

Living Together, Separating, Divorcing: Surviving During a Pandemic



Dear Sue
Thank you so much for
your contribution.
Michael and Peter

Advice from over 70 leading Mediators and related professionals from 10 countries to help you deal with the loss of income, lack of accommodation, child care, and **dealing with each other!**

Created & edited by Michael Lang & Peter Nicholson

Introduction

As Peter Nicholson and I were developing ideas for this book from our home offices in Dublin and Florida, contacting contributors, and planning for its publication, I read an essay in the New York Times by Farhad Manjoo (April 22, 2020) describing his family's life during the 24/7 COVID quarantine—children home from school with limited activities, spouses working remotely, everyone seeking occasional privacy.

Things are starting to break down. I don't just mean psyche and soul and social bonds and sense of self. I mean ordinary, overworked things around the house: the dishwasher, the garage-door opener, the fridge door, the faucet in the kids' bathroom, the towel hanger in the kids' bathroom, the toilet in the kids' bathroom. (Don't ask)

The reality for many is far worse. It's a mess.

And, even if it's temporary, lives will not quickly return to normal - whatever normal may look like once we are able to go to school and our jobs, get out of the house, and feel some sense of relief.

The strain on families at every social and economic level intensifies daily. Economic distress escalates as we figure out how to pay bills, apply for unemployment, worry whether our jobs will be there "after the virus," and if they are, what sort of changes can we expect? Children are idle and restless. They have suddenly lost contact with friends, school mates, and teachers; they have fewer (if any) outlets for physical activity. Children as well as their parents are trying to cope with rapidly organized distance learning courses.

Those tensions and worries are felt more intensely in families where couples are already separated or divorced, or where one or both partners have decided to end their marriage.

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Who will benefit from the advice in this book?

1. Are you living together, forced to shelter in place while one or both of you is thinking about or already in the process of separation and divorce?
2. Are you already divorced or separated with shared parenting and ongoing financial ties, trying to adjust to conditions forced on you by the pandemic?
3. Are you living together but find you are increasingly anxious as people are forced together 24/7 and facing financial uncertainty?

We offer this book as a source of practical advice and helpful tips for all these families. Our advice will help ease the tension, offer alternatives for managing life at home, and offer some hope that some way or another, you can get through this.

The contributors to this book are professionals who help families in distress. In this time of crisis, we want to use our knowledge and experience to help make life just a bit better for families during the pandemic. We come from 10 countries. We are mediators, lawyers, politicians, financial experts, mental health, and child experts.

These are some of the challenges we tackle:

- Children—help with school, discipline, time on screens, finding activities, etc.
- Finances—creating or altering budgets, cutting expenses, managing with less income, dealing with creditors
- Managing physical space, internet/computer usage, TV, and chores, when there are more people at home for longer periods, including adult children and children home from university
- Spending time in the same space 24/7 with someone you may be divorcing
- Access to children—for those separated or divorced. How to manage safely, if at all.
- Choices when physical access is not possible
- Support payments- impact of changes in income and expenses
- Access to courts is restricted

On a final note, we would like to mention our partner in crime, Fiona McAuslan, who would have been in the middle of the madness of developing and producing a book in two weeks, if it was not for the small matter of COVID-19 knocking at her door. During her time out, she did manage to provide us with an article about her experiences with the Pandemic.

Michael and Peter

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Living together during a Pandemic

Even as the dramatic consequences of COVID-19 gradually recede, and quarantine restrictions are slowly lessened, families will continue to feel the effects of sheltering in place for some time. In this section, our contributors offer advice for managing the challenges and complications of living together 24/7. You'll find tips for managing the stress and anxiety caused by living on top of one another, supervising home-bound children and online learning, or managing family finances upended by reduced income and increased expenses.

Finding a pathway out of a challenging situation

You find yourself suffering emotional and financial stress because of the pandemic lockdown. What do you do? How do you find a way out?

The first answer to these questions is that there is no answer. Well, no one answer.

There are a lot of pathways out, but which one do you take? Again, there is no answer to this question? Well, no one answer.

You can start by trying a different way of thinking - Let the answer find you.

So how do you let the answer find you?

Well, try starting with a non-specific broad goal such as: I want to find the best way of helping discipline my children; I want to find the best way of divorcing my partner while living in the same house or I want to find the best way of co-parenting with my separated partner during the lockdown.

These are called oblique goals. The moment you focus on a specific goal you immediately cut out the many other potential opportunities. Being efficient and focused kills diversity. At the moment you desperately need a diversity of options to find your way out.

So how do I start the journey out?

Again, start with a different way of thinking. It's the non-thinking option. Accept that the past is dead, and the future hasn't happened yet. All you have is the moment you are in. So, be totally present in the moment and be totally observant of what is happening. Observe rather than analyse. You cannot use reason or logic to think yourself out of your current problem.

What do I do next?

Make a small offer of generosity, a gift or concession without comment. Harness the power of silence and let the offer hang in the air. It is a very powerful position and invokes a sense of reciprocity from the receiver. Something will emerge out of this selfless act on your part. You will receive something in return.



Then what do I do?

Observe what happens out of the interaction and use your intuition to choose your next move. What is adjacent possible to where you are now that moves you in the direction of your broad aim of finding the best path forward? Small steps are more important than big leaps. As you take each step a whole new world opens of adjacent possibilities. Each step opens fresh diversity. You are now on the path out even though it might wind around in all directions.

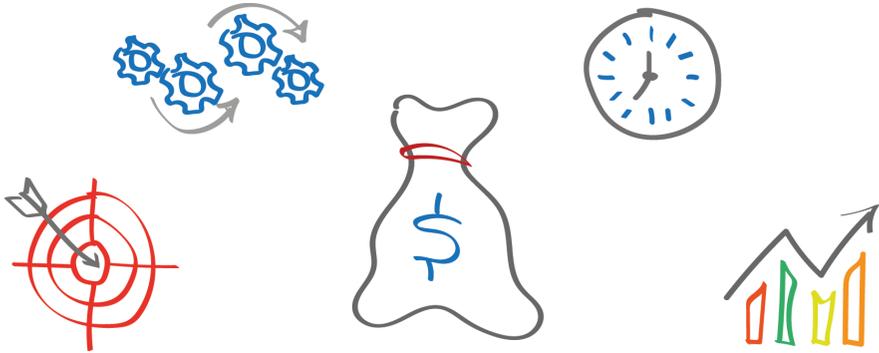
If you strike resistance or aggression reflect on how it makes you feel. Try responding by saying “I feel sad (scared, puzzled, anxious, etc)”. Again, use silence to let your comment hang in the air. It’s the opposite of saying “you make me feel sad, etc. it is a non-accusatory approach. By speaking about your feelings, you are holding a mirror up to the person.

Again, observe the interaction and use your intuition to select what is adjacent possible to where I am now that moves me forward in the general direction of my goal.

Margaret Ross and Greg Rooney

Australia

Negotiating business plan for your relationship



Imagine being in a business with a partner with whom you no longer get along. You understand that your and your family’s financial well-being and security are based on the successful manufacturing of your product. Imagine also that you take tremendous pride in the quality of your product, which you believe is of great benefit to all who use it. Would you destroy the business, or undermine the quality of your product, your baby, that you conceived and nurtured because of the problems in your relationship with your partner? I would hope not.

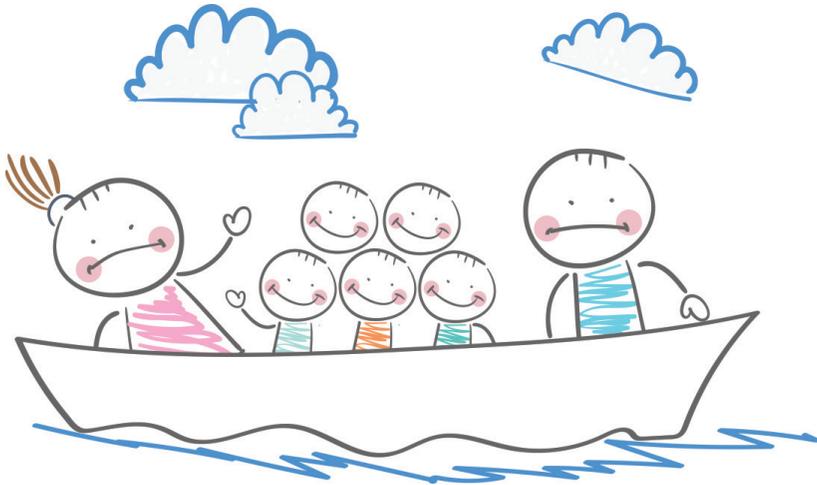
The analogy of trying to live with a partner from whom you would rather separate or divorce, but with whom you have a child, should be fairly obvious. Keeping in mind that the current living situation is temporary, you and your partner can put together a plan that allows the business (parenting) to continue and allows the product (child) to thrive.

To do so, you need to negotiate a business plan that outlines the roles and responsibilities of each partner with respect to the children. Then, you need to keep all conversations and communication focused on issues related to the roles, responsibilities, and products. As in business, be focused on your jobs, and set specific, circumscribed times to discuss issues that arise secondary to your roles and responsibilities. Make an agreement that within the close quarters of the home, personal business, i.e., business not related to parenting, is to be discussed separately and away from the children. Agreeing upfront to stick to a business relationship at this time will go a long way to helping, and your children avoid damaging personal conflicts.

Arnie Sheinvold
USA

Keeping the boat steady

Imagine you and your spouse are in a boat on the sea. If you have children, they are sitting between you. Staying on course, (paying bills, childcare, cooking, house cleaning, washing, etc.) means that you have to coordinate rowing with your spouse because one person on their own will not succeed in making progress. If your spouse becomes provocative and causes your boat to be unsettled, or stands up and rocks the boat in anger, your job is to stay calm and keep the boat steady. While your instinct is to respond in kind, you know that the consequence of joining in and rocking the boat in reciprocal anger is that you could all end up in the water. Knowing this also keeps you from becoming reactive and challenging to your spouse, because you will be the one threatening the safety of everyone in the boat. Responding in a neutral, or sometimes positive manner aims to keep everyone secure. Remind yourself that managing difficulties in this way empowers you. Tell yourself that this level of patience is temporary and is time-limited.



Practicing composure and patience needs cultivation. This means that you are engaging in the process of trial and error. You will not always behave as you mean to and will most likely make mistakes. What is important is that you learn from your missteps. Talk to yourself kindly and aim to make changes to whatever patterns of behaviour need to change, so that you do not repeat any actions that took you off course. You know that everything changes, and how you behave now will have far-reaching consequences. Holding onto the goal of keeping the boat steady with endurance and perseverance, guides you towards your goal, reaching land.

Delma Sweeney

Ireland

What to do if you've lost income due to job loss or reduced hours

Everyone is stressed about the pandemic, there is tension in your relationship, and you're stuck at home with your partner without an outlet. To make matters worse, you've experienced a loss of income.

If that income loss is causing a major strain, there are some ways to reduce pressure and give yourself breathing room. Having an honest conversation about money is a key component to easing agitation, so you come through with your sanity intact.

First, evaluate your current finances. What are your sources of income? Find out if you're eligible for unemployment benefits and, if so, apply immediately. Keep in mind that you could be eligible even if you've just lost hours and not lost your job completely.

Now, make a list of your expenses and liabilities. Identify which are discretionary and non-discretionary and cancel all non-discretionary expenses (e.g., subscriptions, streaming services, etc.) Review your automatic account debits and confirm that there is still enough income to cover them. If not, cancel them. Then, create a new budget that reflects your reality, so you are spending within your means. This is very important!

Next, make a list of the accounts that you're concerned about not meeting payments and contact them. Explain there was a job loss and ask about programs to support those who have lost income (e.g., deferring payments).

With an idea of where your finances stand, create a plan to address concerns in order of importance. Defining goals will help you stay on target. Keep your budget in a place you can access it often to have a clear picture of your cash flow.

Also, consider how much you have in emergency and other savings. There are programs that will allow you to access retirement funds without an early withdrawal penalty. Knowing your options and how much you have in reserves will help you make wise choices about your current budget.

Finally, use the extra time to network online. While many companies may not be hiring due to the pandemic, you'll be top of mind when they begin again.

It's important that you and your spouse have an honest conversation about money. If you cannot do it on your own, engage a professional mediator to facilitate the conversation - this could be a huge help! Having this conversation focused on problem-solving can ease tension related to losing income.

Leah Hadley

USA

Moving from anxiety to clarity

COVID-19 has magnified the social problems and disparities which already exist in our communities. Fragile families struggling with low incomes, lack of secure housing, domestic violence, child abuse and neglect, mental and/or physical health challenges, substance abuse, and other issues become even more vulnerable under the stress brought on by this pandemic. The same is true for unhappy partnerships: quarantine serves to intensify existing negative feelings and perhaps the realization that a relationship cannot be salvaged.

Years in therapy taught me I can't control other people's actions, only my own. That lesson is particularly important in the divorce/separation context. Relationships don't always last forever, but how you choose to manage the disentanglement is critical. Thoughtful, honest conversations related to allocating assets and debt equitably can be excruciatingly difficult. "Fair" depends on where you stand. Agreements on appropriate discipline, access to technology, and expectations surrounding children's educational, social, and emotional needs are difficult to achieve in intact families. For many struggling through this important life transition, it makes sense to seek professional help.

Rather than hiring an attorney to fight, consider engaging a neutral third party to facilitate difficult conversations that provide clarity and move people forward. I always tell clients: Litigation is about the PAST – who did what (or didn't), blame, accusations, failures. Mediation is about the FUTURE – how can we build a collaborative path forward that everyone can live with? We can't control the past or future, but we can mindfully engage in the present. Having a "Good Divorce" can be a reality.

"When we finally let go of what no longer serves us, what we're holding, what we know we make room to invite new wisdom, new choices, new freedom." – Tamara Levitt

Katie Bennett

USA

Living in Harmony during COVID-19

Living during Covid-19 with someone you have emotionally and physically separated from is no doubt challenging. When you fall into troubled waters it is not the water that kills you it's allowing yourself to be consumed by it, instead focus on achieving a 'living harmony' with these three practical skills.

1. **Find your Integral Vision:** Staying close to how you see your family.
2. **Take the view from the Balcony:** Rise above the battle and see the bigger picture.
3. **Segment in Pursuit of Harmony:** Categorise the everyday issues that get in the way of harmony and cocreate a set of ground rules for them.

Integral vision: Deep down all parents have an Integral Vision of their family. Finding your Integral Vision is a commitment by both adults to hold everyone, young and old, united and accountable in their actions. Fear inhibits the development of integral vision. This fear can be addressed through open, clear, age appropriate communication. The essence of Integral Vision is the active pursuit of a harmonious living relationship for all parties in conflict.

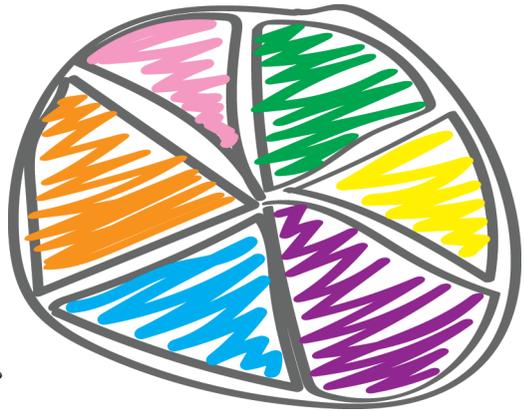


The Balcony: The view from the balcony is seeing life for all family members from the outside looking in, setting aside all emotional elements. Think ahead, ask yourself, 'looking back in five years' what would I want to be most proud of. Ask others in the house to ask themselves the same question - It might surprise you that you all want harmony and reduced conflict. Now it's time to talk to all family members about creating a simple plan to find ways of living in harmony.

Pursuit of Harmony:

To align conceptually as parents, focus on consistency in communications and decision making in all matters.

Think trivial pursuits categories.



Blue - Geography

Who sleeps where ?
Who cooks or cleans and when?



Pink - Entertainment

Who gets the TV, Laptops, ipads, Remote Controls and what are the time limits for same?
Board Games – great when bored!



Yellow - History

Forget it unless it is positive and reinforcing of good times as a family. If it is raking up old wounds, keep history in the past.



Purple - Art and Literature

Read, draw, find productions of school plays and novels for examinations and watch to enjoy. Many of the great artistic houses are showing free performances or virtual tours of galleries. Do it together if possible.



Green - Science and Nature

School work timetables, e-attendance,
Who does the supervision and homework checking
Get back to nature, go for short walks, do some gardening, give children mini pots to grow their own private gardens. Make time capsules.



Orange - Sports and Leisure

Stay active, stay sober, nothing good happens or is said when intoxicated. Get Outdoors, do leisure activities while keeping social distancing and government guidelines.

Margaret Considine

Ireland

“G” – It’s A Pandemic And We’re Stuck With Each Other

OK, I get it. A lot has happened, and you’ve come out on the short end of the stick a few (or many) times; and still, you have to deal with this other person. Whether you’re still in the same house, separated, or finally divorced, you’ve still got kids together, so you’re stuck.

So here’s a way to think about it. You may be justified in how angry or hurt you are, but we have a new situation here – a Pandemic, for crying out loud! How about you try the “G” plan? This isn’t anything to do with what someone else deserves or wants. It doesn’t have anything to do with you being a nicer person. And it certainly doesn’t have anything to do with your wish that they would change. Been there – done that. It isn’t even about survival. The “G” plan is about being our best grown-up self in a really bad situation.

The plan is a commonsense framework for changing some of your own behaviors, and, for just a few more weeks (maybe months), altering how old patterns of behavior are clinging to your brain cells.

Here’s how you try it out - for just a half-day, and then maybe another, and another:

G #1 - Generate a grudge-free environment for yourself.

Make a commitment to yourself that you won’t rehearse, review, re-live stories of grievances with the other person, even in your own mind. Plan ahead for what you can do to move into a different mode when it starts to happen. Turn on music and dance until you have to stop to catch your breath. Work a word puzzle, try to stand on one foot with your eyes closed as long as you can, learn to do the game/motions to the “Cups Song” (web links here). If you have kids old enough and they don’t already know the Cups song, teach them. If they already know it, have them teach you. All of these activities require that your brain works in a different way than when you are reviewing hurts.

G #2 - Get a sense of your priorities.

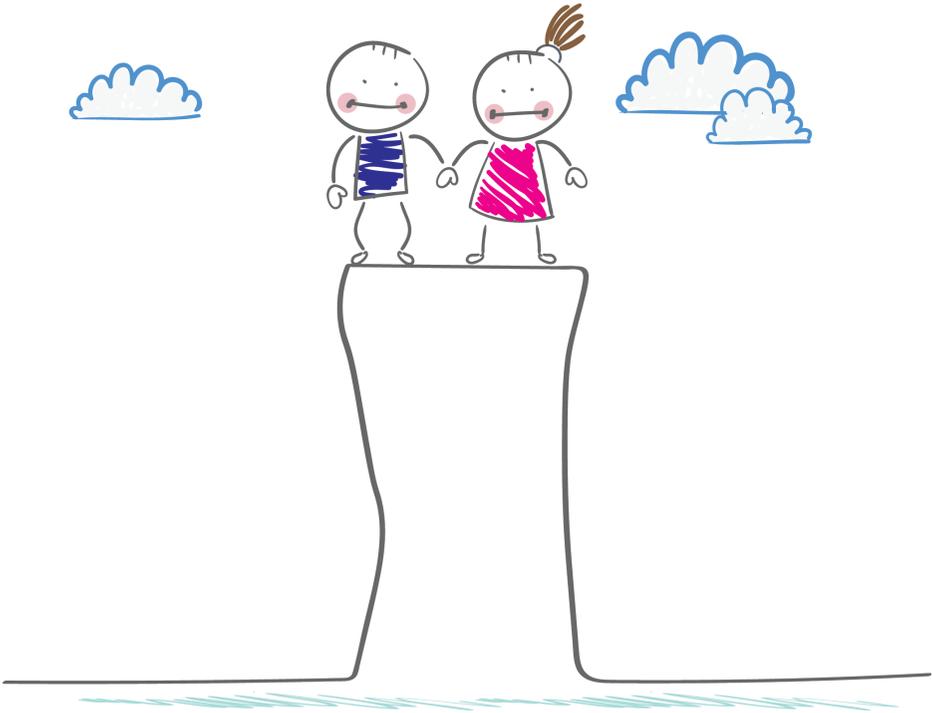
In any disagreement or looming storm-cloud, ask yourself if it really matters in the big picture. If all that is involved is your ego, try stepping aside.

G #3 - Give up having the last word.

No need to have to make the final comment. That includes deep sighs, eye-rolling, or muttering “whatever” dismissively.

G #4 - Graciousness feels good.

Thank the other person for something, whether it is something they did today or ten years ago. Don’t expect to have the same done for you. You aren’t trading thanks, you are giving it.



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G #5 - Generosity makes us happier people.

I know – you probably already feel like you've given more than they have. Openheartedly do one small kindness that you think would make the other person's day just a bit better – take a picture of them with their child(ren) if you are all in the same house, send them a fun photo of their kid(s), make cookies to share. They don't even need to notice – this is about your well-being and not about whether they appreciate it.

G #6 - Go to bed, knowing you did well.

It is nice to drift off to sleep, knowing that you took the opportunity to be your best self. And if you feel like you fell short? Well then...

G #7 - Get up glad to have the chance to try again.

Susanne Terry

USA

Impatience, conflict, and COVID-19

Impatience can be a big contributor to conflict and an obstacle to effective conflict resolution. I started writing a post about this impatience/conflict connection long before so many of us were stuck at home, working or not, impatiently wondering when we'll ever be set free.

We are all under stress.

We are all under tremendous stress, which can lead to outbursts with co-workers, or even with those we love. We are deprived of so much that we can want immediate gratifications or quick solutions. Many of us find it challenging to be at home full time instead of going off to work and having space from family concerns. Others of us are courageously going to work in dangerous situations, worried we will bring the illness home to our loved ones.

Even working from home feels different.

I have worked out of a home office for years, seeing clients, consulting, and delivering some training by Zoom. But I am still deeply affected by all the changes.

I wish I had a HazMat suit to put on before I go to the grocery store. I miss going to the gym and out to eat. I miss seeing my friends live and in person. I get frustrated and fearful, trying to sterilize everything before bringing it into the house. I love my wife, but our house feels way too small at times. Other times I feel like I'm four years old, and I want to hide under the covers from a scary and treacherous world.

Conflict Resolution requires patience.

In these difficult circumstances, it is, of course, helpful to be willing to listen, to speak our truth, and to problem-solve at work and with family, but it is challenging not to be impatient with others about that process as well! We may irritably want them to get to the point quickly.

One truth I know--trying to hurry and force solutions simply doesn't work to heal disagreements. Avoiding conflicts or resolving them effectively requires patience, even when it feels in short supply (along with toilet paper). Why? People need time to process, to let things sink in, to work through their resentments and other feelings.

Impatient Services Director

For a while, I was tracking all the kinds of jobs on. Indeed, the big job search site that requires people to have conflict management skills. One job opening had the (misspelled) title of "Impatient Services Director". I laughed so hard because I was certainly qualified for that position! For me, it is life-long work to become more patient.

So, no matter what your current circumstances, how can you find more patience and have less conflict?



Here are a few suggestions:

1. **Breathe** in and out a few times first before responding or acting. (Note: heavy passive-aggressive sighing doesn't count).
2. **Give yourself and others a break.** Remember, we are all under stress and may not be as calm or articulate as usual.
3. **Don't expect as much.** Anxiety is draining. Looking for food or supplies is draining. Feeling at risk when you have to leave the house is draining. Staying in the house with kids, spouse, or alone is all draining. Naps are good, if possible.
4. **Reframe**, even after a meltdown. Your day and communication style can restart at any moment.
5. **Forgive yourself and others.** Be gentle. Remember love. Remember, we are all doing the best we can in a frightening crisis. Remember, this too shall pass.

