon a disagreement about whether the other parent's precautions are sufficient.

Be honest with the other parent about any exposure to the virus and try to agree on what steps you will each take to protect the children from exposure. Both parents should be informed immediately if the children are exhibiting possible symptoms of the virus.

Be understanding with the other parent. The health crisis will pose an economic hardship on many people, both for those who are paying and those who are receiving child support. The parent who is paying support should still provide some support, even if it is not possible to pay the full amount. The parent who is receiving support should be accommodating under these difficult circumstances.

This time will leave vivid memories in your children. It is important that they know and remember that both of their parents worked together to ensure they were safe and able to maintain their relationships with their siblings and their parents.