Lorraine Segal

USA

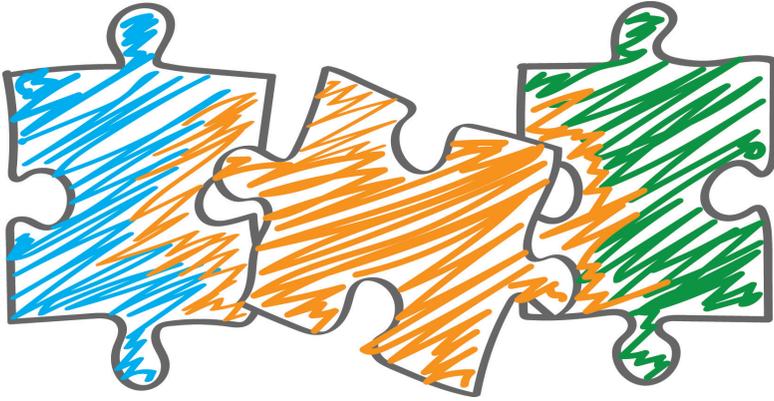
3-Step problem solving: Improving any relationship with practical skill-building

Have you had the same argument repeatedly? Do your attempts to resolve problems leave you feeling alienated and further apart rather than closer together? You can push the reset button and improve your ability to engage in difficult conversations successfully. Plus, you can model this with your children to teach them a useful life skill that will give them an important edge in their own relationship negotiations. All relationships involve negotiation: Preferences about the need for time together vs. apart; dividing household and parenting chores; spending family resources including time and money; developing and disciplining your children; and even preferences around the frequency and importance of sexual intimacy in your romantic relationship.

Conflict is a normal, neutral part of life. How we handle it makes it positive or negative. When conflict arises, remember, “This is an opportunity to improve a relationship.” How? By listening to understand their perspective and feelings deeply, show respect by refraining from interruptions, asking questions, and conveying that you want to find a solution together.

Conflict comes from unmet expectations, but we rarely make our expectations clear and explicit or negotiate share expectations. For example, I usually do the cooking at home, but during the COVID-19 crisis, I am also teaching online and homeschooling my teenager. I might assume my partner can see that I cannot continue to do all the cooking and be upset when he does not voluntarily step up. Yet he is thinking, “If she needs help, she will ask.” This conflict in expectations leads to unnecessary conflict. The cure: regular family meetings where we share our needs and preferences, then reach agreements about who will do what. If something changes, we will revisit these agreements.

Try this formula for 3-step problem solving, whether the problem is between you and your spouse/partner or with your kids, family, friends, or co-workers. This formula avoids the traps of defensiveness, attack-counterattack, personalizing conflict, and reaching an impasse.



1) **Normalize & Show Optimism:**

Normalize conflict: Any two people living/working together will experience conflict. We can use this as an opportunity to build our ability to work together successfully. We can do it!

Frame it like this: “It’s totally normal that two or more people who work/live together will encounter conflict. I am sure that if we put our heads together, we can work it out in a way that works for us both (or all)”.

2) **Conflict Comes from Unmet Expectations:**

“What were your expectations about how this was going to go? My expectation was....”
“In what ways was your expectation met, unmet, shared, not shared?”

3) **Negotiate shared expectations...revisit when new problems arise:**

Write down agreements to ensure the shared memory of the expectations and to reduce misunderstandings. If agreements are violated, revisit them to ask why this isn’t working and what would work better. Apologize for mistakes, find a way to make amends, and prevent future transgressions. Negotiate to reach mutual needs.

Susan Raines

USA

Surviving during a Pandemic

It is not always easy to say what you feel; sometimes, there are emotions, thoughts difficult to explain in words. Each man is like an artist who seeks a perfect harmony between the mind and emotions, who tries to understand and approach of daily life with his thought automatisms that serve to limit or encourage in any context. At the center of our existence, on the empty canvas to be filled, there is communication, which is certainly one of the most important and complex operations that man is able to do and is at the basis of the structures of reciprocity and exchange that are central in human society. It is something that brings the human relationship from the essential being to all life, without communication, the human relationship would be comparable and an image of the search for its faded outlines.

The current historical moment, however, has confronted us with an “imposed” change, which is suffering for the human being that is difficult to accept and to bear. Our vision of the world, of our personal and social existence, has been distorted, we are faced with the unexpected; the impossibility of having total control of what is and will be our short-term life.

First of all, before being a professional woman, I am a wife, and a mother who has never before realized how necessary a close relationship is one of the most difficult engagements to manage. Now, more than ever, we realize how fragile interpersonal relationships can be and how sometimes individualism, egocentricity, and selfishness have led us to a sort of loneliness that the current situation of impotence has necessarily sharpened. Just as the fact of not only having to think about personal needs, our problems but also those of the people around us (despite all the possible affection and love) significantly increase the sense of being in trouble, but they also give us the possibility of learning that only the present moment exists with all its imperfections; because the human being is imperfect and we can all be “perfectly- imperfect.”

Now, look for a unique and certain answer to the question: “how will I ever survive this pandemic?” It is not possible; it is not because there cannot be a single and correct answer; there are as many as there are human beings living on our planet. However, one thing must be clear to all of us (and of which little can be talked about), domestic walls cannot be the outburst of violence, dissatisfaction, anger, whether verbal or physical, even if it is a phenomenon that unfortunately and surely it will be amplifying; I would like to think that all this can be” brought to light,” without shame, without fear but with the certainty that someone, be they the police, a confidant, a friend can help and can also read the silences because the silence is imperfect, the silence says more than a thousand words.



Non è sempre facile trasmettere ciò che si prova , che si sente; a volte ci sono emozioni, pensieri difficili da spiegare a parole. Ogni uomo è come un'artista che cerca una perfetta sintonia fra mente ed emozioni, che cerca di comprendere ed approcciare la vita quotidiana con i suoi automatismi di pensiero che possono limitare o favorire in ogni contesto. Al centro della nostra esistenza, sulla tela vuota da riempire, c'è la comunicazione, che è sicuramente una delle più importanti e complesse operazioni che l'uomo è in grado di compiere ed è alla base delle strutture di reciprocità e scambio che sono centrali nella società umana. E' un qualche cosa che porta la relazione umana dall'essenza all'esistenza, senza la comunicazione la relazione umana sarebbe paragonabile ad un'immagine alla ricerca dei suoi sbiaditi contorni.

L'attuale momento storico, però, ci ha messo di fronte ad un cambiamento” imposto”, che è per l'essere umano una sofferenza difficile da accettare e sopportare. La nostra visione del mondo, della nostra esistenza personale e sociale ne è stata stravolta , siamo di fronte all'inaspettato; all'impossibilità di avere un totale controllo di quello che è e sarà la nostra vita a breve termine.

In primo luogo, prima di essere una professionista, sono una moglie ed una mamma che mai come ora si è resa conto di come un rapporto necessariamente stretto è uno degli impegni più difficili da gestire. Ora più che mai ci si rende conto di quanto i rapporti interpersonali possano essere fragili e di come a volte l'individualismo, l'egocentrismo e l'egoismo ci abbiano portato ad una sorta di solitudine che l'attuale situazione di impotenza ha necessariamente acuito. Così come il fatto di non dover solo pensare alle necessità personali, ai nostri problemi ma anche a quelli delle persone che ci circondano (nonostante tutto l'affetto e l'amore possibili) aumentano notevolmente il senso di essere in affanno, ma ci danno anche la possibilità di imparare che esiste solo il momento presente con tutte le sue imperfezioni; perché l'essere umano è imperfetto e tutti possiamo essere “perfettamente imperfetti”.

Ora cercare una risposta unica e certa alla domanda “come potrò mai sopravvivere a questa pandemia?” non è possibile; non lo è perché non può esistere una risposta unica e corretta, ce ne sono tante quanti sono gli esseri umani che vivono sul nostro pianeta. Una cosa deve essere però ben chiara a tutti noi (e della quale poco si riesce a parlare), le pareti domestiche non possono essere lo sfogo di violenze, insoddisfazioni, rabbia siano esse verbali o fisiche, anche se è un fenomeno che purtroppo e sicuramente si starà amplificando; mi piacerebbe pensare che tutto ciò possa essere portato alla luce, senza vergogna, senza paura ma con la certezza che qualcuno, siano essi le forze dell'ordine, un confidente, un amico possano aiutare e possano leggere anche i silenzi perché il silenzio è imperfetto, il silenzio dice più di mille parole.

Dott.ssa Tiziana Magnaghi

Italy

Five uncomplicated ways couples can turn arguments into discussions

Couples can have big fights, frequent conflict, and bicker, yet still have healthy, fulfilling relationships. We know that conflict can damage a relationship, so why do some relationships with frequent conflict nevertheless weather the storms, survive — and even thrive?

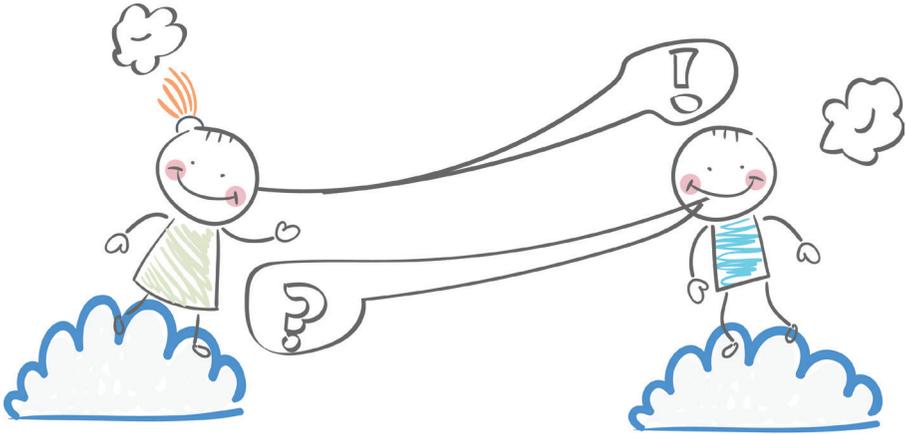
Research suggests that these three conditions help protect couples from the negative effects of conflict:

- **How well you think your partner understands your thoughts, feelings, and point of view**, even if they don't agree with you. This “perceived understanding” seems to buffer a relationship from the downsides of conflict, helping couples recover better from arguments and view conflict as a healthy part of a normal relationship.
- **Being able to “psychologically distance” yourself in the heat of an argument.** Psychological distancing is just a mental trick of the mind to help you look at the argument from the outside in. Psychological distancing has been shown to help with self-control and problem solving, key factors for conflict resolution.
- **Avoiding rumination.** Rumination is dwelling on hurt and angry feelings. This kind of “self-immersive” behavior after a fight can fuel ongoing anger and cause displaced aggression (such as lashing out at your child, who innocently wanders into the room at the wrong time).

You can use this information if you're still together and want to keep your relationship healthy, and you can use this information if you're separated and want to minimize the frustration of conflict. Here are five ways to use it:

Agree in advance on a “pause” word or phrase. Anyone in the conversation may use the pause word to signal they believe the argument is escalating and they want to call a timeout. When one of you uses the pause phrase, the discussion ends for now; even a few minutes' break can help. A pause word or phrase might be, “I'm calling pause” or, more humorously, “Ok, let's fight about it!”

Mentally distance yourself in time. Use the pause to picture yourself a year from now, looking back on this argument. Silently describe to yourself how you feel about the argument, as you look back at it. This quick mental trick, called “prospection,” is helpful for regaining emotional self-control, improving relationship well-being, and boosting insight.



Acknowledge even when you don't agree. Acknowledging doesn't mean you agree, just that you understand. When you acknowledge their point and feelings, you help build the kind of "perceived understanding" that makes relationships more resilient during stressful times.

Give back the last word. Even if you're separated or divorced, if you have children together, it's better for everyone not to damage the relationship more. If you've got to have the last word, try to make it one that conveys you "get" your conversation partner.

Replace ruminating with this thought exercise. If you find yourself dwelling on hurt feelings and angry thoughts after an argument, redirect your mind to consider the argument from the perspective of an impartial observer who wants the best for you both. How would they describe what happened? What would they suggest you do differently next time? What positive aspect would they have noticed in the argument? It can be helpful to do this exercise in writing if you can.

Tammy Lenski

USA

The balm of routine isolation

There are many reading this book who are lucky enough to be fairly content in their marriage. At its very best, a successful union supports individual growth, whilst nurturing a shared sense of purpose in life. At its very worst, it can feel like you're unable to breathe. In these trying times, even the most content of couples can experience additional stress, (and can begin to dread the sight of each other!) Here are a few key points that might help weather these unusual times.



1. Difference perspectives in exceptional times.

Accept that these circumstances are abnormal. Try not to expect too much from each other, and when tempers flare, forgive quickly. Both partners will experience this period of time very differently, so acknowledge that about yourself, and each other.

2. Isolation can be invigorating.

Establishing a routine, even if it's light on the specifics, will benefit both of you. It sets a tone for your day together, but more importantly, for your day apart. Dedicated time alone and giving yourself space can be energising. I would suggest that this is especially important if you have children living at home. Even if you don't feel you need it every day, making it an established part of your daily routine will prevent a big build up from happening.

3. Reflective to be effective.

Like in "normal" life, you'll have good days and bad. Touch base with each other at the end of each day and reflect on what worked and what didn't. Even little tweaks to your shared day can make all the difference.

The next step is to set aside some time with your partner to discuss these points. Open a bottle of something nice and be open with one another. Although this piece was written with the dark cloud of Covid-19 looming overhead, practising acceptance, indulging in isolation, and thoughtful communication will lend themselves well to fostering a happy union.

Marie Freeman

Ireland

Carpe diem during coronavirus

Though the pandemic is upending almost all areas of life, you can flip the script and find new opportunities for yourself and your family, even in these scary and uncertain times.

To make forward progress, your kids need to know you're there for them—no matter what. Your undivided attention helps them feel safe and secure. When talking with a child of any age, look in their eyes and listen closely to what they say.

Make it a no-brainer to serve up plenty of reassuring face-to-face contact and hugs by establishing no-tech-use time periods and areas of the house, especially for meals and bedtime.

Everyone needs structure and a sense of routine. So your kids are durable in body and mind—whether doing academics or not—they need daily 3-D full-sensory play or other exercises (preferably with some time outdoors), skill-building and/or chores, and plenty of sleep. Having direction to the day also ensures kids won't disappear for hours into their technology. Ambiguous or absent device guidance can make them anxious, prone to fights with you, and an increased risk for digital dependence—right down to the toddlers.

Boundaries on screen time and content can be a relief for kids by giving them something to look forward to or work toward. Ask each child what they want to do tech-wise and why then consult the American Academy of Pediatrics Family Media Plan to help you sculpt a plan of your own.

For multi-function households to function, all hands are needed on deck. When kids do chores, they build self-reliance skills and an empowering sense of purpose—plus, you'll feel less overworked and resentful.

Sleep deprivation was rampant in the days before coronavirus. Phones, TVs, game consoles, tablets, and computers are guaranteed sleep disruptors, so ban them from bedrooms at night (yes, even yours). Dust off those trusty alarm clocks and give them to everyone in the household.

Despite your best planning, frustration will likely be a regular fact of life. One way to calm down is to step away from the stressful situation, place your hands on a flat surface, close your eyes, and take slow, deep breaths. Family meetings can also break up interpersonal logjams and allow civil discussion of household progress and policies.

Finally, try to set aside your worries and savor the opportunities for love, fun, and learning in the Time of Coronavirus. They won't last forever.

Jenifer Joy Madden

USA

Pandemic teen parenting



Today is prom. . . except it is most definitely not happening. I think back to the day I sent a text to my 16 and 18-year-old teens at the end of Spring Break announcing they would not have school for another two weeks. They were elated! No school! They planned to sleep in, hang out with friends, and take on more shifts at their restaurant jobs.

Weeks (and weeks) have gone by. They cannot believe they were so happy to be out of school. While they are sleeping in, they are not hanging out with friends, and they are not working at their restaurant jobs at all, much less taking on extra shifts. They are bored and frustrated. And let's talk about how it affects us parents. . . they are home. . . all day. . . and all night. . . day after day.

If you have teens, you know exactly what I am talking about. Pre-pandemic you either spent little snippets of time with your teen in the car as you drove them to all of their activities (while they stared at their phones) or you were waving goodbye to them as they drove themselves. They used to be at school, at work, at their activities, or with their friends. Now they are home full time, and they require some different parenting.

Here are some ideas for parenting your teens during a pandemic:

1. **Set the pandemic rules.** As things change, let your teens know what restrictions you expect them to follow. Where are they allowed to go? Who are they allowed to spend time with? Do they have to wear a mask?
2. **Keep a schedule.** Even if your teens are participating in school from home, they probably do not have a rigid school schedule like they had when they were actually going to school. Have your teens put together a schedule that they will follow during the week to keep up with their homework and “classroom” work. This helps even if “free time” takes up a lot of space on the schedule.
3. **Insist on week-day productivity.** In addition to school responsibilities, make a daily to-do list for each teen. This is a great time for them to learn about what it takes to keep the house going and take on extra responsibilities. Cleaning bathrooms builds character, and heck, they’ve got so much time on their hands, organizing closets is a good idea too!
4. **Talk about their spending.** If your teens were used to you providing them with spending money or having open access to the Amazon account, this is especially a good topic. Set limits on what they are allowed to buy with your money during this time. Gas and groceries may be acceptable purchases, but fast food and X-Box games may not.
5. **Talk about changes in your financial situation.** Be upfront about changes in your work situation and how that affects the family financially. You may need to cancel all of the extras or make deeper cuts. An honest conversation will help them be part of the family’s decisions to reduce spending, and you’ll get less backlash for cancelling Netflix.
6. **Model good emotional health habits.** To the extent they are not completely ignoring you, teens are watching you for clues about your stress level. Take time to exercise, meditate, or do things that lower your stress. If you are completely on edge about the situation, you may want to do your best parenting acting to shield your teens from the brunt of it.

One more important tip for parents working from home, based on recent personal experience.

Teens have conversations with their parents via text, even if you are one room away from them. That means it is important that **you turn off your notifications** if you are screen sharing during a video conference meeting. You don’t want your clients to see the ridiculous text from your daughter asking, “Mom, did you put booze in the tea?”

Andi Paus

USA

Is this Corona crisis a good time to dive deeper into our relationships?

When I was a student of Architecture, many years ago, I began, what became a habit, to wander the streets of Tel-Aviv and stare at Bauhaus buildings. I had to close my eyes to imagine the beauty of these buildings because the sight was crumbling buildings with peeling plasters, broken windowsills, falling balconies, and exposed concrete. So much money was spent building these monuments of art, but how come one their beauty was not there?

Later in life, when I was preparing for my wedding, I was amazed by the incredible amount of money that goes into splashy weddings-- planning, food and drink, flowers, clothes and jewelry, photos, music, and other frills. Advertisements promoted the idea that spending lots of money on a wedding day is proof of love and commitment to each other, and a high-priced ring is an assurance of enduring love and a happily-ever-after marriage. However, a 2014 study by two economists at Emory University found that couples who spent most on their weddings were most likely to end up divorced. The cheaper a wedding, the longer and happier a marriage – and that’s what’s really important. Interestingly, the study indicated that keeping the cost of a wedding down by brutally cutting the guest list is not a good idea. Inviting many friends and family members is critical for a stable marriage, even if you invite guests only for a reception and drink. Also, a honeymoon should not be avoided. Couples who went on a honeymoon, of any kind, had a much lower risk of divorce than couples who didn’t, regardless of what they spent.

So, what is happening here? What is the connection between historic buildings and marriage? Both fall apart without maintenance. As in the case of buildings that need constant maintenance, relationships must be continuously cultivated. It is not enough to meet “the one” and toss a costly party. We still have to nurture our relationships. While most of us go to the service shop for periodic car maintenance, and many go for annual physical checkups, we do not regularly checkup on our relationships. Our honeymoon will not hold a lifetime of marriage. Relationships need to be cultivated. What do you do to ensure your relationships do not break down: Perhaps we should take many honeymoons. Spend time together. Regularly check in with our spouse, our friends, employees.

Everything needs a recurrent examination—a periodic reflection on what’s working, what’s not working, and what can be done differently to make it work better. Coronavirus time is a rare opportunity to step back, pause, reflect on, and reset our relationships. Here are a few questions to get you started:

1. How are you feeling right now about your relationships?
2. What habits or routines enrich your relationships?
3. What habits or routines interrupt the flow of your connections?
4. What can you let go to make space for what is new?
5. What repairs can you make for you and your relationships to come out of this crisis stronger?
6. What relational practices need to be redesigned and improved to hold and appreciate our relationships?
7. What is really important for me that I can change?

This unprecedented time, like any crisis, brings an opportunity. Try to understand what is presently hidden for you and those who are close to you. While we normally do not have much time for ourselves and our relationships with our family and friends, now we are invited to pause, away from the pressures of daily life, and question the meaning of our future normality. Resilient relationships seem to be the foundation of best outcomes and sustainable existence.

Tzofnat Peleg Baker

USA

Living together, not considering separation or divorce

So, you think you finally have your family routine all figured out and then it gets turned on its head! Your children may have been in school every day and you and your partner were both working. Then all of a sudden, out of nowhere it seems, not only are your energetic children back in the house full time but so are you and your partner! Many people have to add to this the worry of elderly family members, some of who have underlying health conditions. So how do we adjust to these new circumstances?

Routine will be your best friend:

We all know that children thrive on routine and structure, so it is important to put this into place as soon as possible. Every family is different and while there is much information on the internet telling you what you should be doing, it is important to set out a routine that works for you and your family. It also does not need to be militant in style! If you now have to work during the day, get school work completed and look after your house and each other, you will quickly realise that you can't do everything perfectly all of the time and nor should you think you need to.

Setting up a flexible but consistent daily routine with your children will help them to understand when certain tasks need to be completed. Asking your children to come up with their fun games and activities will encourage their imagination and help them to feel like they are contributing to your family routine. Other life lessons can be a wonderful way for them to learn. Schedule some time for baking, gardening, or teaching them simple everyday tasks like folding the laundry or filling the dishwasher. It does not have to be all about school books!

Communication with your partner and children is key!

It can be beneficial to discuss with your partner how your weekly workload should be divided at the beginning of the week. Alternating your working hours and if possible, setting up designated office spaces in a quieter part of your house will help you to feel more organised and focused.

Children can feel scared or unsure of what is happening at this time. It is important to explain to them in an age-appropriate way, what is happening with COVID 19 and why we are setting up these new routines for them to feel safe and secure.

Finances and the worry this can bring

When it comes to finances, this can be an extremely worrying time. Many people have lost their jobs and others have had their wages reduced. Maybe consider contacting your bank and asking them for a payment break on your mortgage or loans. Setting up a new budget to try and manage with less income can also take the pressure off. Talking to your partner if you are worried and working through it together will help you both to feel better.

Time Out!

Remember, as much as you love your family, it is necessary to carve out time for yourself to unwind from the day. This may involve reading a good book, going for a walk, or just being by yourself to do nothing. Taking care of yourself first will help you to take care of others. Plan a treat for you and your family so that you have something to look forward to at the end of the week. This may be a picnic in the garden or a movie day snuggled up on the couch.

Although it may be hard to find positives in the midst of this crisis, remember that you are getting to spend more time with your loved ones and this may not be possible in the future. If you are feeling out of your depth, try to reach out to a family member, friend, or partner. There are also professional organisations available to give you helpful advice on finances, relationships, and much more, so please do not feel like you are on your own.

Shauna Lardner

Ireland

Living in strange and challenging times: What children need

Whilst significant attention has been spent on how to deal with self-isolation and social distancing, for those parents who are in a marriage, or relationship they don't want to be in, this can be a very difficult, highly stressful time. Often children suffer the most during the tension, arguments and stress due to the unsettling atmosphere in their home.

But of course, it doesn't have to be this way.

Divorce is stressful for parents and children alike and although reactions will depend on a child's age, temperament, and the circumstances surrounding the split, many children feel sad, frustrated, angry, and anxious. It's not uncommon for them to become naughty at home or at school (under normal circumstances) because of those feelings.

Help your children during this time of change by consciously minimising the tension that this situation creates. Be patient while everyone adjusts to the new situation. Respond openly and honestly to your children's concerns, worries and questions so that you can help them through this difficult time.

It is vital that your children, to feel nurtured, supported and heard, and for them not to be damaged or traumatised by the whole experience.

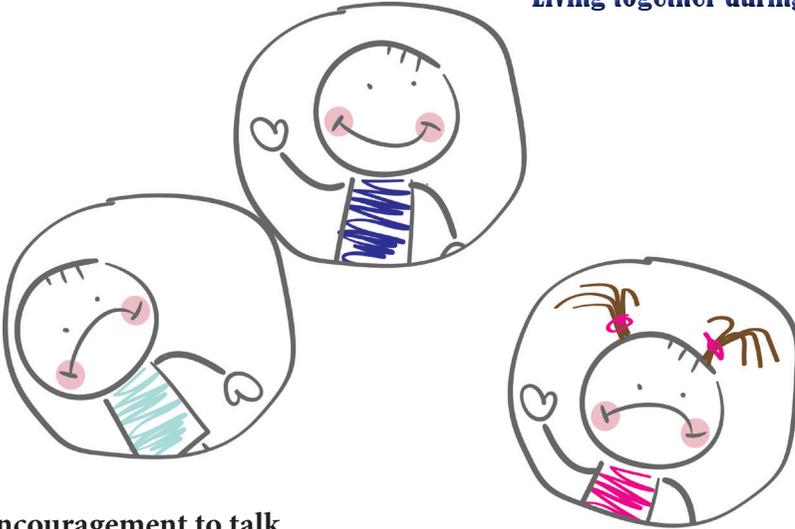
Here are some things children need to hear from you at this time:

Reassurance.

The most important thing you can give your children is reassurance. Let them know that everything is going to be okay, and that you and their other parent still love them very much.

Lots of children feel in some way to blame for your break up so it's vital that you dispel this belief and remove the weight of guilt from their shoulders early on in the process.

What has happened between you is not their fault.



Encouragement to talk.

It's important for children to feel heard. Talk openly with your children and encourage them to share their feelings.

Think about what you want say beforehand as children benefit from hearing similar messages from both of you. Keep your explanations simple and easy to understand.

Many children may not want to talk about the changes at the same time that you want to. Be sensitive to when they appear open and ready to talk; it's important not to force them.

They will talk to you in their own time. Just make it clear that you're always there for them.

Not being negative about your former partner

It can be tempting to criticise your partner in front of your children.

It might make you feel better in the short term but it's not in the best interests of your children to encourage them to think poorly of their Mum or Dad.

Doing your best.

You can't have control over everything that your children see, hear, are told or experience, but with a more detached, calm mindset you can all go through this time of change and challenge with dignity, respect and confidence.

Find simple ways to manage your own stress.

Keeping yourself as physically and emotionally healthy as possible helps combat the effects of stress. By taking care of your own needs, you can ensure that you are in the best possible place to take care of your family during this emotional time.

Sue Atkins

UK

Having a PLAN for navigating conflict between parents during a Pandemic

How we react and respond to conflict during these challenging, difficult, and uncertain times is important if we are to provide our children with the best possible childhood that our situation allows. While you will always be the expert on your situation, parents will disagree and it can be helpful to have a process during these unpredictable times to manage one's reactions to conflict and engage in effective and efficient problem solving when parenting from two homes.

Consider having a PLAN; my acronym for a process to improve self-awareness, self-care, compassion, communication, and understanding when stressed.

PLAN stands for:

P = PREPARE

L = LAUNCH

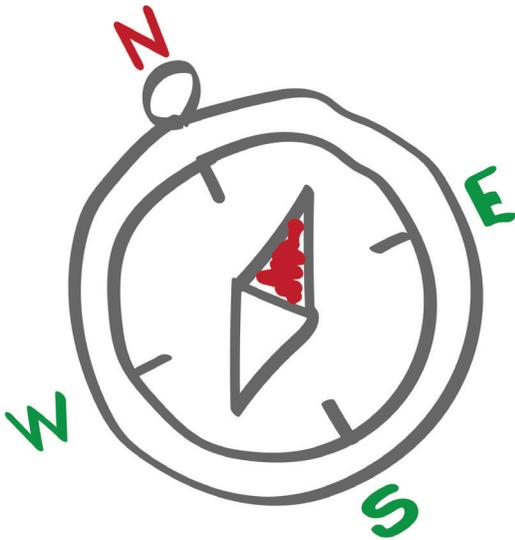
A = ATTEND

N = NEGOTIATE

PREPARE starts with self-care or as the U.S. Army refers to it “Readiness And Resilience” and is anything that helps you to be your best self. Self-care is not considered selfish or self-indulgent but important for you to recharge and replenish your body, mind, and spirit. Self-care should be a daily habit or routine like eating healthy, exercising, or meditation. Before flying on an airplane we hear “put on your own mask first before assisting others” which is a great metaphor and reminder to make self-care a daily priority. Consider searching “self-care assessment” for a tool to reflect on your self-care.

PREPARE reminds you to reflect on your own concerns, needs, and interests, those of your children, and the other parent. **PREPARE** is reflecting on maximizing the children's relationship with both parents while minimizing the children's exposure to toxic parental conflict and determining the issue that needs to be addressed.

LAUNCH the next phase by following your communication protocol in your Parenting Plan to address the specific issue. **LAUNCH** by phone, face-to-face (with social distancing), email, text, or using a parental communication app like “Our Family Wizard” or “coParenter.” Respectful starts will increase your likelihood of success. **LAUNCH** with an I-message, invitation, question, or whatever works best for you.



ATTEND is remembering to be respectful and use your best “business-like” communication skills as you engage in problem-solving to address the issue. ATTEND by not assuming and staying curious.

NEGOTIATE is a reminder that there will always be negotiating with the other parent and you can use the Harvard Program on Negotiation process of:

- Separating the people from the problem.
- Focus on interests instead of positions.
- Invent options for mutual gain.
- Use objective criteria and standards for making decisions (such as the best interests of the children).

Please remember the most important part of PLAN is PREPARE by establishing a habit and routine of self-care that strengthens your readiness and resilience.

David Hubbard

USA

COVID-19 – are you coping with the lockdown?

Whom did you start searching for? A lawyer or a shrink?

Forget it. You may need neither. Keep reading, as it may actually change your life.

I see various reactions to this stay-at-home policy that more than a half of humanity puts up with—depending on the couple's situation.

If the general direction in which the couple goes is set and they are both satisfied, then Covid causes no major upheaval in their everyday life. They may need a few methods to manage their lives and to keep afloat, but nothing special.

If their situation is delicate, and stability has been shaken by an event or unpleasant and unsolved occurrence, then normally after a couple of days of staying 24/7 together, there is a battle. Rancour. Regrets. Blame. They would benefit from online meeting or two with a mediator so that they can straighten things up and they are good to go.

Last but not least- there is a third group. For those who have long been dwelling on a possible separation or divorce, Covid-caused lockdown is like a visit in hell.

But it doesn't have to be so.

Couples in this third group have two options: wait and see or act.

The first option will bring no change but even be worse. It's like a sinking Titanic- slowly, but inevitably going under the water with the crew (the couple and their offspring) aboard.

My advice is to act. Not to wear yourself out by waiting passively. Use the time given to you by this strange virus to change your life for the better.

What you need to do is to put up your courage and speak to your spouse or partner about taking action.

You're not feeling up to it? That's normal. One-to-one conversations between two people going through a rough time, especially in the present conditions, are extremely consuming.

My advice is to speak to a mediator. Ask for an online session during which you can deal with what is bothering you the most. Is it the future or an aspect of the future such as finance? Or is it how to survive right now? In mediation you will tackle the issues in whichever order you choose.

What if you are not sure what you want?

No worries. In family mediation, you'll be able to take strategic decisions. You will just SEE for yourself what is the right thing to do right now.

You think you're unable to speak to your spouse or partner anymore and nothing is going to change it?

In mediation the one who is “weaker” gets support from the mediator who balances the speakers, making sure each one is heard by the other.

You think you don't have the strength or the energy to do it?

Such conversation is certainly an effort, but much less of an effort than a one-to-one conversation. Why?

Mediation begins when two people normally abandon a conversation, feeling powerless or unable to move forward. The presence and guidance provided by the mediator changes everything.

I guarantee. And you can trust me- I am a mediator and a person of public trust.

COVID-19 – jak sobie radzisz z przymusowym odosobnieniem?



Kogo zacząłeś szukać po tych kilku tygodniach w domu? Prawnika czy psychiatry? Zapomnij o tym. Prawdopodobnie nie potrzebujesz ani jednego, ani drugiego. Przeczytaj do końca, to może zmienić Twoje życie.

Polityka #zostanwdomu, która dotknęła połowę ludzkości, powoduje różne reakcje w związkach- w zależności od ich konkretnej sytuacji.

Parom o ustalonym i zaakceptowanym przez oboje osoby kierunku rozwoju nie straszny żaden wirus ani odosobnienie. Po pewnym czasie przyda im się kilka nowych i ciekawych metod zarządzania życiem w zamknięciu, dzięki czemu związek utrzyma się na powierzchni, ale ogólnie rzecz biorąc- niczego wielkiego nie potrzebują.

W związkach, które weszły w koronawirusa w tzw. delikatnym stanie, związki o stabilności naruszonej przez nieprzyjemne wydarzenie lub nierozwiązany problem, po kilku dniach ciągłego przebywania razem 24 godziny na dobę, prawdopodobnie pojawi się walka. Gorycz. Żal. Wzajemne oskarżenia. Jeśli takie osoby chcą dalej być razem, to do rozwiązania problemu potrzebują jedno lub dwa spotkania mediacyjne online, która nastawi je na prawidłowe tory, po czym mogą bez obaw ruszać dalej.

I w końcu- ostatnia grupa. Dla tych, którzy przed koronawirusem od dawna rozważali separację lub rozwód- zamknięcie w domu z partnerem, od którego chce się odejść będzie podobne do wizyty w piekle.

Ale ... wcale nie musi tak być.

Pary z trzeciej grupy mają dwa wyjścia: czekać albo działać.

Pierwsza opcja nie przyniesie niczego dobrego. Jak tonący Titanic- powoli i systematycznie zwiększa zanurzenie i idzie na dno zabierając załogę i pasażerów – rodziców i dzieci.

Living Together, Separating, Divorcing: Surviving During a Pandemic

Ja zawsze radzę działanie. Nie czekaj biernie na rozwój wypadków. Wykorzystaj czas dany Ci przez wirusa i zmień swoje życie na lepsze. Jesteś tego wart!

Musisz zebrać się na odwagę i porozmawiać z małżonkiem na temat dalszych kroków.

Nie czujesz się na siłach? To normalne. Rozmowy w układzie jeden na jeden w parach przechodzących przez ciężki czas są bardzo wyczerpujące, zwłaszcza w obecnych warunkach, kiedy nie można po nich szukać odosobnienia.

Dlatego- zwróć się do mediatora. Poproś o spotkanie online, na którym będziesz mógł porozmawiać o tym, co dla Ciebie najważniejsze. Obawiasz się o przyszłość albo jakiś jej aspekt jak finanse? Czy może o to, jak w spokoju przeżyć najbliższe dni?

W mediacji poruszamy wszystkie kwestie w kolejności, jaką ustalicie.

A jeśli sam nie wiesz, czego chcesz?

Nie martw się. W mediacji rodzinnej podejmiesz ważne dla siebie decyzje. ZOBACZYSZ na własne oczy, co jest dla Ciebie najlepsze.

Sądziś, że nie jesteś już w stanie rozmawiać z małżonkiem i nic tego nie zmieni?

Mediator dba o równowagę rozmowy, dlatego wspiera "słabszą" stronę tak, aby obydwie osoby mogły się usłyszeć.

Sądziś, że nie masz na to siły ani energii?

Taka rozmowa to rzeczywiście wysiłek, ale znacznie mniejszy niż rozmowa jeden na jeden.

Jak to się dzieje?

Mediacja zaczyna się w miejscu, w którym ludzie zazwyczaj kończą rozmowę, w poczuciu bezsilności lub braku postępu. Obecność trzeciej osoby i ukierunkowanie rozmowy, którą daje mediator, zmienia wszystko.

Gwarantuję. Możesz mi wierzyć- jestem przecież mediatorem i osobą zaufania publicznego.

Anna Saczuk

Poland

Common sense is not too common, it's hard-earned

Between 2008 and 2011 Ireland was in the throes of what we called “The Recession “. Everybody earned less than in “The Celtic Tiger Years “ For some couples who wished to separate this significantly reduced their options to live apart.

What has this got to do with 2020 COVID 19, I hear you ask.

The answer lies in the kind of grit, resilience, consistency, and ultimately hope these families showed during this time. I hope that their story will help you now.

During that period these couples negotiated what they could, then put the rest on hold, until the economic situation or their circumstances changed. Sometimes this took a very long time indeed.

Brendan and Shelia were one such couple. Both were employed but their joint income did not cover their financial outgoings, never mind cover the cost of another home and another set of household bills. They decided their best option was to stay put and ride out this storm under the same roof. They had two young daughters they both adored and who adored them.

Neither of them found it easy to accept their life at that time. Both were stressed and felt trapped, with no obvious freedom from each other in sight. Both were very reactive. They would take turns attacking each other or defending their views, alternating between cold shoulder avoidance of each other, to an all-out explosive style, where blame, shame, anger, and tears were the order of the day. With everyone in the family becoming more and more unhappy.

They decided they wanted to live more peacefully. Brendan and Shelia were honest with themselves and each other about what they were doing that was making it difficult to live under the same roof and started acting in a way that made it easier, they began to cooperate. They jointly took on the responsibility of creating an atmosphere of emotional calm in their family.

How you might well ask, a feat many of us cannot achieve in less difficult circumstances They found a way to comprehend what the term we are all used to hearing now “ we are all in this together” really means when you live it. Which was working together, for the benefit of everyone. Even when they did not feel like it, when it was very uncomfortable when it felt like there was no end in sight. Because quite quickly they all experienced the mental health and well-being benefits that their efforts brought each of them and their daughters.

Julie McAuliffe

Ireland

Surviving during a pandemic

Create MORE LOVE during the Coronavirus “House Arrest”

Even if your first weeks together during “house arrest” are peaceful and happy, every couple will feel triggered by “forced togetherness”. Even if you plan to make this a 2nd honeymoon, you will need advanced self-soothing and communication skills to create the intimacy, passion, and peace that you desire under these challenging conditions; won’t you? Your relationship can survive and thrive in ANY financial, health or lifestyle emergency that you may face for the rest of your life if you learn these skills now. With these skills, you will always be able to motivate and inspire your partner so that you merge as the true couple you always hoped you would become. Now you can use a crisis and plenty of extra time to learn what is essential.



Here’s how:

You must now be sure to be in a “no fight zone” as any argument you have now will be very expensive for you. Arguments are no longer an option when you are virtually sharing a prison cell with one another!

The 5 Secrets to Creating Thriving Marriages & Relationships during the Coronavirus:

1. **Self-soothing skills**©-As soon as you master any of the self-soothing skills that I offer clients worldwide, you create a Heartspace® Solution. There are 5 skills and during your complimentary session I will offer you at least one of them.
2. **The Definition of Love**, “When the other person’s needs being met is as important to you as getting your own needs being met, that’s love.” When you enter this state of mutuality your relationship thrives, and self-soothing makes it possible. Can you begin to focus on his or her needs right now? Can you take a look at a few easy adjustments you are willing to make to be “more” as you partner desires?
3. **“Motivating and Inspiring”** your partner requires that you possess the ability to self-soothe, then soothe your partner with empathy, and then co-create a solution. The 6 Part Conversation© is a wonderful tool for this and Part 6 is learning to create offers and requests that really generate The Solution!
4. **Marital Mediation**© is a set of skills for long-married couples who have never resolved their issues although they love each other. You can create the life-long love you desire; and it only takes you to master this! For couples on the verge of divorce and for clients who are divorcing, learning how to generate the cooperative solution saves you 1,000s or dollars, euros, rupees etc.!

Were you feeling overwhelmed by your marriage before the social distancing rulings? Is it harder to cope with your spouse’s behaviors now than it was during all the previous years of your marriage? Have you considered separation or divorce because you can’t stand this level of suffering anymore? I have helped thousands of families create peaceful separations and divorce transitions as well as reconciliations.

5. **Peaceful No-court Divorce with The Divorce Forum**®: Even if you decide during your “house arrest” that you are done; learning how to peacefully separate allows your family to retain most of your assets instead of watching the legal system take your community property as spoils of war. YOU CAN learn this; you MUST learn this, and the free 1-hour telephone session will clarify for you how you can learn to accomplish this fast.

Susan Allan

USA

Financial fixes during times of hardship

COVID-19 has created an unprecedented time of loss: emotionally, socially, physically, and especially financially. While we cannot know the full financial effect that will continue to radiate across the globe, we can begin to take action now. This pandemic can be a time of action and growth, rather than being frozen with fear.

Budgeting will help you and your family have a better understanding of where your money goes on a monthly and annual basis. Applications, such as Mint, can help you organize your expenses and income based on categories, including vehicles, home, groceries, restaurants, children's expenses, and vacation. Ask yourself a few questions:

Expenses

What expenses are necessary?

Which can be cut temporarily?

Non-essential services such as exterminator and tv applications (Netflix, Hulu, etc.)

Can you take on any services that you would have traditionally paid for?

Cleaning your home or doing your landscaping.

Can you pay less for certain items?

We tend to spend a great deal of unexpected, unnecessary expenses in addition to necessary expenses. For example, using take-out delivery services, such as Grubhub, can add up to 25% additional expense to your original order.

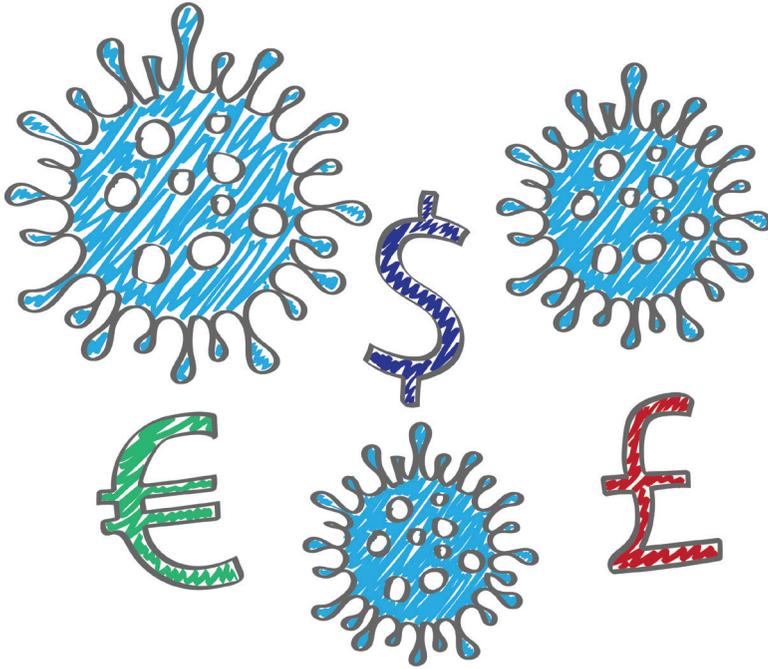
Who can you ask for assistance from?

Contact your mortgage company to arrange for a "skip in payment." Ask family or friends for assistance. You may also seek out state or federal circumstances. Asking for help is challenging and understandably so. It is hard to ask for help because it makes us question our abilities and make us appear weak. In reality, asking for help can create a closer community and an environment in which your family and friends feel safer to come to you for help as well.

Income

How can you make income when yours may have temporarily been decreased or even eliminated?

Seek out temporary employment. A variety of companies, including grocery stores and delivery services are seeing an influx in need for employees. If you are unable to leave your home, consider offering online services, such as tutoring. Offer services to your friends and neighbors, for income, or just out of generosity. Finding the positive in such a challenging time and helping others can give you a renewed sense of purpose and perspective.



Where else can I find sources of money?

Take an inventory of your property, big and small. What do you need or want, and what can you give away? Try selling items. Have you been putting off your taxes? Get them done now to have a better understanding if you are going to receive a refund. Software, such as TurboTax, will allow you to complete your taxes and have an understanding of the result before completing the filing.

This time will also pass and so will the financial strains you feel. In the meantime, this is an ideal opportunity to have a better understanding of your finances and work to create a better financial picture for you and your family.

Kristyn Carmichael

USA

Do as I do, and then some...

Do as I do, and then some...

Life restricted to our homes, home schooling, working from home, financial worries and fears of contracting COVID 19 are challenging our capacity for patience and understanding. Our boundaries are being pushed, our frustrations are high and our resources are limited. All of these issues may be magnified if you and the other parent in the midst of a separation, divorce or were thinking about divorce even before the onset of COVID-19. What can you do, right now, to help you manage and deal with difficult relationships at home while outside life is on hold?

Wear your children's shoes

Understanding the challenges, changes and disruptions caused by the Pandemic is hard enough for adults to deal with so can you imagine what our children are thinking and feeling? In their own way they are also experiencing confusion, frustration and fear. Putting ourselves in our children's mindsets can give us a different perspective. Understanding how they feel can help guide us as we deal with the day to day, and often hour to hour issues that are coming up as we live, work, study and everything else, together 24/7. Seeing life through their eyes may give us some insight on our adult interactions.

Be a Model

Because our children are with us 24/7, now more than ever, our words and actions are on display for our children. Like you, your children are restless, impatient, bored, intolerant, unfocused, anxious, and so on. The days are long and increasingly frustrating. But if we expect them to be able to get through these challenging times, we have to show them how to do it. We cannot expect them to take things "one day at a time" if we do not adopt this approach ourselves. We cannot expect them to "think before they speak" if we do not and we cannot expect them to be patient if we do not model patience. But if we model behavior for them, we may actually improve our own interactions and expectations.

Be forgiving and allow "do overs"

We all make mistakes and make choices we wish we could take back. We say the wrong things and we make poor choices. Frustration and impatience can make us do these things more often. And while it is true that some things cannot be undone, in most instances, we can have "do overs." If you say something that you don't mean, apologize and try again. Be forgiving when someone apologizes to you. Let it be an opportunity to open new paths of conversations.



Find opportunity in adversity

Overly positive? Maybe. But why not? We have no choice but to deal with the current situation as best we can. We can use this time to try to understand how others around us feel and experience this “new normal.” We can model for our kids coping strategies and we can find ways to regroup, reevaluate and find new paths. The challenges of COVID-19 can certainly magnify the problems that already existed, but maybe, with patience, forgiveness, and modeling, we can also find opportunities to address those problems as a result of the way we face the adversity of the pandemic.

Laurel Amaya

USA

Healthy tips for co-parenting in a cage

After days of watching the president indicate that the public need not panic about the COVID-19 virus, in what felt like the blink of an eye, life shifted to social distancing, schools and businesses closing, face mask wearing, hand sanitizing, shuttering in, Zoom calling, and fearing whether we had enough toilet paper and milk in the house.

As a conflict resolution specialist, I shifted my practice to mediating online. Shortly into the first few weeks of quarantine, a male client indicated that trapped by his inability to physically separate from his wife, he felt like he was co-parenting in a cage.

The truth is that no matter how spacious one's home is...when you don't want to be in it with another person...it feels confining as hell. As his children were now being homeschooled, and his wife took over the bigger upstairs bedroom office, he was stuck making calls in a closet off of the kitchen. With no defined boundaries and expectations for sharing duties, he felt isolated and alone but bizarrely surrounded by people constantly.

Together, he, his co-parent and I worked on an interim parenting plan, while we waited to see how long their family would be quarantined together.

The following are a list of ideas that helped them find a light at the end of the tunnel:

- Afford your co-parent grace by acknowledging that this is an unprecedented time.
- Create a shared schedule based upon school and work demands with clearly defined parenting times/duties.
- Talk to your children. Honor each person's stress. Acknowledge that there will be designated times when each parent is actively on the job. Discuss expectations.
- Find time to be a part. Determine times of day/night when one parent goes for a walk outside with and without the children.
- Walk away and write down frustrations. When the tension erupts, choose to neutralize the situation by taking your anger to pen/paper. Designate a weekly or daily appointed kitchen table meeting where each parent can share their concerns.
- Pick your battles. Decide if being right matters more than practically getting through the day with limited frustration.
- Thank your co-parent for the space they gave you, the act of stepping up to partner during a strenuous time, and the choice they made to take the high road when it was not easy.
- Decide that you want to come out of this experience a better co-parent, mother, father, and give yourself the grace to try again tomorrow.

Kelly Gering

USA

Every generation matters

Although we know COVID 19 can affect anyone, people over age 60 are especially vulnerable. Now our collective world community is sacrificing in-person connections and economic hardships to enhance and ensure the remaining days of their lives. We know this isn't easy. We are living with the fear that the virus will take a loved one away from us. This fear permeates all of the generations in the family, including the youngest, as we hear them questioning, "Is grandma going to die?"

Resources are pushed to their limits as people are furloughed or laid off from work, and have the extra expense to ensure their parents' safety, paying for caregivers or taking them into their homes. Grandma was caring for children and no longer does so for fear of the disease. Grandpa lives alone, without access to nurturing touch, in the name of protection. It is especially difficult to stay connected when family members are excluded from visiting assisted living facilities, nursing homes, and hospitals. Heartbreakingly, older adults are dying without seeing their family members again, no one by their bedside. Grief is difficult enough and made more so when funerals are postponed, family members are excluded from participating, or cannot be given a comforting hug.

And for families already in conflict, "I just wish my family to get along!" takes on a whole new meaning. We have been working to spread the word about eldercaring coordination, a new dispute resolution process to help families in conflict over the care and safety of an older adult. Focusing on your aging loved one, rather than the blame about the past, is more important than ever, as well as other lessons families have passed on:

- Responding to children's questions is crucial, giving them age-appropriate answers, and making it easy for them to ask for more information as they are ready to hear it.
- Take that "me time" for a five-minute guided meditations, a few minutes with that book you started, exercise, watching the movie your friends recommended, or whatever refreshes you.
- Stay connected. Set up video chats, performances through windows, touch hand-to-hand through glass doors, arranging for calls throughout the day, sending photos, drawings, and letters. They can all bridge miles.
- Find a meaningful way to honor a loved one: everyone sending a patch to a quilt, writing a chapter for a book, creating an electronic photo album, sing their special song.
- Create a shared file or website where you invite people to post memories, photos, and feelings.
- Ask for help. If home isn't safe, reach out for support from Adult Protective Services.

Children are learning from our responses. How can we shape the learning of the next generation as we share our grief and loss of special moments and relationships? How do we explain six feet away to avoid six feet underground? Somehow we must teach children that the changes they are experiencing are worth it through our personal and joint responses and the values we continue to share.

Linda Fieldstone and Sue Bronson

USA

Can't we just get along?

When College Co-eds Flee Home during COVID 19 to a House Divided

As divorce mediators, we are well-versed with Mom's House/Dad's House situations and the reality of children being uprooted from having one home to now having two, even in the most amicable of divorces. A child no longer has her house or his house, and indeed children no longer refer to their houses as their homes. They say they're going to Mom's House or Dad's House. When COVID 19 forced colleges and universities across the country to close their dormitories and lock the gates of their campuses, it forced a mass exodus of kids fleeing home. For a number of these college kids, they thought they were going to their Childhood home, but many instead came home to a house divided, learning for the first time their parents were divorcing.

The situations were further exacerbated if the Co-ed wasn't an angel before they left to go away for college. There was no welcome party nor a support group for them when they arrived home. In some instances, the Co-ed's bedroom was already being turned into a home office, in other instances, it had been dismantled. The situations became tinder when a 19 or 21-year-old, used to being on their own at college, faced new house rules: no eating in bedrooms, no walking around late at night. What is a college kid to do?

Here are some learnings for parents and college Co-eds caught in the middle of these unforeseen- sometimes heartbreaking but always illuminating- situations.

1. Face-to-Face Dialogue is the premier way to go. It holds everyone accountable to each other when they understand the whole picture. Set a day, time, and place for the conversation, outside the earshot of younger children.
2. Whether you use a neutral mediator to help with the conversation or not, remember the main issue is between the college Co-ed and the parent who is remaining in the house. That said, it's a booby trap to not include both parents. These are 3-way conversations.

3. Before your date, create a structure with Pre-Conversation Goal Setting asking each person to write out their goals. Create two columns: goals for the next few weeks or months and goals for the bigger picture. Do not hold back your honest goals including Moving your Co-ed out to auntie's house or a hotel, Wanting cooperation, or Reducing volatility in the house. This will help your Co-ed prepare and not be caught off guard. Share these written goals a day before your conversation date. You and your soon-to-be-former spouse do not have to be on the same page.
4. It's likely your college Co-ed needs extra emotional support. Add to your goals, Assurance my Co-ed has resources for their mental health. Also add to your goals, To better understand the needs of my Co-ed.
5. When you meet, commit to focusing on the quality of the interaction itself, to understand each other despite your disagreements or challenges.
6. At your meeting, listen carefully to your Co-ed's goals, they are often tender. They are usually new information for you too, including, If I get kicked out, I'm afraid of being lonely. I just want to do well in school. Where am I supposed to go this summer? Or next Christmas? When I get married, I want to bring my kids home and have holidays in my home.
7. Keep in mind: these are not simple conversations. They are about much more than just a plan for a tense living situation for a few weeks or months. You have the capacity to create greater well-being in the family.

Some might say it is cruel and selfish of parents in the process of divorcing to not figure out how to get along at least temporarily during COVID 19, put out a truce flag temporarily, and allow a haven for their college-age kids. Perhaps it is. Perhaps it isn't as others will never know the full extent of any family's history. What we do know is that a face-to-face conversation that is focused on the quality of the dialogue with some thoughtful honest preparation ahead of time- shared ahead of time--yields swift and often compassionate outcomes. Structured relational interactions about these issues build capacity for the family. Whether it's Mom's House or Dad's House, these 3-way conversations create an opening for My House, a more complete and restorative picture for the House Divided family.

Louise Phipps Senft

USA

Living Together, Separating, Divorcing: Surviving During a Pandemic

Trapped together when you want to separate

Just when the constant disagreements and friction between you was leading to separation or divorce, restrictions imposed to deal with COVID-19, make that impossible. Even worse, you have no idea when those controls will be eased. Children need more attention and now you're also their teacher. In this section, there are tips for easing the strain, working together, and managing your stress.

Sheltering together and navigating apart - Fridge magnet philosophy

In uncertain times, I find myself drawn to the simple wisdom that fridge magnets promote. Magnet “philosophies” like “Keep Calm and Carry On” are exactly what we need right now, but how do families do that when the stress of separation creates additional burden?

Magnet 1: “To Build a Bridge, You Have to Start on Both Shores”

What do you know for sure about the conflict? Can you see your partner’s shore? Does your partner intend to irritate you as, for example, you notice them only selectively listening to you? What impact does that have on you? Feeling unheard could be the first response; what else is going on for you? What if you were able to ask a curious question about their behaviour? What if the assumption you tied to their behaviour is incorrect, and the explanation less antagonistic than you thought?

Insight Mediation is a model used very successfully in family mediation; it takes us past the “certainty-of-knowing” and helps us listen for new information.

Imagine meeting an old friend at the grocery store, without it being a strategic operation with gloves, masks, and steady supplies of disinfectant. What would you hope to tell them about your relationship with your ex-partner? Is it possible that in these challenging times spent together sheltering-in-place you have come to understand each other better, to have built a bridge that you walked across together, to celebrate your co-parenting relationship?

Magnet 2: “Conflict is Inevitable, Combat is Optional”

Many families have the added stress of sheltering-in-place after a decision to separate has been made. The option to be outside the house and give each other room has been erased. You already know what irritates you about your partner’s behaviour, you’ve thought about that a lot along the way, and it is part of the reason for separation. You are an expert in predicting what will cause tense situations, and what you can now become is an expert in deciding how you will handle it. The conflict is inevitable, the combat is optional.

What if you didn’t react in the way you normally would when faced with a behaviour that bothered you? What if you could identify the “attack” as a threat to something you care about, and instead of using your usual “defend” strategies, you were able to work on protecting what you value. So far, nothing about your past conflicts has made any impact toward changing the patterns of interaction, so why not try something else? What about the situation you can control? The answer is that you can only manage your own response. It can be jarring for your partner to see you disengage from a conflict. Our patterns of behaviour, even when dysfunctional, are familiar to us, and we tend to like the familiar. Watch out for your partner trying to bring you back to the combat. This change in patterns need not be a “sneak attack,” let them in on your experiment, maybe they would be open of the change of “rules of engagement” too.

Mary-Anne Popescu

Canada

Boundaries

Paul Simon wrote a song with the incredibly profound title: Remember: one man's ceiling is another man's floor. Through his own unique and creative artistry, his lyrics touch on an issue that, in the context of interpersonal relationships, is almost universally honored in the breach than respected for the principle. Consider this: when a person first meets someone to whom they are attracted and in whom they are interested, they are all about respect and boundaries. They assume nothing and are curious about everything. They would never presume or assume that they were in a position to speak for the object of their attraction. The magnetic pull of the attraction is exquisite, and the compelling curiosity to learn more is genuine. Hope does indeed spring eternal in those halcyon days of falling for someone.

By contrast, examining the couple's behavior in the middle or toward the end of that relationship, we find the most telling characteristic of the relational landscape is the incredible absence of boundaries. In this state of "range free relationships," the partners can be seen clucking about noisily like relationship-chickens transgressing each other's turf with no respect for one another's autonomy. The awareness that this action constitutes a trespass of one another's turf, much less the acknowledgment that it does, is by then long gone with the wind.

This sad and toxic state of affairs is the predictable product of one's ego. It is this ego in each of us, which allows us to become blinded by our own myopic, subjective perspectives and, correspondingly, less mindful of the need for respect of the boundaries of the other. Of course, this is only important if one wants the bilateral quality of the relationship to succeed long term. What came so easily and naturally at the beginning of the relationship needs to be supplanted by a willful and mindful commitment to show respect by honoring boundaries. We need to remember that no matter how much we think we know our spouses and partners, it is always better to demonstrate respect by taking the trouble to ask than it will ever be to simply assume. The line: Good fences make good neighbors comes from the Robert Frost poem perfectly titled The Mending Wall.

Chip Rose

USA

Diagnose and treat interpersonal conflict: a latent symptom of COVID-19

Health experts know that all human diseases have both primary symptoms as well as hidden symptoms and side-effects.

With the coronavirus, primary symptoms include fever, persistent cough, and fatigue. Latent symptoms include social, psychological, and job-related problems that manifest in high unemployment, depression, and the fraying of family and business relationships.

Conflict between spouses, children, and their parents, business partners, and with citizens and their government can be some of the most pernicious and long-lasting side effects of this pandemic.

Dealing with conflict as with a serious health problem, the first step is to obtain treatment for primary symptoms; then focus on the long term latent symptoms. With the coronavirus, treatment of primary symptoms may involve bed rest or possibly hospitalization. Once you've recovered (and most patients do), you need to address the latent symptoms or longer-term side effects.

Latent symptoms may be longer-lasting---and in many cases very damaging. Divorce, bankruptcy, behavior, and learning problems for children exposed to parental arguing, or even domestic violence can scar people for years, or forever.

Just as we are ready to shelter in place, social distance, and wash our hands, we should consider the following steps to minimize or resolve a conflict that is happening within our families:

1. Be aware of escalating behaviors that are initial symptoms such as raised voices or refusal to discuss concerns (both are harmful), or blame others.
2. When those around you show, stress or depression make every effort to feel empathy for their emotional pain. Try to put yourselves in their shoes rather than react to their behavior.
3. If resources (money, food, freedom of movement) are scarce, work with those in your family or business to float options to solve the problem rather than to complain or push others to accept your way of doing things.
4. Research and use the resources in your community (therapists, financial planners, lawyers, and mediators) to help you gain information and tools to solve your problem. During this crisis, many of these professionals are offering reduced fees or free services.

If you treat conflict with the same care, you would with a cough or fever, your odds of a fuller recovery when this pandemic passes will increase significantly.

Forrest (Woody) Mosten

USA

Grieving the loss when you can't live separately

There can be a multitude of issues that come with the decision to separate. For some, there may be relief that you are bringing to a close what has not always been a happy chapter, or that you are finally calling time on something that has challenged you both. There can also be hurt, anger, and resentment about things that have happened during the relationship, as well as the way that it ended. Disbelief and shock are common where one person was not aware that the other person was unhappy in the relationship.

From your own experience, you may be loosely aware that there is a grief process and a range of emotions that each person goes through. You may have noticed that perhaps one of you is a little ahead of the other in how they're feeling? You can look up the Kubler Ross change curve that describes the emotions. Under ordinary circumstances, both of you would come together when you were ready to make decisions about what happens next. This has been complicated by COVID-19.

Firstly, you may have no idea yet how your circumstances (financially or regarding work or other issues) might have been affected, and this may mean you are not in a position to make decisions any time soon. Secondly, living in the same house as someone you're separating from presents many challenges. It can be an uncomfortable, emotional, and challenging thing to do. Under ordinary circumstances, you might enjoy going to work, visiting friends, having new hobbies, or going away for weekends (or longer) to try to limit the time you spend together. In the current circumstances, this is impossible and means you are stuck in far corners of the same house 24-7 (these may not be very far apart).

In this situation, it's essential to try to carve out your own space in terms of the time you can spend alone, and with your children, and how you can use the space in your house so that each person has some privacy and a 'safe space.' An uninterrupted space where they can go when they feel overwhelmed, sad, or angry and need a moment to process things. This is also crucial in helping to minimise the conflict that children are exposed to.

Many family mediators are now working online across the world, and family mediation can be a place where you can carve out some ground rules about what happens in the immediate future (or the longer term if you're able to have those discussions). Mediators are professionals who help you to structure your discussions, keep things on track, and provide information to inform those discussions. They can also point you in the direction of further assistance you might need to help you manage this challenging time.

Louisa Whitney

UK

Splitting assets during a down market

For those of you currently involved in a divorce, one of the many things you might be worried about is how this down market is going to affect your division of assets as values fall. Divorce is a time when financial anxieties grow, and when the stock market and economy are going crazy, you might worry about how you are going to make this divorce work. That being said, financial anxieties are normal and completely understandable no matter what the market looks like, and you can still get divorced during a down market and still come out with some financial security.

The very first thing is it's important to take a deep breath and realize that you will get through this, and you will be able to put yourself in a secure financial position. It's important not to make any decisions until you feel that you can do so in an educated manner.

One issue to think about is what date you are going to use to value the assets, especially if time has passed since your date of separation, and the accounts have a big difference in value between then and now.

Next, you need to be aware of what kind of accounts you have, whether they're retirement accounts or non-retirement investment accounts. Different accounts have different tax ramifications to them to keep in mind. If you're unsure what kind of accounts, full financial disclosures can help you understand what there is before you agree to any division of assets.

It's a good idea to look at the retirement accounts separate from the non-qualified investment or bank accounts because the taxes on these accounts are handled very differently. For the retirement accounts dividing the accounts by percentage instead of a certain dollar amount will make sure that if the accounts (hopefully) increase in value before actually dividing them that you both receive that increase.

When you address the non-qualified accounts and stocks, it's important to pay attention to the cost basis. The cost basis of an individual stock is the cost you and/or your spouse paid for it at the beginning. The cost basis is even more important at this time because some stocks may have increased in value, and some may have decreased in value. Also, if there has been a loss on the stock, it's possible that this could benefit you for tax purposes.

Amanda Singer

USA

“You deal with him!.....I can’t have him in the house anymore!!”

exclaims a mother of four at her wits-end to me midway through my first meeting between her and her husband. The stunned expression on his face quickly faded. She went from zero to sixty and purged for the next few minutes, he then followed suit. After venting, they both agreed that the hardest part was that neither of them had any option but to live with each other, at least for the foreseeable future.

Long periods of time indoors with family life and strife do not always mix well but are downright toxic to a couple on the path to separation. Mediators in Ireland will likely confirm this theory, given that many separating couples stayed under the same roof for economic necessity due to negative equity in the family home and no place else to go, a throwback consequence of the recession here a few years ago. Those families taught me some techniques they used along the way. Here’s a sample of them:

Delay, Distract, Decide

Getting annoyed/frustrated with others is to be expected, and can be anticipated when you try to think of the tell-tale signs that your own levels of angst may be on the rise. You can **delay** your reactions to frustration and **distract** yourself through finding something to take your mind off what’s going on. Finally, with a cool head you can then **decide** a course of action that meets your needs without losing control.

Rely on facts not emotions

When things are contentious, and narratives get distorted, bring your own thoughts back to what you know as fact and avoid speculation, particularly when it comes to the motivations or position of ‘the other side.’ We can demonise the other person we live with all too easily at times when we don’t see eye to eye and risk missing resolutions by not being objective.

Keep arguments away from small ears

It can be an obvious one but is worth stating again. One of the first things that I ask couples during mediation is to agree that arguments take place at a time when the kid(s) are not present or out of earshot, safely, of course. This is an easy win for everyone and always pays off in the long run.

That couple I told you about overcame that time in their lives. You can too!

David Gray

Ireland

Feeling stuck: Time for necessary conversations

For many families, the restrictions of COVID-19 have been experienced as one more setback in a long, difficult line.

As a family mediation practitioner, I am regularly struck by the additional challenges some separating couples face. The family home goes sale agreed, only for the buyer to pull out, adding months to my clients' ability to move on. In other cases, the home cannot even be put for sale, as there is a problem outside the owners' control.

Many separating couples were already weary at the start of social isolation. For some, this time has been further compounded by addiction, e.g., alcohol, which coronavirus seems to facilitate. For others, the additional challenge is one person's sex addiction, with multiple partners, which distancing rules actively frustrate.

For so many, this period of a shutdown has been particularly tough. Unsurprisingly, many parents feel increasingly irritable, even despairing. Words are contentious. Children are seeing and hearing things you don't want them to and acting up as well.

Naturally, you want to progress things, even in some small way. But it's hard. Meanwhile, you're reading glowing social media posts, espousing the adage 'never waste a crisis.' But what on earth can the current situation facilitate for you, that is positive?

Like children, we learn to mould behaviour to meet expectations. Expectations that differ, dependent on the relationship, and the particular dynamic that has developed within it. Perhaps, in your relationship, one of you hears – or feels you hear – nothing but judgment and criticism? Maybe you feel beset by an endless run of challenging behaviours?

Circumstances may be such that parallel parenting is the right option for your family, with communication channelled through parenting apps. Alternatively, co-parenting and improved communication may be possible. If so, you may be asking yourself, "What is the best thing, at this point, that I can do?"

This might be acknowledging key challenges, triggers, even vulnerabilities, for both of you. In other situations, it could be stepping away from judgment and acknowledging impact.

Right now, you may have insufficient outside support and accountability. No one to guide you both through the process and help you when you get stuck.

Trapped together when you want to separate



These questions might help you:

- What discussions and decisions can be parked? What cannot?
- How can you each be heard, positively, and succinctly?
- Who doesn't need to hear you?

Recently, Ireland's Health Minister acknowledged two key unknowns in the pace at which restrictions can ease. He said it would depend on how the virus behaves; and how we behave.

We cannot underestimate our role in the retreat of coronavirus. That is empowering. Our actions will help define what happens next, what our post-COVID world will look like.

Similarly, for now, at home, every necessary conversation can become a new chance to move forward.

Keave O'Donnell

Ireland

Do no harm: Should I move fast or slow?

Whether you have left an unhappy situation or are heartbroken about being left by someone you love or need—anxiety around the prospect staying connected to your separated spouse is visceral.

For children, frustration and despair are multiplied. Children have no control over the decisions of their parents, the spread of the coronavirus, nor the conditions in which they find themselves. As Justice Marvin Kurz of the Ontario Superior Court wrote:[1]

“As great as the danger of COVID-19 undoubtedly is, another great danger here, as it is for many families before this court, is the virus of conflict. Putting children in the middle of conflict, demonstrating that fighting and arguing is how adults manage their disputes, making children take sides in a lose-lose game, all corrode a child’s emotional equilibrium. Children have no special mask or protective gear that can shield them from this type of virus. “

Should you act on any impulses, you might have to getaway? Or move quickly to negotiate a separation agreement?

Here are some tips to help you control what you can in the best way possible for yourself and your children.

Moving Fast

If you are in an abusive relationship, the toxicity of being connected to another person may harm you and your children. If your partner is dissipating or hiding assets, moving fast to see a lawyer and take preventative steps is smart. If you are in a coercive controlling relationship, your life or that of your children could be at risk. Learn the behaviours that predict domestic homicide—an often preventable crime. Advice and support from a domestic violence agency and knowledgeable lawyer should be an urgent priority. If your children are being exposed to the risk of harm by the other parent, if the other parent is a flight risk or is unreasonably denying you access to your children or to money you need--- these are urgent situations that may require immediate action.

Moving Slow

In most other cases, slowing down is likely safer for you and your family. In many jurisdictions, getting before a judge is not possible unless your case is urgent. Courts everywhere are saying the same thing: do not disrupt the lives of your children unless there is an emergency. Dramatic change, in most cases, is not a good idea.



Take this time instead to learn.

Find the local resources to support parents, small businesses, children, and youth. Read up: there is an abundance of websites featuring great parenting tips and free advice. Be present for your family, listen to your children, and give everyone, including yourself time to adapt.

Get legal advice. The risks of negotiating a separation agreement in these times are great, and not all are known. For example, in most jurisdictions, property is divided as of a separation date. Most asset values have changed over short periods of time. Know the law before taking steps that could prejudice you later. Make the fewest decisions necessary and provide that they are temporary, particularly if incomes are in flux or disclosure is not complete. Agreements made today are likely to change once life returns to 'normal'. For example, your children are likely at home and not in childcare during the pandemic, but that may soon become an expense. Security for child support through life insurance or other means is more important than ever... along with updated wills and powers of attorney.

There is much to consider at this time. Try to put your emotional brain on hold so that you can think rationally and reduce the risk of taking (or not taking) steps now you may regret later.

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[1] *Thomas v. Wohleber*, 2020 ONSC 1965 (S.C.J.).

Hilary Linton
Canada

For couples going through separation or divorce, making the big decisions along the way can be the hardest part

Be it in relation to children, valuable shared possessions, money, or something else, the need for couples who are separated or going through a divorce to decide on changed arrangements and a workable system can lead to situations of tension, particularly if the relationship has broken down entirely.

During times of reduced mobility, such as during the period of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, many separated couples may have no option but to reside under the same roof. The inability to escape from an unhappy household can lead to increased tensions caused by worry and boredom.

In these situations, couples can arrive at an impasse very quickly.

The Oxford dictionary defines “impasse” as “a situation in which no progress is possible, especially because of disagreement; a deadlock”.

Throughout my career in family law, and later in politics, I have come to know the various impasse strategies that can help to overcome seemingly intractable disagreements. Passions can often run high in negotiations or in disputes, leading the participants to come up against what appears to be a brick wall. Some of the strategies that can be applied at this point include,

- Simply taking time to pause and consider the situation at hand
- Identifying a short-term solution that can move things beyond the stalemate, or
- Approaching a third party who can help by discussing the situation with both parties separately and facilitating a calmer and easier decision-making process.

During these times, it is recommended to agree on boundaries within the house for use by one or both individuals. If there are children involved, then this will also have to be factored into any decision about shared and individual spaces.

For shared spaces, it is worth agreeing rules for when and what can be used and when certain spaces are off-limits. A key aspect of this is an agreement on separate mealtimes if necessary. Periods of lockdown are hard for everyone, but particularly so for couples undergoing separation or divorce. By mutually agreeing on rules and structures, the situation can be made more bearable for everyone involved.

Where parents are separated with children and still living in the same household tensions can arise. A helpful strategy could be to agree separate days where each parent would have the children to bring them out for a long walk and make this as positive an experience as possible, particularly in the good weather.

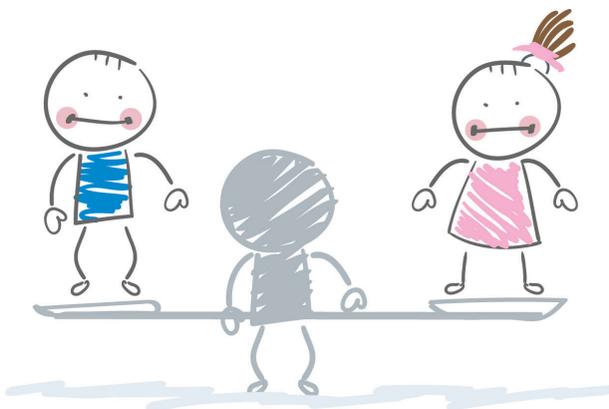
Trapped together when you want to separate

Remember, many Courts remain open to deal with emergency applications for domestic violence orders.

Sometimes, a third-party mediator can make a big difference in facilitating progress and ultimately achieving agreement. As Joseph Grynbaum writes, “An ounce of mediation is worth a pound of arbitration and a ton of litigation!”

This mediator may:

- Analyse the situation to identify whether there are underlying or unspoken concerns behind the impasse,
- Identify whether the impasse is a result of particular biases or unrealistic expectations – this kind of personal inventory is important,
- Provide a synopsis or review of progress made to date, in order to demonstrate the progress that has been made or how far parties have shifted from their original positions.



Be it a shared friend, colleague, or a trained professional, what matters is getting the right person.

A successful third-party mediator should be able to act as a facilitator of discussion, a manager of the negotiating process, an effective gatherer and provider of information, someone who can test the reality of options, as well as take notes throughout the process. This is not an easy combination of roles! Do not make the mistake of asking for help from someone who is unsuitable due to emotional involvement or an inability to be impartial. Fundamentally a mediator should be trustworthy and non-judgemental. As Roger Fisher points out, “Judgement hinders imagination.”

Josepha Madigan

Ireland

Waiting to divorce during the pandemic

If the pandemic caught you in the middle of planning to divorce – or worse, you have come to that realization while being stuck at home with your spouse – you probably have concerns about how this historic crisis will impact the process.

Here are 3 ways the pandemic is impacting divorce cases and what you can do about it.

1. Delayed New Cases.

Perhaps you were on the verge of filing for divorce, or maybe you wish to start a new case now. One thing is clear, many states have closed courts to new “non-emergent” cases, which includes divorces. On top of the lack of court venue, many people are waiting to start divorces until after the stay-at-home orders lift because honestly being stuck inside together with less ability to separate is a painful prospect.

You Can Do.

But while you may not be able to drop papers with a court, that does not mean that divorce attorneys and mediators aren’t working. Many of us are helping clients prepare for the eventual court openings. Now is the time to start planning, get your ducks in a row, or even begin laying the groundwork with your spouse if you hope to keep things amicable. Talk to your lawyer or schedule to meeting virtually with a mediator. One thing is key: don’t waste this extra time, use it to your advantage.

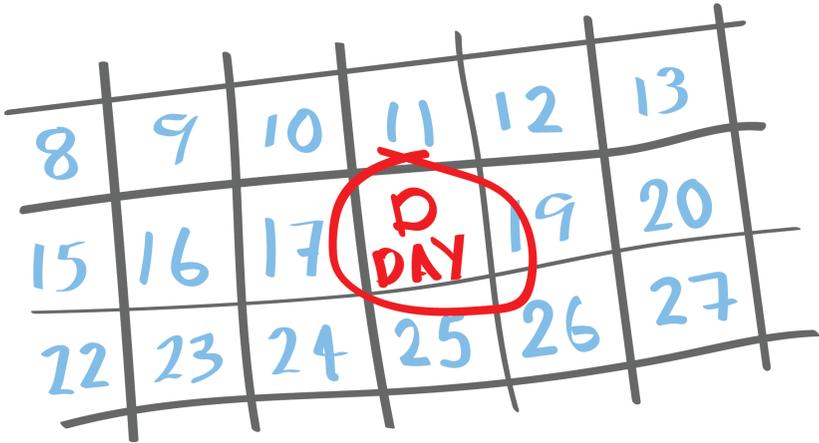
2. Quarantine Boundaries.

Maybe you are stuck at home and want to delay the “D” word until you have the ability to get away from one another. There may be a combination of issues going on in your home – like working from home, home-schooling, or daycare issues – that make it even more difficult to deal with relationship drama and communication problems. Many people don’t realize that couples sometimes live together during a divorce for financial reasons – in fact, that isn’t uncommon because maintaining separate homes can be costly. This means that while you are in new territory because of the pandemic, but it isn’t entirely uncharted.

You Can Do.

If you have kids then you are probably dealing with the stress of home-schooling on top of everything else. In normal circumstances, when a couple lives together during a divorce (which is not uncommon due to finances), I advise them to work out a schedule for time-sharing with the kids that can be transitioned into an access schedule when the separation eventually happens. Generally, this can involve dividing up weekend time and giving each other some space during the week (if and when you can!)

Trapped together when you want to separate



If you are able to start that discussion with your spouse now and come up with a schedule – even if it means dividing up space in the house – it may help alleviate some of the stress of quarantine. It may also result in both of you sharing the heavy load of home-school and childcare that is happening across the country right now. Note: you can tackle other domestic issues this way too – try dividing up the load of chores like laundry, grocery shopping/ordering, and cleaning. Figure out a schedule and make sure it gives you each some time alone to decompress.

3. Don't Play The Blame Game.

Being stuck inside is causing many of us to reach our emotional breaking-point when it comes to coping with anxiety, fear, and trying to stay mentally healthy. Right now, there is more stress on everyone, especially due to some of the uncertainty and the economic pressures we are facing.

You Can Do. Avoid fights about the past – troubles, and wrongs are all things that you can hash out with a therapist, not your spouse. Getting into fights about the past when you break the news about your decision to divorce will only lead to unnecessary arguments. These past problems may be the reasons you are getting divorced, and if you couldn't solve them during the marriage, you won't solve them now. On a personal note, acknowledge the real difficulties you are facing in dealing with a divorce during this global disaster. This is hard. Treat yourself gently with a bit of grace. Take whatever breaks you can and find ways that help you de-stress. You do not need to be perfect right now – you just need to do your best.

Morghan Leia Richardson

USA

Picture this!

Communication was strained before the COVID-19 pandemic, now with the stay-at-home order in effect, it can get downright nasty! Worse yet, the children are at home to witness it.

Or

Perhaps your relationship was on the rocks before this pandemic, but you were too busy to be bothered by it. Now that you are in each other's faces, the cracks can no longer be glossed over. Alarmingly, the whole thing seems to be on the verge of crumbling down.

What can you do?

The truth is even if you can't wait to get out of the relationship, your partner will always be part of the children's lives and therefore will always be connected to you. Working out the finer details before the split can prepare you for co-parenting after separation. Now might be a good time to think about how you want to divide parenting responsibilities. But how can you possibly work out these issues if communication is strained or even non-existent?

Where do you start?

Consider communication as your tool for dealing with conflict. Spending time planning how to communicate may vastly enhance your chances of a desirable outcome. Think about watching a movie. You may sit down and stay focused on the movie. Alternatively, you may glimpse the television screen between washing and packing away dishes taking in bits and pieces of the overall movie. Which option give you the best grasp of the plot? For me, the clear answer is to focus on the movie. This is the same with communication, that is, communication is most effective when we focus on what each party says. It is especially important to pay careful attention to communication when a relationship is already strained because strained relationships tend to illicit poor mood, negative attitudes towards each other, and a tendency to find faults in each other's stories.

Additionally, communication tends to work best when we listen as much as we speak. Equally important is soliciting feedback to check our understanding. It is easy to assume we know what our partner thinks and how they will respond to our questions. However, I believe it is better to check that we are right than to make an erroneous assumption. Furthermore, deep listening is crucial to enhanced understanding. So, what is deep listening? Deep listening is listening to fully understand and not to respond or prove the person wrong; ask questions for clarification rather than to disprove. It means having an open mind and considering that your partner is sincere. After all, your partner has high stakes in this conversation too! Is it possible for you to suspend all your judgments and try to consider your partner's perspective?

Trapped together when you want to separate

Likewise, the best way to get buy-in from your partner is to use nonviolent communication. But what is nonviolent communication? (See book *Nonviolent Communication* by Marshall Rosenberg, PhD.). For me, nonviolent communication is communicating in a way that does not hurt the other person or cast blame. It is a focus on issues that need to be resolved rather than accusing your partner. Non-violent communication begins with being kind to yourself and extends to being kind to your partner. For example, avoid saying “you always/ never”; instead be specific about what occurred, when it occurred and how it affected you and use “I” statements. For example, “I feel overwhelmed when I have to prepare dinner while helping the children with their homework and I would appreciate your assistance with the children”.

Moreover, when it comes to communication, the timing makes the world of difference. If we have a conversation in a peaceful state of mind, we tend to have more patience and cope better with disagreements. Spend some time balancing yourself before attempting a difficult conversation, this may involve meditating, listening to the sound of the ocean, or any other calming technique. It is also important to check that your partner is in the right frame of mind to engage in discussions. You do not want to feel rushed or just let a bad mood make things worse. Beware of your emotional state. Keep alert for signs of racing heart, quickening speech, or raised tone of voice, from yourself and your partner. If you observe these signs, you may also want to take a time out before things get out of hand.

Also, preparing for the conversation beforehand may help keep you from getting side-tracked by strong emotions.

Here are a few things to consider doing before you sit down to talk:

- Put your thoughts down on paper before verbalizing it
- Reframe the harsh words and pull out the major issues
- Prioritize issues you want to deal with
- Find a comfortable, private space to talk
- Set a time limit to your talk

Some issues you may want to talk about may include:

- Establishing boundaries within your household
- Work out a schedule for looking after the children
- Try to come up with a workable co-parenting plan

It is important to pace yourself. You may not get everything resolved in one sitting. If this does not work for you online mediation is an option during this COVID-19 pandemic or even after.

Devika Sammy

Trinidad

Caring for your financial health during a Pandemic

Even in ordinary circumstances, dealing with finances is one of the most stressful aspects of a relationship. Add in a pandemic and its overwhelming implications for our health, finances, and our social lives, and the stress can feel unmanageable. Although there is no easy fix, there are steps you can take that will help you gain a greater sense of empowerment.

First, look carefully at your spending over the past six months to a year, putting every expense into one of two categories: fixed (what you need at a minimum to survive, such as food, housing, and utilities), and discretionary (everything else). At the same time, make a list of what you value most in life. To the extent your discretionary spending is not in alignment with your values, see if there are areas you can cut back on. Further, in this exploration, you will likely find some financial “clutter” that you can clear out, such as recurring charges for subscriptions and memberships that are no longer being used.

Second, take some time to unearth your money scripts. In *Wired for Wealth: Change the Money Mindsets That Keep You Trapped and Unleash Your Wealth Potential*, Brad Klontz, Ted Klontz and Rick Kahler, three pioneers in the financial therapy field, explain that we all have “money scripts,” or subconscious beliefs about money, that affect our financial well-being and drive our financial decision-making. Because our money scripts generally go unexamined, we tend to “blame our financial difficulties and pain on other people and external circumstances, locking ourselves into a cycle of financial stress and self-destructive behaviors, feeling victimized and powerless.” Our money scripts are often written and cemented in our psyches early in life as a result of child-hood experiences and messages around money. Spend time recalling and writing down your earliest money memories. This will likely lead you to an awareness of your money scripts.

Understanding our past and present is merely the starting point of creating a healthy relationship with money. The process continues as we continue to explore our values, goals, and dreams, and begin to consciously create a healthy financial foundation that is aligned with our integrity and desires. As is the case in so many other areas of life, with awareness and focus, we can gain control of our financial well-being rather than allowing money to have power over us.

Lori Lustberg

USA

A meditation for divorcing parents during COVID-19

Divorcing during COVID-19 presents parents with a perfect storm of fear: They face the threat of death, feelings of confusion and powerlessness to protect themselves and their children, the stress and complexities of a divorce or separation, and the vulnerability to the parenting choices of the other parent. Traditional resources such as courthouses are generally closed as well.

There is nothing more human than taking the materials around us and the situations we happen to find ourselves in, and turning them into tools for our strength, growth, and survival. In the unique and challenging context of COVID-19, we can take inventory of the things we can control and resolve how they can help. In addition to taking reasonable precautions and heeding practical advice, it is equally important for parents to control their mindset and utilize it to inform their important decisions going forward.

Parents can set an intention to experience gratitude for their current health, an appreciation that as bad as their situation is, others still have it worse, and the empowerment that they can still control important elements of their lives.

This perspective holds that compassion and kindness are more contagious than any virus. Parents can choose to take a mindful, deliberative approach to problem-solving in situations where there may not be a perfect solution. They have the opportunity to role model for their children how people make difficult decisions during times of stress and uncertainty, even when others are slow to reciprocate or understand the value of such an approach. Parents can feel proud of themselves for making the best decisions they can while remembering that we are all struggling through this unique situation together. Children will benefit from having another resource to help them through their challenging situations in life.

It is not easy to keep a perspective that takes others into account. Parents can expect themselves and each other to slip up and occasionally say or do counterproductive things. This meditation will be here as their resource for reconnecting to themselves and their intentions. When COVID-19 passes, parents will be stronger for having gotten through it. Their tools will have sharpened. They can feel confident that perspective and intention will continue to carry them through any challenging situations they come across in the future, long after the virus is gone from their day to day lives.

Josh Kraus
USA

Taking the heat out of being trapped together

1. Set up

Difficult dialogue needs clear intention to change, saying what you mean and truly listening to the other person with greater depth. Begin alone with a pause, “What do I wish to change by talking?” Make a note before you request to meet. Remember, a request always allows a yes or no or waiting for a yes or no.

2. Meeting up

Start slowly, with silence, stillness, and serenity, creating calm, space and respect like neither of you gift yourselves normally. Remind yourself that the conflict you experience now is your biggest learning. Trust this process. One of you goes first, explains the problem(s) and what matters while the other actively listens. The other summarises what they heard and the speaker confirms they have been heard or explains a bit more. The second person explains their problem(s) and the first summarises, gets confirmation or more explanation. Only if you listen well will this cycle not repeat, so forget running any commentary, planning, or objection in your head and hear, listen, see, smell, feel, intuit what is going on in the other. Only by getting into the mindset of the other will you achieve your objective.

3. Clarity and Exploration

List the issues together, and together, pick an easier one. Clarify what it is. Accept different views are equally valid. Explore. “What, when, where, who, how, why is this important?” The more you explore, the more it becomes a dialogue. If there is emotion, acknowledge it, name it and allow it to dissipate. “What are your values, interests, and needs behind the issue?” Express yourself and allow them to self-express too. “What does that mean to you?” Keep listening to the other and yourself.

4. Problem Solving

Dialogue is talking with intention to reach mutual understanding. Exploration makes space to be creative in ways you never thought of before. “How would it work if?” “Would you be willing to.....?” “How about...?” Go for impossible ideas and find realistic possibilities. Reality check. “How would it work?” “Would that work for you too?”

5. Outcome

Pause to honour each and every time you agree on anything; no matter how small, it matters. You can agree. Make a shared note. Check what if anything you missed. If you have no outcome, go back to clarifying, exploring, and problem-solving because you both have the necessary intention.

Jane Cooksey
UK

Insights from Divorce Coaches

Remember, you are a role model for your children. When you look back at these times, will you be proud of how you handled this crisis?

1. Take care of yourself even before you take care of others. Create a morning ritual to announce to yourself the start of the day and to get yourself ready – whatever that might be for you. For some examples: a shower, nourishing breakfast, a cup of coffee or tea, a few quiet moments to think about and write down your priorities for the day.
2. Call a truce with your spouse. Agree with your spouse not to talk about the divorce. Create a workable daily routine for both of you and your children.
3. Focus on giving your children the full measure of your love, affection, patience, and character as only a parent can provide.
4. Live in day-tight compartments. In other words, close off today from yesterday and tomorrow so you can focus just on what needs to be tended to today. Get through today.
5. Take time for yourself, in a quiet place, from time to time during the day. Maybe a quiet space in your house, before others get up, or in your parked car or in a corner of the yard. No yard? Put on your headphones and your choice of music and go for a walk.
6. Set some boundaries for yourself. Internal boundaries you impose on yourself help ensure you can respond in a kind, and patient, even if firm, way to others.
7. Create a lifeline for yourself. A friend you can reach out to when you need to connect with the outside world; a gracious listener who refrains from telling you what you should do and will listen as a supportive friend (as you might also do for them) who understands your pain and frustration.
8. Take time at the end of the day to write down on paper the frustrations, whatever thoughts may be causing you pain (emotional or physical), just write, no editing. Empty out those negative thoughts, and tear that paper up and throw it away. And then acknowledge what you are grateful for, one or two things, big or small.

Parting thought:

From the pen of Dr. Seuss: “When bad things happen, you can let them define you, let them destroy you, or let them make you stronger.”

Pegotty Cooper and Randall Cooper

USA

How to divorce/separate during a pandemic...

I've (we've) decided to separate. What should I (we) do?

- These are stressful times; safety first for all involved must be the first priority. In an emergency call the emergency services. In some countries there is another number you can then call if you can't speak; which results in your call being transferred to the police and treated as an emergency with someone listening and if possible identifying your location (although that can't always be done). In spite of pandemic restrictions, if you have to leave for your safety, then leave. Better that than injured or dead. Charities across the globe offer support for victims of domestic abuse, whether you are male or female, and increasing if you identify as neither.
- If you have children; do your best to make sure you are looking after yourself, and then you will be better able to put them first. Easy to say, and often impossibly hard to do. Whatever age, children will feel the stress in the household and will overhear conversations. Remember that parental conflict is likely to be more damaging for them than a separation.
- Access online therapeutic help. Free therapeutic help is available in some localities for adults and for children. Make sure you check the provider's professional qualifications to be sure they have appropriate training and experience.
- In some countries it is possible to get divorced online relatively easily yourselves without lawyers, and this is likely to be quicker in the current situation or may be the only option to get the "paperwork" processed. Beware of commercial offerings that seek to capitalise on state provisions and effectively use the same process but charge for it.
- Often lawyers will offer a free initial call so that you can find out some basic information. Try to find a specialist family lawyer in your locality by checking out several sources (personal recommendations, firm websites, independent legal directories, LinkedIn and Twitter, and if in doubt, check the list maintained by the professional body in your country or state) and don't hesitate to ask the lawyers you speak to about their experience and approach.
- The law is very different in different countries and states across the globe. Make sure you're looking at information relevant to your locality and/or that of your ex (there may be a choice to be made and this could make a big difference; beware).
- Check whether the divorce process you use will also mean sorting out financial settlement and the arrangements for your children; or not.
- If you are not married, then you may be entitled to financial support; particularly if you have children. The law is often very different for separating couples who are married/in civil partnerships and those who are not.
- Use a parenting plan. You should be able to find one online for your area. This will help you think about arrangements for your children. You can also prepare your own and agree as much as possible with the other parent and then agree on where the differences between you are. Think about the important underlying elements of co-parenting; if you can commit to and adhere to these, then this, and the quality of the time you spend with your children, will be far more important for their well-being than how many hours or nights they spend with each of you. Focus on practical, workable arrangements, not on principles.

Trapped together when you want to separate

- If you can't agree on how to fund your children's financial needs going forwards; or even if you can, it is sensible to find out about how much child maintenance/alimony should be payable. In some locations there is an administrative process to work this out which operates separately to anything else. In most areas, there is an online tool you can use to calculate these amounts.
- To try to agree a financial settlement. If you are married, wherever you live:
 - o the first step is likely to be gathering financial information. In most places you can find an online form to help guide you so you can understand your finances and those of your ex. Some information will take longer to obtain and so it's wise to seek that as soon as possible. Other information may have to wait (e.g. real estate valuations) or is inherently uncertain at the moment (e.g. investment values). Also, if you or your spouse is currently unemployed due to the pandemic, you may need to wait until you have a clearer understanding of future income.
 - o the second step is to start considering how your financial resources should be reorganised, and what provision each of you needs. Legal advice would be helpful with this, but you could try mediation first.
 - o identify a mediator who can help you. Some mediators will give you legal and practical information and explain the other options such as collaborative practice and arbitration (find one that will if possible). Most mediation services will be offering online video mediation during the pandemic. State funded legal aid for mediation may be available; check this out if you think you might be eligible. In England for example, legal aid is more widely available for mediation than for legal help.
 - o if you have a financial adviser, seek their help with identifying your assets for this first step and with forward planning for the second step. Cash flow projections and debt management may be particularly important.
 - o You should record any agreement in an appropriate formal document for your location; but before confirming your agreement, if possible take legal advice, or otherwise be certain you understand all the implications and will be able to live with them for the long-term after the pandemic is over.
- If you have an international background, then seeking legal information from a specialist family mediator or legal advice from a specialist family lawyer early on is advisable, and thereafter a mediation process may present the best way of working out something sensible when multiple legal systems could otherwise be involved.

Alison Bull

UK

A short-term agreement could help you get through the Pandemic

A written short-term agreement may help with the stress of the pandemic. A “written short-term agreement” may be as simple as an email or text exchange about a parenting schedule. Or it may be several hard-copy pages temporarily changing a support order. Or it could be something in between in length and formality.

Why put any agreement in writing? Doing so increases the chance that you both are agreeing to the same thing. An in-person or phone conversation may be remembered differently by the people involved. Additionally, you can re-read it later to check on what was agreed.

Why “short-term”? It is usually easier to agree on something for the next week or month, or until the emergency orders are lifted, than to agree to something permanent, like what happens to the house, or the parenting plan through age 18.

How can you get to an agreement? Ask the other person about finding a time to talk about “topic X.” It is important to give the other person advance notice of your wish to talk about “topic X,” so he or she can think about it. The whole discussion could be in person, by phone or Zoom, or by email or text. Let the other person know that you do not expect an immediate response. You might say, “Do you think that we could make a plan for who is in charge of homeschooling on which days next week? I need to schedule some Zoom meetings. Could we talk on Saturday?” If you feel unsafe dealing with the other person, or there has been domestic abuse, reach out for help before making any agreement. Use the internet to search for “(name of your state, province, or country) getting help for domestic abuse.” This will lead you to help. In the US, call the Helpline at 1-800-799-7233.

What would be in the short-term agreement? It should briefly answer these questions:

- Who are the people making the agreement?
- What are they agreeing to?
- When does the agreement end, or what period does it cover?
- What is the reason for the agreement?

If it is changing a court order or covers major topics, say that either person may seek something different when the agreement ends. This is to head off any claim that it should become a permanent agreement. Follow up the conversation or exchange with a written version of what was agreed to. The agreement should include signatures, or if electronic, confirmation from the second person that she or he agrees. For example: Harper emails Avery “I will pay \$200 a week until the emergency orders end, or I return to work, whichever is first.” Avery emails “I agree.”

Honey Hastings

USA

Don't become a statistic: seek out relational help

We are in the midst of a pandemic involving a highly contagious and potentially life-threatening virus for which there is no established cure, no vaccine, shortages of safety gear, and trustworthy testing. As a result, stay-at-home orders, and physical distancing guidelines with recommended or mandatory use of protective wear when leaving the home for essential purposes is the current reality throughout the world. This is highly stressful, even without also taking into consideration the impact COVID-19 has had on people's employment (including any employment-related benefits such as health insurance), incomes, businesses, and investments. And, that does not even take into consideration that families either find themselves confined within their homes with their spouse or significant other and their children or struggling with co-parenting between two households with the fear and anxiety of possible exposure to the virus that may cause. And, currently, courts are generally only hearing matters deemed emergencies. To state that most everyone is on pins and needles and incredibly stressed out is an understatement.

Meanwhile, it is well-established that under certain levels of stress, people's IQ performance level decreases, as does their ability to manage their emotions. Thus, they do and say things they might not otherwise have done or said. There has been a noticeable increase in domestic abuse and in people numbing their feelings and emotions with alcohol and other numbing agents, among other things.

As such, it is widely anticipated that there will be a substantial increase in divorces, and other legal matters, including those involving family law, once the pandemic is under control. It is also anticipated that those matters will be more contentious than "normal" because of how people behaved with each other behind closed doors during this incredibly stressful time.

I would like to take this opportunity to state that such an outcome is not written in stone. Many therapists and experienced, well-trained, and well-skilled mediators, among others, are available through technology to assist people to be the best they can be to themselves and each other under the circumstances and thereby create a more optimal outcome, whatever that may be. Through technology, such help is literally just a click away, which could not be more convenient. And, when access is not limited by geography because we are all just a click away, people's options of which professionals with which to work increase significantly. Licensed mental health professionals can help anyone located within the jurisdiction(s) in which they are licensed and mediators are generally not licensed and therefore tend not to have any geographic limitations.

The vast majority of us will have less financial resources to divide and spend engaging in contentious legal battles once the world returns to some degree of "normalcy." I encourage everyone to do everything in their power to lead to the best possible post-COVID-19 outcome possible. Remember, we are just a click away.

Mark Baer

USA

Online mediation helps families avoid court

If you are reading this now - you are not alone.

Stress levels for families everywhere have never been higher. Severe economic distress and grave health fears combined with a crisis timeline that has no end date have increased tension within families. “Stay at Home” orders have forced parents to work from home and forced children to learn from home in confined spaces, with little relief. Social distancing from family and friends has caused many to feel isolated, except when connecting online.

If you are considering divorce or legal separation, please know this: You do not need to fight with each other. A professional family mediator in your community, or on-line, can help you through your entire process in a way that reduces conflict, lowers stress levels, and protects your family from the harm of litigation. Mediation is a far less expensive and less time-consuming process than more traditional methods. Mediation’s confidentiality protects your family’s privacy. It is also better for children.

Professional family mediators are offering online mediation, during the COVID-19 crisis. As a result, online family mediation has surged. Mediating online may even provide additional benefits for people who need immediate assistance. It supports an out-of-court, effective, affordable solution for families in need of conflict resolution or management. Success rates for resolving issues through mediation are very high, showing that court battles are mostly unnecessary. Family members are far more satisfied with mediation outcomes when compared to court-ordered outcomes, demonstrating that mediation is also more effective.

If you are a parent who is already divorced or separated, you and your co-parent do not need to use the courts, which imposes a judgment that dictates your family’s future. Legal battles cause harm to children. Child specialists agree that more conflict during and after separation increases the likelihood of long-term emotional and psychological problems for children.

Children benefit when parents remain in control of their child-related agreements and cooperatively develop a thoughtful Parenting Plan. Parents are more likely to comply with mediated agreements when compared to court orders. Healthy co-parenting is possible when parents choose online family mediation.

Courts have never been best equipped to resolve conflict within families. During the pandemic, they are either closed, holding hearings only on emergency matters, or experiencing major delays. Family court, even in normal times, is the worst option for most disputes involving divorce or separation.

Trapped together when you want to separate



If you are experiencing relationship challenges, but are not considering separation, mediation can also be effective to help couples stay married. Marital mediation, or “Couple Mediation” may provide practical, actionable agreements for couples to help solve problems, in order to improve their relationship.

A professional family mediator is available to assist you for almost any family issue that needs resolution. To find a mediator, visit The Academy of Professional Family Mediators website at www.apfmnet.org.

You are most certainly not alone. On behalf of family mediators everywhere, we wish you peaceful resolution, and we are standing by to help in any way possible.

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Head to the moon

Divorce or separation is a big challenge in itself. Usually, we decide to divide our paths when we are quite sure that we can no longer share the future, ideas, upbringing of children, or even to share the same space with our partner. All this can be made much more complicated by the pandemic. In the worst case, it may force you to stay together in one household much longer than you planned. Being forced to be with a partner 24/7 can lead to unpleasant feelings and experiences that result in many conflicts. You may feel confused, worried about what, and when your partner will do, you may also feel insecure about what you can do about it yourself. Such feelings can lead you to pre-prepared reactions - you protect yourself in advance, you are suspicious of your partner's motives and goals, and you defend your view. In such moments, you will already know how the negative, destructive spiral of conflict begins to spin and brutally pulls you down. You may often find that the worst thing about such a situation is not the inability to achieve your rights, interests, or pursuit. The worst part is how such a situation forces you to behave towards yourself and others in a way that is unpleasant, even repulsive. And that's not fair! Because you are a good person. Mostly you can follow your moral compass and distinguish between right and wrong.

What can you do in such a situation? Head to the Moon. Afford yourself to a change of perspective, leave the Earth (your current position in conflict), and move yourself to the Moon, where you will have a better overview. Everything is lighter on the Moon. You can take three essential steps here now (they may not be giant for humanity, but they can certainly be relevant for you).

Step 1: Understand what the conflict is doing to you

Conflict creates effects manifested as helplessness and self-absorption. These lead us to react blindly, rather than responding to our partner. Such a reaction weakens you in conflict. Take a look at yourself from the Moon and try to find out what thoughts and emotions tend to appear when you in conflict? What happens to your body - what physiological changes occur when you are part of a conflict conversation? When do you need to defend yourself? Under what conditions is it difficult for you to perceive the perspective of a partner? When you can realize you become self-absorbed in conflict, it will paradoxically make you less self-absorbed and, therefore, stronger.

Step 2: Choose a strategy for acting in conflict - you cannot control the other, but you can control yourself

Our moral compass best fits the strategy of compassionate strength, where we can stay true to our principles, values, and beliefs while being open and understanding of those different from ours. You can use compassionate strength in different ways. For example, you can create space and time to respond - not to react right away - and suggest that you return to the conversation within a particular time or date. You can also take the initiative and start asking questions that will help both of you better understand what the other is trying to say. This approach often calms the conflict. You can also create a list of sentences and things in advance that you won't say next time in the conflict conversation because you know that the other will explode then.

Step 3: Decide in advance what your global goal of further conversations with the (ex) partner is

In what situations do you feel good about how you handled the conflict conversation? Is it when you win, or rather when you can be proud of yourself how you acted? What do you need during a pandemic while you are locked up at home: trump another or survive together?



Leťte na Měsíc



Rozvod nebo rozchod jsou velká výzva samy o sobě. Většinou se rozhodneme rozdělit svoje cesty, když si jsme dost jistí, že s partnerem už nedokážeme dál sdílet budoucnost, představy, výchovu dětí a doktorce ani stejný prostor. Tohle všechno může pandemie hodně zkomplikovat. V nejhorším případě vás může donutit zůstat v jedné domácnosti mnohem déle, než jste plánovali. Být nucen potkávat partnera 24 hodin 7 dní v týdnu může vést k nepříjemným pocitům a prožitkům, jež vyústí do řady konfliktů. Můžete se cítit zmatení, strachovat se, co a kdy partner udělá, můžete cítit i nejistotu, co s tím vším vlastně můžete udělat vy sami. Takové pocity vás mohou vést k předpřipraveným reakcím - předem se chráníte, jste podezřívaví vůči motivům a cílům partnera a bráníte svůj pohled. V takových chvílích už poznáte, jak se začíná roztáčet negativní, destruktivní spirála konfliktu a surově Vás stahuje dolů. Často možná zjišťujete, že nejhorší na takové situaci není nemožnost dosáhnout naplnění svých práv nebo zájmů, případně nemožnost uplatnit svou snahu. Nejhorší na tom bývá způsob, jakým vás taková situace nutí chovat se vůči sobě i druhým způsobem, který je pro vás samotné nepříjemný, dokonce odpudivý. A to není fér! Protože vy jste dobrý člověk. Většinou se dokážete řídit svým morálním kompasem a rozlišovat mezi dobrým a špatným.

Co můžete v takové situaci dělat? Vydejte se na Měsíc. Dopřejte si změnu perspektivy, opusťte Zemi (vaši současnou pozici v konfliktu) a přesuňte sami sebe na Měsíc, kde budete mít lepší přehled. Na Měsíci je totiž všechno lehčí. Tady teď můžete udělat tři důležité kroky (možná nebudou důležité pro lidstvo, ale rozhodně mohou být důležité pro vás).

Krok 1: Uvědomte si, co s vámi konflikt dělá

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Konflikt s sebou přináší efekty projevující se jako bezmoc a znevýhodnění vůči druhému. Ty nás vedou k tomu, že slepě reagujeme, spíše než promyšleně odpovídáme na podněty druhého. Takové reakce Vás v konfliktu oslabují. Podívejte se na sebe z Měsíce a pokuste se zjistit, co bývají myšlenky a emoce, které se u Vás objevují, když jste v konfliktu. Co se děje s Vaším tělem - jaké fyziologické změny se v něm stávají, když jste součástí konfliktního rozhovoru? Kdy máte potřebu se bránit? Za jakých podmínek je pro Vás náročné vnímat perspektivu partnera? Když si dokážete uvědomit, kdy se stáváte v konfliktu sebestřednými, udělá Vás to paradoxně méně sebestřednými a tím pádem silnějšími.

Krok 2: Zvolte si strategii jednání v konfliktu - nemůžete kontrolovat druhého, ale můžete kontrolovat sebe

Našemu morálnímu kompasu nejlépe odpovídá strategie citlivé síly, kdy můžeme zůstat věrní svým zásadám, hodnotám a přesvědčením a přitom být otevření a chápaví vůči zásadám, hodnotám a přesvědčením, jež se od těch našich liší. Citlivou sílu můžete uplatnit různými způsoby. Můžete si například vytvořit prostor a čas na reakci - třeba neodpovídat hned a navrhnout, že odpovíte do určitého času nebo data. Můžete také převzít iniciativu a začít se ptát na otázky, jež vám pomohou lépe rozumět tomu, co se druhý snaží říci. To často konflikt zklidňuje. Můžete si také předem vytvořit seznam vět a věcí, které v konfliktu přistě neřeknete, protože víte, že pak druhý bouchne.

Krok 3: Rozhodněte předem, co je Váš globální cíl dalších rozhovorů s (ex) partnerem

V jakých situacích máte dobrý pocit z toho, jak jste zvládli konfliktní rozhovor. Je to tehdy, když zvítězíte, nebo spíš tehdy, když můžete být hrdí sami na sebe a na to, jak jste jednali? Co potřebujete v průběhu pandemie, zatímco jste zavření doma: zašlapat druhého nebo společně přežít?

Rovin Brzobohatý

Czech Republic

Co-parenting in the face of COVID-19

As we begin to work through the days and weeks of living in these uncertain times, it's important for co-parents to remember that any stress we are feeling is being absorbed by our children. Right now families need more cooperation than ever before.

Parenting plans that worked a few short months ago may need to be revisited. If you mediated your parenting plan, your agreement likely contains language stating that "a reasonable and flexible access schedule between both parties and the child serve the child's best interests, and as such the parties intend the plan to provide a flexible framework which may be adjusted, upon mutual agreement, to meet specific needs and circumstances." Co-parents who have a healthy co-parenting relationship likely are able to agree upon changes that make sense for the family during this uncertain time.

But what if you can't? What if the kids being home from school make it so the parenting plan you've had no longer works and you both have different ideas as to how it should change? What if your opinions as to safe distancing differ?

Now, more than ever, parents need to have meaningful, respectful co-parenting communication focused solely on the best interests of their children. An evaluation of the potential issues this pandemic may raise for your family is necessary. Better to be proactive and have a discussion now so that your expectations and those of co-parent are aligned.

What steps should we take to properly co-parent during coronavirus?

Your parenting plan may have a built-in framework for working towards an amicable resolution of any modifications, such as an agreement that you will meet in person, and attempt to reach a decision that is in the best interests of the child or children. Many agreements will provide that these steps will be taken prior to either party seeking judicial intervention. Some even mandate that the parents meet with a neutral mediator, mental health professional or co-parenting before seeking judicial intervention. Make sure you go back to your agreement to see what you and your former spouse agreed upon and follow that framework.

Tips for Approaching Conversations with your Former Spouse:

- Lessen your reactivity/triggering. Although you may have tried this in the past and feel like you may have failed, there is no better time than now to re-commit to non-adversarial communication with your co-parent.
- Don't contact your co-parent when you are feeling overly stressed. Right now, most of us have stress, no one is immune to it. Make it a policy to try and communicate with your co-parent after you have used your self-calming tools. For a quick boost before contacting your co-parent, try CALM or Headspace Apps. These mindfulness Apps are a great way to lower heart rate and blood pressure which is essential in lowering stress.

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- For co-parents who attend individual therapy, take advantage of your ability to schedule virtual sessions during the COVID-19 pandemic as many therapists are switching to a video format. If it's tricky to find a quiet place in the house to talk, you can do it in your car in the driveway, and sessions can also be shorter to accommodate. If you don't have a therapist, this is a perfect time to find one and get started.
- Talk to your support system. Explain to your friends and family that you are putting your best foot forward with your co-parent and that you will do your part to keep things positive. Committing in this way gives them the cue not to bring up negative things about your co-parent which can re-trigger you.
- "Fake it till you make it" We all know this saying, let's adjust it to, "keep trying as an act of self-compassion." Self-compassion is reducing your own suffering.
- Keep re-centering. Ask yourself, what are you grateful for during this time? This is a question that we would like you to answer throughout each day because it will bring you a measure of peace and flood your body with positive and stabilizing hormones.

If you are still unable to come to an agreement together, what are your options as you will likely not have access to the Court system.

Private Mediation. If you cannot come to an agreement, consider mediating your dispute with a private mediator. In mediation, the mediator facilitates the negotiations of the disputing parties and tries to help them settle their dispute. The responsibility is on the parties, and not the mediator, to make the decisions. Often in parenting situations, co-parenting counselors can help enhance your co-parenting relationship to reduce the stress for both you and your children.

Private Arbitration. You can also explore private arbitration in which you and your former spouse appoint an unbiased arbitrator to make a binding decision after hearing from both sides. Proceedings can range from paper submissions to a full trial. Parties should consider the extent to which the rules of evidence will apply, the type and extent of witness testimony, upper limits on the length of the hearings, whether hearings will be in person or over electronic means, and more.

Your children need to see parents working together, having respectful communication and ensuring they are safe. You can do this, because you have to do this.

Rosemarie Ferrante with Tips by Kelley Hopkins-Alvarez

USA

Change the nature of the interaction

Divorce is a couple's way to make things better, but this pandemic may negatively interfere with that plan and make things much worse for your family. But consider that **it only takes one person to change the nature of an interaction** and you have a great deal of power if you are the recipient of your partner's frustration and anger. You can either engage or keep some semblance of calm. Fighting back has many negative ramifications as you already know, particularly for your children. So taking the high road, no matter how painful it may be, may create your best outcome. Here is something we mediators suggest for our clients.

One of my former divorce mediation clients told me that her husband yelled and demeaned her in front of their three-year-old when picking her up to go to his house. But she remembered something she learned in our divorce education class: **that it only takes one person to change the nature of an interaction**, so she tried that and began to listen respectfully each time her husband treated her so poorly, and while he was yelling at her she calmly told him how much their little girl loved him and was so excited for him to pick her up. She did this each time he picked her up, as he yelled at her. But as she stayed with her resolve to talk kindly over his yelling and screaming, he became less and less angry, and after a few weeks, he no longer yelled at her. Since his wife continued her reasonableness, his behavior had no real effect on her. He de-escalated a bit each time and eventually changed his behavior. The only hint I had from him of his pain was when he shared with me how hard the divorce had been for him. Had his wife not shared this with me, I would never have guessed he would have had such an awful temper and intense anger towards her. (This intervention in conflict is not appropriate where there is domestic violence.)

So as you and your spouse are confined in the same house consider the power you have in respectfully managing your part in the conflicts as they arise, by taking the high road and not engaging in the other's angry outbursts. **For you have the power to change the nature of the interaction.**

Marilyn McKnight

USA

Strategies for living separately but together

During this pandemic, some parents who intended to part ways soon must postpone their separation. Income has decreased a lot, so supporting two households is suddenly not possible. Everyone in the family is likely to be feeling the stress. Being trapped in a house with someone you intend to divorce has the potential to be terrible, but with wisdom and effort, you can make something good come out of dealing with it.

Start with this: Instead of being adversaries who do not care about hurting each other, you and your spouse can be allies as you try to solve the problems your family faces. Your kids need you to do that. They don't want to be caught in the crossfire of open hostilities or in the ice of cold rage. They need parents who can make their homes safe and supportive.

To get through this period you will need to take good care of yourself: nutrition, sleep, exercise, and frequent conversations with friends matter. If you are coping with a lot of anxiety or depression, talk with a therapist at least once or twice a month.

About spaces: regardless of how small your apartment is, you need to make sure that each parent has an entirely private space they can return to when they need to rest and recharge their psychic or physical energies. If you also need places where you can do your work by telecommuting, creating ways for both of you to do that will be crucial for the family's financial and emotional well-being. If your living quarters are crowded, you may need to share an office, taking scheduled turns to use it.

Having rules about the use of shared spaces will also be very helpful. Is it important to you or your partner not to have to contend with the other's presence while cooking or cleaning up? In your family, is it still possible for everyone to sit down together for dinner without putting your kids in an uncomfortable situation? Can you agree about periods when the TV in the living room must stay off?

If one or both of you need to continue working from home, that may automatically decide who is the default parent during work hours — the parent who has to handle squabbles, pleas to play outside, kids' chores, etc. Each of you should have some scheduled turns as the default parent. To help the kids with the schedule, you can have a sign on your shared office door. One side can say "Mom is at work. Talk to Dad." The other can say "Dad is at work. Talk to Mom."

If you and your spouse can agree on consistent rules for your kids that both of you will enforce, that will be helpful for everyone. Coming to an agreement about the family's budget during this period of sheltering at home will also be very helpful.

Some couples will be able to make agreements about finances, use of space, schedules, rules, and activities on their own. Others will have considerable difficulty. If you and your partner are in the latter group, seek help from a professional family mediator. Their work regularly includes helping families with separation, divorce, and co-parenting, and they are available for online meetings.

Virginia Colin

USA

Thinking about the future - even during the pandemic

This piece is for couples with children to encourage them to use this time of enforced lockdown to reconsider whether their relationship is over and to think about how splitting up can affect children a long time into the future. **Ask yourselves, “Where do I want to us be in 3 years?”** It is very difficult when in the throes of conflict to take a step back, but making such a big decision when feeling upset, angry, hurt, vengeful can result in consequences you may come to deeply regret.

Timing is crucial and being aware that you and your partner may be at very different stages in the process can help make sense of why feelings may be so at odds. Often the issue is about “the leaver and the left”. Very rarely do couples both decide at the same time to end their relationship. When a partner decides they can no longer stay and tell the other it can come as a great shock. It helps to know that many of the overwhelming emotions are in fact a normal part of a process as fraught as ending a marriage or long term relationship, especially when children are involved.

Parallels can be drawn between the stages of the emotions commonly experienced in separation to those of bereavement. Elizabeth Kubler Ross’s book *On Death and Dying* (1969) describes the emotional stages of bereavement as: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, Acceptance. When one of you is in denial and the other has moved on it can be like talking in different languages! It takes an average of two years for a couple to get through the process, so trying to resolve things quickly and at the same pace is pretty difficult.

Parents naturally do not want to upset their children, but if the urge to protect them is to avoid talking to them, this can make things worse. Children may not be able to ask questions, so it’s up to you. Yes, it is hard for parents to deal with their own emotions, much less their children’s, however, in the absence of knowing, children often feel it is somehow their fault. So parents need to muster their own “adult” selves to deal with the upheavals. Giving yourselves time in lockdown to bend not break might just ...

Lorraine Schaeffer

USA

Even during a Pandemic, don't forget your Bank!

When you're dealing with a relationship that is coming apart and worries about the effect of COVID-19, your Bank is probably not at the top of your to do list. Although often overlooked, especially in these times, your lender is one of the most important entities to consider if you are separating or divorcing.

As a lawyer dealing with the consequences of separation and ultimately divorce, it is very frustrating when I am asked to assist a client who may already have spent thousands on legal fees and many hours negotiating the terms of a settlement agreement or obtaining court orders, having forgotten about talking to their Bank.

Any proper settlement of the couple's finances must address their unique circumstances, and be practical and realistic. The bank is never a party; it did not agree to the settlement terms, and it is therefore not necessarily required to honour those terms. However, the bank's participation and even consent may be essential to implementing the terms of that settlement. Serious problems can arise when, as part of their settlement, couples propose to making transfers of property with one of them assuming responsibility for a joint debt or other obligation, without first consulting the bank and obtaining necessary approvals.

For example, if you have a property that is mortgaged to a bank, the terms of the mortgage usually requires you to obtain the lender's consent to any future transfer of the property - unless the debt is paid in full.

So, if you propose that one of you will transfer a mortgaged property to the other, and in return your partner will assume all obligations of the loan, including repayments, you must ensure that the Bank will consent to this arrangement. To implement this transfer and assumption, the existing mortgage would be cancelled and a new mortgage created.

That might seem like an easy process—just prepare new documents. However, before agreeing to these terms, the bank will assess the new the new owner's financial situation and ability to repay the outstanding debt. You cannot assume that the bank will simply accept your plans without conducting this sort of evaluation. Further complicating the situation is the possibility that your employment situation may change as a result of the fallout from COVID-19.

So my advice is to remember to talk to the Bank, and do so while you are negotiating the terms of the settlement. Even now, with restrictions in place you can always talk with your bank by phone, email, or other safe method. Don't wait until after your plans are set in stone.

Peter Boyle
Ireland

How to deal with a Pandemic while separated or divorced

As part of your separation or divorce, you and your partner carefully negotiated parenting and financial plans that you were sure would work for your family. Well, now those plans have swiftly been turned upside down. How can you continue shared parenting when the children are quarantined in one residence? Is it possible to meet increased expenses or to manage with less income? Contributors in this section offer practical advice and useful tips to help you through this new and challenging time.

Child-friendly tips for separated parents during the COVID-19 crisis

When families separate, it can be a sad time for some people, especially for the children, and for parents and grandparents when separated from their children or grandchildren after the break-up. This sadness can increase if children are physically separated from one parent and their grandparents and other members of their extended family during a COVID-19 virus' lock-down' period.

Children caught up in the conflict and tension of a family break-up may feel anxious, sad, confused, left out, angry, depressed, or even torn between parents who are dealing with anger and other stresses associated with separation - and these feelings can intensify during the current crisis.

Although this can be a stressful time, try not to fight or argue in front of the children, face-to-face, or when on the phone, as it will increase their anxiety.

Depending on the age of the children, separated families may be able to arrange for children to have meaningful time in each parent's household, depending on the distancing rules that are placed in your location. If that is not possible, encourage the children to have meaningful and regular contact with both parents and their grandparents – face to face is best but regular contact by telephone (face time), skype or zoom, emails and/or letters can reassure children that they are wanted and loved.

If parents are able to settle their differences and treat each other with respect, it will be reassuring for children to see their parents cooperating during this otherwise stressful time.

Remember that grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins are very important sources of support for children. Phone calls, emails, cards, or a visit can help children to stay connected and feel that they are still part of a family. Make sure that your children can feel free to contact their relatives on both sides of the family - children grieve when they are not able to see people that they are close to.

If you have another partner after separation, and there are children from different families, make sure that they all feel loved and included.

If you are able, take the time to play with your children every day.

If any of your children show signs of being depressed, make sure that you get help for them from someone they love and trust or an expert children's counsellor – some may be working online via zoom or skype.

How to deal with a Pandemic while separated or divorced



If you, as a parent, are physically unable to be with your children, arrange to spend time with friends or family so that you do not feel lonely, and the children are reassured that you are OK.

If a problem arises, get the facts and make a plan; don't worry alone – talk to others and ask for help. If you feel depressed or anxious, make sure that you get help from your friends or family - you can also ring a telephone Helpline.

While children, in general, like to see their parents together, there are circumstances when this may not be safe or of benefit for the children. If you and/or your children have experienced violence and abuse, you should not think that you need to spend time with your abusive partner for the benefit of your children. If you or your children feel unsafe, receive threats or experience violence or abuse, contact your Emergency phone number or a Domestic Violence Helpline.”

Dale Bagshaw

Australia.

Grief and loss in family separation

At this time of COVID-19, we need to practice social distancing. Information is dynamic, and messages about how to stay safe are conflicting. The goalposts keep shifting, and we're learning to manage and navigate as we go. There is a risk of feeling isolated, stressed in a new world that feels uncertain, unclear, frightening. Parents may find themselves navigating the blurring boundaries between their worlds (work/life/leisure), and their sense of self (professional/personal/work/parent/remote distance teacher/other life roles). These shifting sands have an impact on how one can manage and engage with others and the world.

At separation, the intimate adult relationship is severed. For those who have ongoing, unresolved emotional connections and children together, this can interfere with parental capacity and co-parenting. For their children's best interests, parents need to build their post-separation adult parental relationship.

How do grief and loss feature in family disputes?

Separation and the relationship ending can signify a loss of dreams, expectations, trust, and an experience of grief that can be similar to a death.

At separation, parents can be vulnerable with a web of emotions that is complex and dynamic. These emotions often include fear, anger, grief, embarrassment, shame, guilt, betrayal, loss, and relief. Each parent has a different experience of these, as does each unique child. These can be further complicated by mental health issues, drug and alcohol issues, availability and helpfulness of supports, the behaviour of others (including the other parent), other motivations (new partner, work commitments), financial wellbeing, etc. These emotions can overcome rational thinking. Neurological evidence demonstrates the primacy of emotions over cognitions (thoughts) as separation can be experienced as a threat to a person's wellbeing and even survival of self (including economic, social security, support systems, etc.). The primal impact of the potential experience of losing children (or time with children or control over children), can have a fundamental impact on one's sense of identity. Often at a time when they are most raw, parents need to put these emotions aside.

When there are children, parents may have no sense of closure as they need to repeatedly engage with the other parent and co-operate to work in their children's best interests. This can be tricky as their conflict, and their separation story can continue to have an impact on their ongoing interactions. Parental conflict has a profound impact on children. The degree of parental conflict is a major risk factor associated with children's adjustment to parental separation. It is the ongoing unresolved parental conflict, not separation, that has adverse effects on children and can have developmental impacts. Children's adjustment improves when conflict declines.

Now add COVID-19 and all its impacts; the uncertainty, fear, stresses, and stressors to this already complex mix.

How to deal with a Pandemic while separated or divorced

So, tips for parents are to consider their own willingness to negotiate and make decisions, their capacity to negotiate, voluntariness, and degree of authority to make decisions at this time. In the current COVID-19 climate, these considerations are far more complex. Parents may feel less able, more worried, more fearful. Being aware of how you feel and think, enables a parent to identify how to build their own capacity to support co-operative post-separation parenting and ensure their parental capacity is not diminished but remains 'good enough.' This does not mean you get it right all of the time.

Selecting appropriate and helpful language in these conversations is vitally important.

Self-awareness, acting in good faith, giving the other parent the benefit of the doubt, being interest-based rather than adversarial, remaining accountable, allowing for flexibility and patience, is even more important than ever particularly when you can feel and be, stressed and wanting to fight/flight/freeze, feeling easily provoked and triggered. Parents need to manage the pathway between rigidity and chaos in their parenting (borrowed from Dan Siegel), creating space and time to decompress and de-stress, therefore building capacity to focus on their child/ren.

Finally, particularly at this time, developing and maintaining strategies to support self-care and mindfulness, good mental health, nutrition, physical wellbeing and safety, building toleration of stress, are of paramount importance for parents and children.

Jodie Grant

Australia

Share empathy, structure, and play

Regardless of whether your children are with both parents in one household or share time across two, here are some helpful considerations regarding children within any household structure.

Understand that, just like you, your children are stressed by the lack of control and uncertainty about the COVID shutdown, and by the limitations to their physical and social activities. Talking frankly and honestly about their concerns and the reality of the situation, and projecting hope and optimism into the future, will help give your children a better sense of control over the situation.

Continue to show love to your children every single day. Remember to play with them a lot, since it will elevate their spirits and help keep them from being bored. Children miss the sensory world of friends and play, and they may have to share physical space and have minimal social privacy. Parents may be working on their computers from home, and demand quiet time. This can be easy for a child with temperament characteristics of low activity level, low intensity, and low needs for sociability, but it may be more challenging for the child who, by their very temperament, may need to be exuberant, spirited, expressive, and play frequently with other children. Give the exuberant child a safe space to do this. For example, letting the child go into the garage, sit in the car with the windows rolled up, and scream and/or sing to his or her heart's content often takes care of that energy. And, if parents' disagreements result in anger, they would also do well to take their argument and settle it out in the car, away from the children.

Engage your children in meaningful activities, based on their strengths and interests, rather than forcing compliance with tasks that the child may see as boring. This includes schoolwork, which most children resist during this crisis. Keep perspective on these activities—the goal is engagement and expression, not perfection. Lower your standards for a “great” job, and just let your children “feel good about their effort.” Share this perspective with the other parent. Remember that we are in a crisis, and our goal is to survive, not necessarily to excel. These times call for more parental empathy, not impatience and anger. Try to make this time more fun and creative for children; remember that they naturally live in the world of play!

Donald T. Saposnek, Ph.D

USA

How one person can diffuse high conflict situations during quarantine

Understanding Conflict Styles

In relationships, people will approach conflict differently. Five main conflict styles can help explain the reasons behind high conflict situations. Accommodators give in and do whatever the other person wants, making them feel taken advantage of. Avoiders leave or avoid conflict at all cost. Controllers have to win at all costs: their way, or else... Collaborators try to find a way for everyone to win. Compromisers know that everyone can get a little of what they want but realistically might have to make some sacrifices, too. Think about a person you are in conflict with. What conflict style do you take with them, and what style do they take with you? This might help you understand how to approach them better.

Power Dynamics

High conflict situations can also be understood through power dynamics or an imbalance of power. This could apply to partners with each other, or parents and children. When one person has more power than the other person, conflict will follow. Power imbalances are also behind domestic violence. (Please reach out to your local DV shelter and connect with an advocate if this is your situation).

Rewriting Your Story

Once you understand conflict styles and power dynamics, you can learn to take different approaches towards handling and diffusing high conflict situations. You might not be able to change how the other person handles or approaches conflict, but your actions can prevent and reduce it. It's also okay to ask for professional help while navigating conflict.

Write and reflect on the conflict example above. If you are an avoider or an accommodator, does that solve the conflict? What might you do differently? Could you be more assertive to get your needs met, too? As a controller, could you think about what the other person needs?

What would it look like if you had more power? If you had a voice, what would you say? What do you think the other person wants and needs? What do you think the other person would say?

When stuck in the same space during quarantine, make sure to communicate when you need time for yourself, and respect each other's boundaries. Practice winning a little and giving a little. Talk with others when things are calm, not when things are heated. Reach out for help if needed.

Darby Munroe

USA

Five financial tips when you are facing divorce

I picked up the phone the other day to speak to a potential new client, and she cried, ‘I’m panicked!’ She had left her career to be a stay at home mom of three small children, the couple had been talking about divorce for a while, and the husband is the primary breadwinner. I mediated a case yesterday in which the husband was the stay at home dad and the wife is the primary source of income for the family. He is nervous about his financial future but moving forward with hope.

All of my clients are apprehensive and scared of the changes that a divorce will bring. These tips will focus on financial concerns when a couple is facing divorce. Often only one spouse was involved in handling the finances in the marriage (paying bills, budgeting, investing) and establishing relationships with the family accountant, attorney, and financial advisor.

1. Assemble a good team of advisors

Find a good certified divorce financial analyst (CDFA). Financial analysts help to assess every aspect of your financial life -- including savings, investments, insurance, taxes, and retirement—and help you develop a detailed strategy or financial plan for meeting all of your financial goals. Your CDFA may also be skilled in advising you on business valuation if either party owns a business or on financial forensics. Sometimes my clients together hire a divorce financial neutral who works collaboratively with them during the process of mediation.

You will need to find a neutral mediator if you are mediating your divorce and a lawyer to review any agreement that you may reach and with whom to consult during your divorce negotiations, You may also need to consult with an accountant, a real estate appraiser, a therapist, and a parenting coordinator if there are children.

Worried about how to pay for a team of advisors? Ask for a no charge consult before you commit to working with and paying a CDFA, mediator, lawyer, accountant, and/or therapist. You want to make sure that all of the advisors who you are hiring will be a good fit and will be affordable. Negotiate sharing the cost of your neutral mediator, divorce financial neutral, and real estate appraiser with your former spouse. And if you do not have the financial resources to hire a CDFA or similar advisor, do not worry. Many couples do not have a complex financial situation that might benefit from and require a financial analysis. A neutral mediator will help to empower the divorcing couple to negotiate splitting of assets and liabilities without hiring a financial analyst. Moreover, health insurance will cover much of the cost of a therapist and/or parenting coordinator, if needed.

How to deal with a Pandemic while separated or divorced

2. Organize your financial documents and record your monthly expenses

Set up an organizational system if you don't already have one in place so that you have easy access to all of your utility bills, mortgage statements, car loan documents, credit card statements, joint retirement and bank accounts, tax returns, homeowner/car/liability insurance statements, appraisals of valuable items, and all other important financial documents and records. Estimate the net worth that you and your spouse have accrued.

It's important to understand what all of your specific monthly expenses are so that you know what monthly income you will need for the future. You will want to create a budget for future income and expenses. Save your receipts and track all of your monthly expenses with an easy to use money management program such as Quicken or Mint.

3. Update insurance and beneficiaries

If you have health insurance coverage through your spouse's plan, you will need to investigate new coverage options and change to a different health insurance plan once you are divorced. Contact a health insurance broker if employer-based health insurance is not an option. A broker can help explain different benefit packages and costs. Review and update beneficiaries on your various insurance policies and financial accounts, as well as who has legal authority to make health care decisions for you on your medical proxy document. If you had joint car, valuable articles, and liability insurance or any other joint insurance policies, set up your own separate insurance policies in your own name. Update your will. (You may need to consult with a lawyer who specializes in wills, trusts, and estate planning.)

4. Hold off on major financial decisions for now

Don't make impulsive large financial purchases, switch jobs, or move to a different geographic location at this time.

5. Review and monitor your credit report and check your credit score

Close your joint bank accounts and open accounts in your own name. You don't want to be responsible for the spending and debt of your spouse once you've decided to divorce. Obtain a new credit card account in your own name. Protect your credit score.

Ellice Halpern

USA

Where do you go when there is nowhere to go?

While advising family law clients during the COVID-19 Pandemic over the past few weeks, the most common issue which has emerged relates to access for children.

I have had queries from all sides, some from fathers who wish to continue to see their children and who are being denied access and some from mothers who are genuinely worried about their children going on access, often to another home, where they may be in contact with many other people, with a higher risk of being exposed to COVID-19.

This is often against a backdrop of hurt and mistrust which can be generated when a relationship breaks down. In the majority of cases (although not all), there are two loving parents who both want what is best for their children and who will take good care of their children when they are with them.

The messages from the Irish Courts, the Law Society of Ireland and the Minister for Justice have been clear and consistent and confirm that if there is an access order in place, access should continue. In addition, if there is no order in place but there is an arrangement for access which the parents have been using between themselves, then this should also continue. The restrictions on travel do not apply while parents are traveling to have contact with their children.

There is a slight sting in the tail, however, in that a lot of parents who have access Orders or agreements, may not have a secure home to bring their children to for access, or they may be living with elderly parents who need to be protected. The usual options open to these parents, of a trip to the playground, the cinema or a play centre, or calling to visit aunts, uncles, and cousins are not available at the moment.

We have had good weather over the past few weeks, and a walk, a picnic in the park, or feeding the ducks have been options for spending quality time with children during scheduled access. If or when, the weather changes however, the parent with access may find things even more difficult, as a trip to the park in the rain will not be a viable option. In this situation, the parent with primary care of the children may need to consider whether they want their children to spend their access time sitting in a car with Daddy or Mummy, or whether, in a bending of the usual rules around access, the children's home and a box of art supplies could be made available for the children and their non-custodial parent. I appreciate that this may not work in some cases where the relationship between the parents is too strained or where there has been any kind of abuse in the relationship, however, it may be worth considering in some cases to ensure that access can be an enjoyable experience for the children.

Doirín Mulligan

Ireland

Child support account

As a result of the global pandemic, there are likely 5-7 million child support payors in the US who have a legal right to seek modifications or suspension of their child support orders. The one problem is the courts have shut down with nobody to change the orders. Another more pressing problem is that children still need to be fed. The third problem is that holding a court contest has never really worked. The US guidelines child support system has been a disaster. Less than half of all child support recipients ever receive the full amount ordered and with more than 114 billion dollars of unpaid arrears owing as of 2018, a completely new approach is needed.

The new approach, pioneered by a few professional family mediators, is the “Child Support Account” and it is the perfect answer to the disruption of the virus.

It works by having both parents deposit money into a joint account which is used by either parent to pay for agreed upon children’s expenses. Either on their own or with the assistance of a professional family mediator, parents jointly create a budget of children’s expenses to be paid from the account. Food, cell phones or computers, clothing, and medical costs are likely the basic categories these days of sheltering in place. The details will be different for each family, and when things get back to normal, school lunches, activity fees, child care, activities, and a host of other expenses will likely be added. Housing may also need to be added in this time of crisis to help children have adequate residences when moving between both parents.

In normal times, parents contribute to the account on a proportional basis according to their incomes. In these times of Pandemic crisis, parents will need to have difficult conversations about how they will both fund the account. If they are fortunate and have IRA accounts or savings, they may have to tap into these reserves. Use of the Child Support Account allows both parents to see that the money is being used directly for the children’s needs. Most importantly, use of the account actually enhances cooperation and ownership because it requires the creation of a joint plan, as opposed to discussions with an attorney about legal rights. The experience of those using the account method has shown greater compliance and almost universal satisfaction.

Disrupting old patterns is one effect of a pandemic. But in the case of traditional child support, a disruption may be beneficial, because parents are forced to cooperate to find a better mechanism for sharing the costs of raising their children.

The author of this article (chapter) is also a co-author of a recently published book titled “THE CHILD SUPPORT SOLUTION, UNHOOKING CUSTODY FROM SUPPORT, CSR Press 2020. (contact the author at steve@ericksonmediation.com)

Stephen K. Erickson

USA

Understanding the human wellness system to sustain our relationships during difficult times

Are you going through a difficult conflict or situation in your life? Is it time to take the pulse of your relationship, job, or situation to see how they are contributing to your overall well-being and to that of those around you? Often, we fail to see that a conflict may be highlighting that an area in our life or relationship is detracting from our well-being.

I have spent a bit over two decades as a Conflict Analyst, which allowed me to shed light on the fact that when we are not well, it is difficult to contribute wellness to our relationships, work, or life in a way that can meet the needs of others.

Imagine yourself trying to fill a water jug from a disconnected tap. It would be a futile impossible exercise that would eventually leave you feeling not only thirsty but also frustrated and maybe a bit disappointed and angry.

Although it looked like a regular tap and had all the parts in place to turn it on unless the tap is connected to the main water source it will not be able to deliver water to fill your jug. No matter how much you turn it on, no water will come forth.

The same is true for us in our various roles as parents, spouses, leaders or citizens, we need to be connected to a main source, a process, model that continually improves our wellness so that we can be able to contribute some element of wellness to our relationships and our lives. Often when we are upset at someone, in a conflict situation or facing a difficult challenge, we look externally for the answer. We blame, criticize, and accuse others but the fact is that we should be looking internally to see how well we are doing in the various areas of our lives and taking the pulse on what we should be doing to improve how well others are experiencing us in various areas.

I have done extensive work on what I call the Wellness Competency Mindset Teaching™ to practitioners to help their clients adopt a wellness mindset. This teaching is based on my signature Wellness Improvement System® (WIS) model, a nine-dimensional wellness tool that shows us that we are multi-dimensional and multi-faceted. Thus, our level of wellness in any one of the nine dimensions will impact our overall well-being and how well we function in the other dimensions.

How to deal with a Pandemic while separated or divorced

The Wellness Assessment offers you an opportunity to see all key life areas that makes up your wellness dimensions such as: spiritual, social, emotional, intellectual, environmental, financial, physical, interpersonal.

There is a pause here as we become aware that we are also vulnerable to leak vital energy and become unwell in any of these micro areas. Thus, we should pay attention to the little things that irritate us or take our attention away because they can deplete our wellness if not appropriately addressed.

Joyce Oddison

Canada

Seven guidelines for parents who are divorced/separated and sharing custody of children during the COVID-19 Pandemic

1. BE HEALTHY

Comply with all CDC and local and state guidelines and model good behavior for your children with intensive hand washing, wiping down surfaces and other objects that are frequently touched, and maintaining social distancing. This also means BE INFORMED. Stay in touch with the most reliable media sources and avoid the rumor mill on social media.

2. BE MINDFUL

Be honest about the seriousness of the pandemic, but maintain a calm attitude and convey to your children your belief that everything will return to normal in time. Avoid making careless comments in front of the children and exposing them to endless media coverage intended for adults. Don't leave the news on 24/7, for instance. But, at the same time, encourage your children to ask questions and express their concerns and answer them truthfully at a level that is age-appropriate.

3. BE COMPLIANT with court orders and custody agreements.

As much as possible, try to avoid reinventing the wheel despite the unusual circumstances. The custody agreement or court order exists to prevent endless haggling over the details of timesharing. In some jurisdictions, there are even standing orders mandating that, if schools are closed, custody agreements should remain in force as though school was still in session.

4. BE CREATIVE

At the same time, it would be foolish to expect that nothing will change when people are being advised not to fly, and vacation attractions such as amusement parks, museums, and entertainment venues are closing all over the US and the world. In addition, some parents will have to work extra hours to help deal with the crisis, and other parents may be out of work or working reduced hours for a time. Plans will inevitably have to change. Encourage closeness with the parent who is not going to see the child through shared books, movies, and games, and communication through FaceTime or Skype.

5. BE TRANSPARENT.

Provide honest information to your co-parent about any suspected or confirmed exposure to the virus, and try to agree on what steps each of you will take to protect the child from exposure. Certainly, both parents should be informed at once if the child is exhibiting any possible symptoms of the virus.

How to deal with a Pandemic while separated or divorced

6. BE GENEROUS.

Try to provide makeup time to the parent who missed out, if at all possible. Family law judges expect reasonable accommodations when they can be made and will take seriously concerns raised in later filings about parents who are inflexible in highly unusual circumstances.

7. BE UNDERSTANDING.

There is no doubt that the pandemic will pose an economic hardship and lead to lost earnings for many, many parents, both those who are paying child support and those who are receiving child support. The parent who is paying should try to provide something, even if it can't be the full amount. The parent who is receiving payments should try to be accommodating under these challenging and temporary circumstances.

Adversity can become an opportunity for parents to come together and focus on what is best for the child. For many children, the strange days of the pandemic will leave vivid memories. It's important for every child to know and remember that both parents did everything they could to explain what was happening and to keep their child safe.

AFCC and AAML

Created by leaders of the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts, and the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers: Susan Myres, President of American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers (AAML); Dr. Matt Sullivan, President of Association of Family and Conciliation Courts (AFCC); Annette Burns, AAML and Former President of AFCC; Yasmine Mehmet, AAML; Kim Bonuomo, AAML; Nancy Kellman, AAML; Dr. Leslie Drozd, AFCC; Dr. Robin Deutsch, AFCC; Jill Peña, Executive Director of AAML; Peter Salem, Executive Director of AFCC

Cooperation and co-parenting during a time of crisis

COVID-19 has disrupted our lives. We've added new vocabulary like "social distancing," and items like toilet paper and hand sanitizer have become currency. Sometimes information has been in short supply, not available at all or changing quickly. We've had to make decisions in the moment with incomplete information, and sometimes those decisions are not popular. Or easy.

If you are divorced or separated parents, this time of crisis can make the regular issues of co-parenting more challenging. These circumstances will require increased cooperation and communication. If the ego of the adults is engaged, rather than the best interest of the children, it is a recipe for disaster.

So, what can you do to weather this crisis successfully?

1. **Breathe.** Your children are taking their cues from you. This pandemic is a trauma for everyone. There is no playbook for this, and we are all just doing the best we can. But remember, your children are looking to you for assurance and certainty in the face of change.
2. **Communicate.** Talk to your children. Talk to your co-parent. This is an ever-evolving situation with no clear time frame. People and plans can and will change. Keep the lines of communication open and keep talking.
3. **Remember your intentions.** When you created your Parenting Plan with your co-parent, you likely did so because you believed you were the best people to make decisions for your children and what you wanted your family to look like after the transition of divorce. Keep those intentions in the forefront now. Don't lose sight of the goals you set for your family.
4. **Remember, this is temporary.** While the days are blending into one another right now, this too shall pass. There may be adjustments you need to make to your Parenting Plan to weather this crisis but think of them as coping skills for the good of everyone involved rather than permanent changes.
5. **Get help.** If you find you can't successfully talk to your co-parent right now or are having trouble maintaining the intentions you both set forth in your Parenting Plan, get some help. A trusted family member may be able to help you with perspective, a professional in the area of question may be able to give you a second opinion in the area of disagreement, or engaging the services of a mediator (many are working via an on-line platform like Zoom these days) can help you with your discussion.

How to deal with a Pandemic while separated or divorced

I recently heard from past clients of mine who were struggling with co-parenting time in light of the pandemic. These parents are divorced and have a solid co-parenting relationship and can generally make good decisions together. However, this situation had stretched their ability to agree about what was best for their daughter. By the time they contacted me, they had fairly successfully run through the five steps above and just needed some final feedback. Prior to any shutdown orders, Dad had been traveling, and Mom felt strongly that he should quarantine for 14 days prior to seeing their daughter again. Dad disagreed. Together they decided to contact the child's pediatrician and get some feedback. The doctor recommended Dad quarantine before seeing the child, and the parents agreed to abide by the doctor's recommendation. At all times, the parents calmly communicated what was happening with each other and with the daughter.

During the 14-day quarantine time, Dad "visited" with the child via electronic means so that they remained connected, and Mom facilitated that contact. Once Dad's quarantine time was up, the parents discussed further the wisdom of the daughter traveling back and forth between homes.

Dad lives in a highly populated apartment building, and Mom lives in a single-family home. Given the exposure risk of the apartment building, the parents jointly decided that all of Dad's access would take place at Mom's home, and Dad would forego his overnight visits for the duration of the crisis for the safety of their daughter. At this point, they contacted me. They had questions about how this temporary change in their schedule would impact their Parenting Plan. We discussed the parameters of how they arrived at this decision, and how they would decide when the temporary schedule would end, and the normal schedule would resume. We talked further about Mom's added expenses of having the child with her full-time and whether child support would be impacted, and we discussed if Dad wanted make-up time for his missed overnights. We also created a shared script for the parents to talk to the child about these changes, so the message remained consistent and agreed upon issues that would trigger a return conversation in mediation or other help.

While these clients had done most of the heavy lifting on their own using the co-parenting skills they had been building, they needed a little help to finalize it and put it in action. With the courts closed or operating on a limited capacity in many jurisdictions for the foreseeable future, creating agreements quickly to keep families stable is more important than ever.

Lisa Sundquist

USA

How trauma might affect relationship conflict during the COVID-19 crisis: A brain based approach

What fight, flight, or freeze looks like in relationship conflict

The body can respond differently to trauma. Reactions, once survival mechanisms, can now happen in situations that are not always life and death. Common reactions are fight, flight, and freeze. The fight reaction, in family conflict, might look like someone who gets in physical fights, talks or yells back or is aggressive or argumentative.

Families may recognize the flight response in people who leave home, go outside when things get heated or hide from others in certain rooms of the house. They might binge-watching tv, play video games, or excessively sleep.

The freeze response, at home, is going to look like a checked-out person that might be there physically, but their mind is somewhere else. That person could have unresponsive blank looks and stares. If family members are triggered and stuck in any of these reaction states, it will be hard for them to calm down and work towards conflict solutions.

The different parts of the brain and what they do

The human brain is made up of three main parts: the hippocampus, amygdala, and prefrontal cortex. The base is the hippocampus. When someone experiences trauma, they go into survival mode and have physical reactions to fear. Here fight, flight, or freeze kick in, until the person feels safe again. If stuck in survival mode, the other areas of the brain might be inaccessible. The amygdala sends all sorts of signals out to the body, especially in stressful situations. Imagine a person that experiences a lot of yelling at home. That person's amygdala is going to pump hormones into the body, causing a fight, flight, or freeze response.

The pre-frontal cortex is where there is higher-order thinking, the ability to use words, problem-solve, and function. If someone is shut down or being problematic, understand that person is operating out of a different part of the brain than what is required for acting rationally. Knowing most fights are reactions to things happening in the brain, families can use a trauma-informed, brain-based approach to understand how others are struggling and reshape how they handle conflict. They can learn to regulate their nervous systems, and calm down, before talking about family conflict.

Darby Munroe

USA

Parenting while angry

Anger is a universal experience. Sometimes, anger spurs positive change, but at other times it is purely reactive and destructive. There is a lesson I wish I had learned – back in the day when my only child was a teen. She’s thirty-four now, but parts of the memory are still vivid. We are both introverts; perhaps she is more introverted than I am.

At that time, my day job included teaching conflict resolution skills to seventh graders. April was seventeen or eighteen at the time. We were carrying things in from the car, arguing and getting angrier and angrier. I can’t remember why we were angry, but the angst of close quarters and insufficient alone time led to a melt-down for both of us.

I decided to teach her how to de-escalate tension – right when we were in the midst of it. She exploded: “Don’t you try your mediation shit on me!” She stomped into the house, slamming doors as she retreated.

How would I handle it now? I would make a choice. I would choose not to engage with her while angry. I would not let my anger meet her anger on the battlefield of the moment. I would notice my breathing. I would breathe in, hold it a moment, and breathe out. A few of these, maybe three or six or ten, and my stress would start to recede. Later, when we were not angry, we could talk through the situation. Perhaps create boundaries. Note what were triggers for each of us and be respectful in finding ways to deal with them. It is hard, maybe the hardest lesson ever. I can’t make her change; I can change how I react to her and the situation.

Georgia Daniels

USA

What should parents think about in terms of transitioning their children between parents/significant others, during this COVID-19 crisis?

One of the most trusted manners of settling parenting differences has always been mediation, where you can speak your mind, in the context of a safe environment, with a 'neutral' third person. That could be a trusted elder, a mediator, or other professional. You can settle differences yourselves.

A recent court decision confirms what we've known for a long time:

- Children need the love and caring of two parents, especially during this disorienting time in history.
- This love includes emotional support and guidance during 'now more than ever.'
- Sometimes a parent might have to forego their parenting time with modifications due to their employment and social distancing.
- However, there is always a presumption that parenting time for a child is a child's right to another parent and that parenting time, if there is a court order/award, should continue in a safe way.
- Parents might consider in their discussions whether there are personal restrictions such as self-isolation due to contact/exposure to the COVID-19 virus or travel.
- Parents might consider whether the lifestyle of a parent 'in the face of COVID-19 might necessitate restrictions on parenting time'
- For example, do the lifestyle or behaviours of a parent increase the risk factors to a child or significant others?
- A consideration might be whether there are risk factors, considering COVID-19 to a child.
- In light of risk factors to a child, thus there may be risk factors to members of a household or parent due to these risk factors, that may warrant changes to parenting time.

Hints:

Think of 'risk' versus 'fear' as they might be different and consider that children need to be safe with both parents. consider risk as 'low, medium, and high.' Today, many parents continue sharing their parenting time for their children, but some parents must consider their relevant risk factors for the safety of everyone.

Dr. Larry Fong

Canada

Visitation during the Pandemic – What is changing

I recently received an email from the teenage daughter of a couple whose divorce I mediated several years ago:

Hi Ken! It's Sarah.

I hope you are well in this crazy time. I've been thinking about my parent's divorce a lot. As I've mentioned before, I want to live with my mom, but the court decided my sister and I would live with both parents. I love my dad, but I want some stability. I don't want to move from house to house, especially now with the virus. I want to have one bed at my mom's house. Like you suggested, I wrote a letter addressed to my father. I haven't given it to him because I'm scared. I don't want my sister to feel that I've betrayed her, I don't want my father to bring our family back to court, and I don't want everything to work out just to find out that having my full time is too hard on my mom. Besides these concerns, I think I am ready, and I want your input.

Thank you,

Sarah

I have now become Sarah's conflict coach, helping her write to her father and communicate with her sister and mother without triggering conflicts.

Many have requested mediation because their kids now have to be home-schooled. Only one parent can monitor their studies during the week, or one is a doctor on the front lines of the pandemic who could infect the children, or one wants to leave a pandemic hotspot and take the kids to live with her elderly parents in a safer rural area, or an ex-wife has decided to live in quarantine with her new boyfriend and his kids. The ex-husband is both jealous and frightened and written threatening emails to the new boyfriend.

In each of these cases, I am taking on new roles that supplement and often overshadow the ones I play in mediation – not only “conflict coach,” but “hostage negotiator,” “family shuttle diplomat,” “multi-party consensus builder,” “home-schooling educational consultant,” “pandemic quarantine advisor,” and “family dialogue facilitator.”

All of this is emotionally intense, with life and death consequences. And none of it is face-to-face. Zoom is a life-saver, but it is distant, untouching, and less immediate and heartfelt than being in the same room - so many challenges, so much at stake, so little time.

Kenneth Cloke

USA

Living Together, Separating, Divorcing: Surviving During a Pandemic

True life experience

In this section, some of our Contributors share their experiences in managing life during the pandemic. Their personal reflections and commonsense advice can help all of us not just cope, but thrive during the pandemic.

Kindness and compassion in times of fear and uncertainty

In the eye of the storm

Two weeks ago, I listened with disbelief to the news that schools will remain closed after March Break, and then with a further shock that many courts would be closed until further notice. The continuous news feed, telling us to stay home, social distance from others, and close businesses are creating palpable fear.

The knee jerk reaction for most of us is to panic. Our clients are scrambling to get their mediation dates pushed up, asking if we can do remote mediations. Parties are calling lawyers and paralegals asking for advice regarding emergency matters and court hearings. Those involved in family litigation are very concerned that their motions for custody, spousal support, and other pressing issues will not be heard for an indefinite period of time.

The stress of these uncertain times is greatly multiplied for those going through the litigation process. Litigation itself encompasses and swallows one's life in a cloud of uncertainty and darkness. It causes parties to literally put their lives on hold, sometimes for years. It depletes mental and physical energy, finances, and at times, hope. Each litigant knows that feeling of hopefulness when heading to court for a motion or hearing, the hope that maybe today will be the end of this hell and life can return to normal, only to exit the courthouse feeling dejected and hopeless, as the wheels of the process turn at a very slow pace.

On top of this daily reality faced by litigants, current court closures and restrictions have added a whole new dimension to the seemingly endless litigation journey.

Reframing and taking control

My parents came to Canada as refugees from the former Soviet Union.

In order to get here, they went through many difficulties, from religious persecution to indefinite waiting in refugee hubs, not knowing what awaited them. They left everything they knew in order to ensure freedom for their children.

The lesson that they imparted to me was to stay in the moment. No matter how uncertain life seems, focus on what's in front of you.

My parents chose to control what they could and let go of things they could not. It was not easy, but it helped them survive.

The present situation may seem very dark, especially for litigants who are waiting to resolve family law cases where children are involved. However, I would suggest reframing current events and finding purpose within the havoc.

For once, everyone is in the same boat. For the first time, all litigants are facing the same closures and delays, which are unaffected by one's ability to hire a lawyer.

We cannot control the 24/7 news feed, other people's behavior, government directives, court, and other closures, or COVID-19 itself. What we can control is ourselves. We can be accommodating to other litigants, and help find alternative ways to resolve cases. If courts are closed, private mediations are still available through video conferencing. Talking to the other side about settlement and perhaps coming to an interim agreement, which could become a final one.

Recognizing that in one moment, everything can change gives us a different perspective on what is really important in our lives, and what we want to accomplish through the litigation process. Fostering kindness and compassion will serve all of us well, even after the current crisis is over.

Taking action

If your dispute is not one that lends itself to mediation or out of court settlement, I would encourage you to deal with fear and uncertainty in other pragmatic ways. Court closures and getting cases heard is something that you can't control. We know that our minds tend to create doomsday scenarios that add to the stress of litigation.

Here are some practical ways to help deal with fearful thoughts. (These techniques may also help manage stress during litigation.)

- Consider reducing your news consumption. The fear and panic created by the continuous newsfeed are affecting mental health and exacerbating symptoms of anxiety, depression, and PTSD.
- Every time you have a fearful thought, say the word STOP; then bring yourself to the present moment. Look around you and find five things you can see, four things you can smell, three things you can touch (following social distancing and safety directives, of course), two things you can taste, and one thing you can feel. You can then say to yourself, "Even though it's stressful not knowing when I will get to resolve this case, I cannot control this. I can either use this time to live in fear and panic, or I can use this time to do something positive for me." Read a book, catch up on work, do a craft, spend time with family, etc.
- A good way to combat fearful thoughts and anxiety is to do something for someone else. You can still video chat with someone who may need to see a friendly face. Or you could text or email those who are alone and would love words of encouragement. Some of my clients have created video group calls while they talk and eat lunch from their respective homes.

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- Walking in nature, yoga, tai chi, dancing, or any other physical activity that takes your mind away from ruminating thoughts, recharges, and energizes the mind and body.
- Meditation also gives your mind a break from ruminating thoughts and lets your body and mind recharge. There are numerous meditations on YouTube for all levels of expertise, which are very helpful for those wanting to start a meditation practice.
- Your practice does not have to involve sitting in a lotus position for a long time. It could be as easy as focusing on relaxing music for a little while and bringing your focus back to the music every time your mind wanders.
- Measured breathing is a great way to reduce uncomfortable bodily sensations. For example: take a belly breath (diaphragm breathing) to a count of 4, hold to a count of 5, then release to a count of 6. Doing this a few times will send a message to your body that all is well, and will create a calming effect. You can find diaphragm breathing demonstrations on YouTube. <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/health-topics/uz2255>

Patience is hard to cultivate when all you want to do is get this ordeal over with. In time, life will get back to normal, but meanwhile, we can all do our part by fostering kindness, compassion, accommodation, and love toward our fellow human beings. Remember: this too shall pass. We have the potential to come out of this storm a better, stronger, kinder, and healthier society. It's all up to us.

Tania Perlin

Canada

Never waste a crisis

It was 26 March 2020. My country stood poised on the eve of its first-ever national lockdown. Hospital scenes from what looked like a post-apocalyptic World had been flashing for weeks across our tv screens. China, Italy, Spain, the US... and now it was here. My country had seemingly also succumbed to this new deadly enemy. As a nation, we were gripped with fear. The anguish within me was exacerbated by the knowledge that my much-beloved husband's services as a Family Physician would probably be in great demand over this time. I knew the statistics and I knew the dangers. I felt overwhelmed by a future I could only imagine but not control.

It took the wise advice of my sage-like older brother to bring back hope and courage in the face of an uncertain future. His words to me were a simple "Never Waste a Crisis". I pondered upon those words late into the night as I counted down the minutes to the final locking down of our borders and our people. "Never waste a crisis". One sentence, one command but a maxim so pregnant with potential.

Life is full of crises...divorce, separation, the loss of a job, financial devastation, family disunity. These are all crises of monumental magnitude. The issue is not so much how do you survive your crisis, but rather how do you thrive despite the overwhelming negativity of your crisis? How do you make the crisis work for you? The answer is not in action but in choice of attitude.

From a mediator's perspective, we would define this as a "reframing" of the crisis. This is simply the process of bringing a new perspective to an existing situation or problem. It is like putting a new frame on a painting where we are suddenly able to see that piece of art in a new light. How we frame a situation inevitably impacts our response to that situation.

In other words, a loss of a job while soul-destroying can be reframed as being an opportunity to find a new line of work. Tensions between spouses who wish to remain together can be reframed as learning opportunities for spousal likes and dislikes. A divorce can become a catalyst for new positive ways of living. A lockdown can be reframed as an opportunity for family re-connection, whilst seemingly endless time at home can be reframed as a chance for re-discovery of self, for spring-cleaning and new skills development.

How we respond to the challenge of a crisis is the key to whether the crisis will overwhelm and destroy us, or whether we will triumph in the face of that crisis.

Every crisis brings with it a unique opportunity for change and upward momentum, the challenge of a crisis is to embrace it rather than run from it and to work towards the positive outcome present in every crisis. Never Waste a Crisis.

Tracey-Leigh Wessels

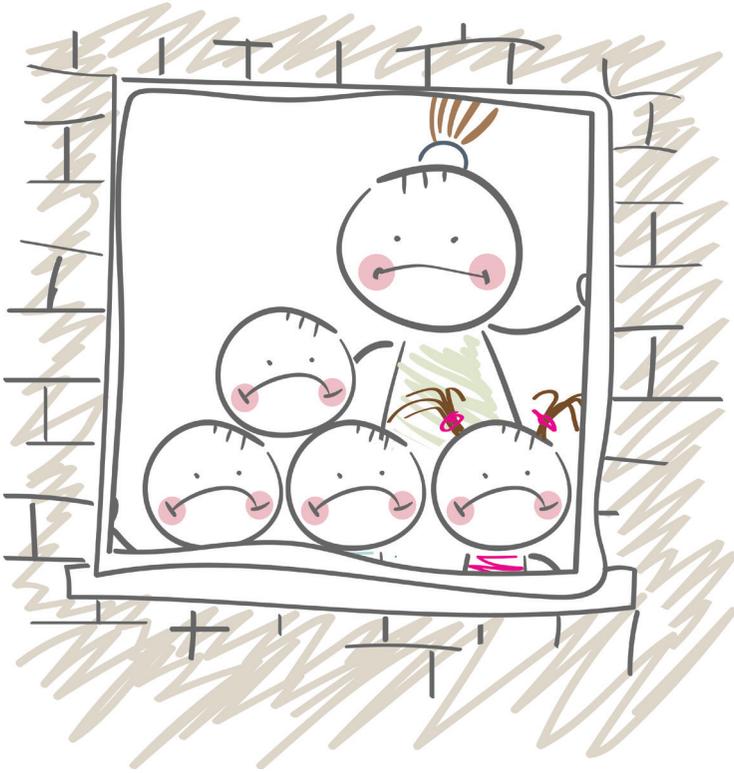
South Africa

Surviving to thrive: Parenting success in a time of Pandemic

There is little about our current predicament that is normal. Sheltering in place is new language and behavior meant to keep us safe and healthy. The specter of a virus that has no calling card but instead a threat of severe illness and possibly death motivates compliance but cannot smooth out the rough edges that accompany our new normal. And those rough edges, better described as the human condition, are only intensified by the uncertainties, the strangeness, and the cropping of support systems that previously provided a sense of order, peace and wellbeing. Parents in particular can feel bereft at the loss of convention even as the urgency to respond and adapt to the unconventional goads them on, distracting them, disturbing their sleep, and challenging, often demanding, their creativity and innovation to make the most out of family life in a pandemic. Vulnerability and insecurity are unavoidable reactions to this new situation. The order and predictability that previously provided comfort and stability are now preempted. The new and daunting challenges us with home schooling, physical distancing, wearing protective masks, isolation from family and friends, and in many cases, replacing money lost to unemployment and the need to find new ways to provide for families. These and other challenges will not be ignored.

Then there are the children, children who are entitled to the best that their parents can give, caring attention, compassion, guidance, unconditional love, children who, for the most part, have been beneficiaries of a loving upbringing. Parents want that to continue unabated but theirs and their children's supports are, for the time being, constricted. Schools are closed, recreational programs cancelled, and friends are living under the same restrictions that they are. The new normal can seem to be the new insufferable that ramps up stress on parents and children.

Meanwhile, parents' situations have changed while their relationships with their children are playing catch up to this new reality. Some regression may be in order as parents and children scan the new normal with apprehension in preparation for meeting the transformed reality as it is. Parents engage their children, however imperfectly, with an artistry born of experience and wisdom. Parents know what their children need: food, shelter, and clothing for openers. Then the more intangible but no less real needs: attention, compassion, encouragement, guidance, kindness, nurture, positive regard, structure, and warmth, among others. Responding to these needs can reassure and swaddle children while giving them a resilience and stability to help them face their new limitations and unknowns. To the extent that these needs are met, to that extent children can be free and open to participating in the creation of family routines, schedules and opportunities to see possibilities where they now see loss. To that extent, parents can practice the shared power of influence and respect in their children's lives rather than the personal power of shame and intimidation to keep things under control. Even under the best circumstances and with best intentions, however, parent-child relationships are inevitably an admixture of the two. Families have been under assault for decades. The physical, social, emotional intensity that comes with the pandemic only intensifies the situation.



Seeking help under duress can be the last thing that we try, and then only after we have tried everything else. It takes a certain humility to say “OK, I need help” and then to invest courage and trust in finding it. When we get to that point, being urged to follow parenting advice, though maybe not the last thing we want, it is certainly the last thing that we need. At times like this, parenting advice, beyond health and safety considerations, is irrelevant at best and insulting at worst. “How can you tell me about my life when you have never lived it?” is a reasonable and spot on reaction to such hubris. So what is needed by those of us under duress? The first thing, I would say, is affirmation, affirmation for what is being said and affirmation that I don’t know what this other’s life is like. Advice threatens to make things worse, risking shame and desperation to a person whose fear and vulnerability has put her/him at their wit’s end. This initial task is to lower the temperature, modify expectations, and lower the intensity. With proper respect and understanding, the conversation can get eventually around to alternatives, alternatives that the person in this body, in this state of mind and this situation can use.

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Of course there is no one size fits all solution for any of us experiencing duress. It is more a different sizes and styles process. Depending on one's community, one can find partners, friends, neighbors, mediators, therapists, social services, and religious institutions that provide support, support that at its best begins with "tell me about you." It may have to be "you tell me about you first" but the objective is the same: begin the conversation. First comes safety, then trust and then relationship. The process then goes wherever it needs to go in whatever time frame the situation dictates with however many resources the parent enlists to support her/his healing and learning process. At its core, this is a deeply intimate and personal experience with one's self. The trust in and the credibility invested in the other is not a given but earned with integrity and respect. The student and the teacher may be indistinguishable from one another as the process unfolds.

At some time in our lives we have all needed the affirmation and guidance that comes from talking about our problems with someone else. What worked yesterday may not work today. Continuing to push old solutions onto new problems can drive us crazy. The lesson that none of us can do life alone becomes compelling and urgent, especially in the intensity and reactivity of stress-frayed relationships that have left us feeling inadequate and inept, desperate. Validation that spousal and/or child relationships have been debilitating if not traumatizing helps us see and embrace the reality of our situation. The added validation that all of us are dealing with similar issues and none of us are doing it perfectly can give us permission to relax expectations, switch gears, and ease up on ourselves, and, for that matter, others. Now there is room for a more realistic perspective. Now responsible alternatives to entrenched reactions can be entertained. Such is the power of self and other validation and guidance.

To finish with the beginning, healthy parents beget healthy children. If one's rest, nutrition, and supportive community are seen not as selfish luxuries to be forsaken but essentials to be nurtured and refined in this time of crisis, then one has stepped onto the path of thriving. Selfless giving to children is, I believe, an illusion, an oxymoron, as certain as an empty well yields no water. Self-filled, nurtured and nourished spirits giving from a well of healthy perspective, self-awareness, clear thinking and peace endow parent-child relationships with credibility, integrity and mutual respect. Engaging in a supportive community can initiate, sustain and refine this process. Practicing the rudiments of physical, social, emotional and spiritual health, however imperfectly, can fortify the parent and their relationships with their children and their community. Out of this solemn commitment to self and family, parents can transcend the drudgery of surviving and initiate a process of thriving. They and their children deserve no less.

Daniel Murphy

USA

Locked down with COVID-19

It started on a Thursday afternoon. A slight tightening of the chest. My imagination. I returned to my home-based virtual office. Running a national family mediation public service was one thing, but moving everything online while staff and managers were all locked at home was a trial. But today it irritated me. “Fiona, you are not yourself,” says a colleague. Well, in fairness, who would be in these circumstances.

Its Friday and the tightness is joined by a slight husk when I breathe. I am now getting tired and, is that a shiver? Saturday follows and Michael remarks that he cannot smell the Indian meal I am making. Blimey, neither can I, and neither can our two adult children, unexpectedly wrenched from college life and back home with us in Ireland.

We are now sitting around the table sniffing the whiskey decanter, the night nurse medicine, the ground coffee. Not a scent, not a whiff. How peculiar. We googled the symptoms of COVID-19. Half seriously with brows beginning to furrow. As Sunday passed into Monday, we were now definitely coming “down with something”. Our GP was phoned and we heard the words “you definitely have the virus”, the sentence “Michael is an urgent case, because of his respiratory history”, the warning “Fiona, Day 5 - 10 of this virus are the real danger days. You must, must be on your guard with Michael.” The instruction “Any decline in his health and you rush him to hospital”.

And so, accompanied by fear, anxiety, and confusion the Corona Virus entered our home. Bit by bit. Step by step. No whistles or fanfare. The great pandemic slipped silently, intimately and unseen into our lungs, our gut, and our minds. All four of us ill at the same time with COVID-19. We started to watch over each other, glad to be together, scared of the week to come. Confused, worried, and very unwell.

It had been a good start to the year, apart from the news that my 93-year-old dad in Scotland had been diagnosed with dementia. Sarah was doing Post Grad in Musical Theatre in Glasgow and Ben was in his final year doing International Studies in The Hague. It was the start of March and when mum phoned, dad was ill and my sister went North to help out. He was very unwell and admitted to hospital and put on oxygen. Michael and I traveled to spend the week with my parents. It was St Patricks’ week. The week Ireland and the UK called their lockdowns. We listened to the speeches, read the papers, and saw the world change around us. Like in so many homes, there were anxious conversations in bedrooms. Discussion over breakfast. How do we get the kids home from college? How does my nephew get home from Malaysia? What do we do about mum having to isolate with us so far away? Freezers were filled. Cupboards restocked and emergency travel plans made.

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How many families went through this chaotic, circular thinking. How many of us saw our normal life collapse around us, while we struggled to put the best care we could in for those we loved? I visited dad every day in hospital. An important part of our story, as it turns out. As we discussed and debated with the family, Ben flew home, Sarah decamped from Glasgow, and a plan was hatched. My sister's two boys would isolate in their home for two weeks and then head North to stay with mum. We would head as quickly as we could home to Ireland, as Michael needed to be near his consultant in case he fell sick.

On Sunday morning we kissed mum goodbye and drove off to Ireland. I have never had such an anxious, surreal goodbye. Were we doing the right thing? Had we made the right plan? How could we, the adults of the sandwich generation keep our parents safe, our kids okay, and our jobs on the go? Our world had become a series of difficult small issues while trying to shield our families from the ghost that stalked us all: The Corona Virus.

So, here we were. Day 5 of the Illness. Michael had gone for his test. The GP had given us our riding instructions. "Beware it can be a sudden and dramatic decline". Silence in the streets. Keeping our secret, lest we worry our family. Alone and together in the awareness of our potential loss. Those days and nights the symptoms came and went. We counted every day. Day 5, 6, 7..... We had to get through these days. That is what the doctor had said, wasn't it? Every time Michael coughed, we held our breath. As we wheezed, we went through stomach pains at night, the sweats, the headaches, as the exhaustion ebbed and flowed. Food became unimaginable. Life became unmanageable. The world turned.

How can a global pandemic be such an intimate, family experience? How can this thing, discussed every night on the news share our lungs, inhabit our gut, and befuddle our minds. Inhabiting our family soul, we became permanent watchers of the other, ever aware of our fragility. Is this what it felt like back in the days when sickness and death stalked the normality of everyday life? I began to understand why people carried lucky charms.

As Day 10 came and went, we dared to hope. Our two sisters and family kept distant vigil. Our church prayed for us from afar. Close friends were told, as the days passed. Mum was told when we were out of the worse. The distant vigil grew, disembodied yet present. Separated. Unable to reach out or be reached. We were at the centre of an invisible, international web of care, prayer and love but yet had never felt so alone and fearful of our future.

The worst moment: When Michael told me he had prepared a file of all I would need if he didn't make it. The best moment: to see my husband breathe beside me in the bed as I woke up each day.

As we recovered, (Day 20 now, thank god, could we relax yet) my dad tested positive for COVID 19. Still in hospital and now isolated even further. We became part of the distant vigil. The night time worriers and fearful family members. How could this have happened, we had been so careful. The hand sanitising we had done and cleaning. However, the twist in our tale, is that he had caught the virus it in late February. This was the illness that had taken him into hospital. He was not tested. We visited him with no protective clothing. In hospital care, he remained untested until, towards the end of his stay, he had coughed. By now hospitals were testing and the virus was discovered.

As this book is being completed, and after having rallied last week, Dad has taken a turn for the worse. He is receiving palliative care; his life is ebbing slowly away. We are grateful for all the years of his life though, of course, we wished for more. It's discomfiting and deeply sad to say farewell in this way and to be unable to be with Mom to comfort her.

The four of us are feeling better. It will be a long time before we get back to taking each other for granted again! We are shocked by how easily we caught COVID 19. More shocked that dad, in a small town on the west coast of Scotland, caught it first. We have been inside, now, for five weeks. Venturing out occasionally. Testing that the outside world is safe. The birds are singing and Spring flowers. We give each other more space. We are gentle with each other. We know that we came close to losing too much.

Fiona McAuslan

Ireland

Reflections on parenting and mental health during COVID-19

As a parent working from home I was becoming exceptionally stressed at how my children appear to be falling into a routine of ‘nothingness’.

For us, lockdown started on March 13th, 2020 and the first week was terrifying, we were all highly anxious and unhinged. By week two that had eased somewhat and was replaced with all of the positive quotes on social media, about downtime, getting back to basics, being with family. My family and I even made a schedule, for each day in the week. We planned to bake, do puzzles, painting, reading, homeschooling, and work from home. In my mind and on paper it was all perfect. However, mid-way into week two it became apparent that there was no way the ‘calm’ schedule I had created in my mind with the help of social media was going to work. I am a lecturer and a mediator. I have patience in abundance, but not with my children. My children hate studying. The conflict that ensued was tremendous. The preteen declared she hated me and wanted me to go back to work. The arguments over the baking (or the clean-up) became entrenched and bitter. These arguments seeped into other relationships in the house. I became almost fixated with these positive quotes on social media, and more especially how far away I was from that. This made me angry. Week three was a train wreck. Work, the tiny corner of the sitting room with the desk, computer, and chair was my haven. My life continued around this workspace, I was ‘in control’ in that space. This was the space where I could think and be. I continue to renegotiate my internal conflict in this space.

This is an extraordinary situation where I as a mom, employee, conflict resolution practitioner have heaped unrealistic expectations upon myself during COVID-19. I love my children with every ounce of my being, but I also love being the lecturer and the mediator. To be honest, I feel more comfortable in those roles because I can see small successes. When engrossed in motherhood only, my successes, my sense of self is lost. When I work outside the home I can achieve my professional/personal expectations and it makes me a better mom. I realised I was adding additional layers of absolute unnecessary stress with all of the ‘positivity’ on social media. It’s ok to be scared, this is a scary time. I realised that I felt trapped. I couldn’t get in my car or on a train, I couldn’t go see my extended family if I wanted to, I was beginning to feel panicked driving to the shop for milk. Queueing to get into the shop served to heighten my panic.

I realise I miss human interaction. I’m a hugger and now people are hidden behind masks and gloves. If I felt this way as an adult with a good sense of logic, how do my children feel? Stuck at home with a frantic, fearful mother, trying desperately to keep all the balls in the air, full of internal conflict. They are scared, bored, missing their friends, missing the routine of school. Homework and schedules being imposed on them by a mom whose behaviour is bordering on unstable in this crisis.

We talked together, we sat with TV off, jigsaws away, just us. And we talked. What did they expect of me, what did I expect of them, what did we expect of each other. We broke it down to open honest communications. I relaxed, and I saw in their faces that they relaxed also. During this conversation I made a decision, I began to be honest with myself. Parenting is hard. I find it difficult, I find the unmanageability difficult. I put away social media and the onslaught of positivity which was clashing violently with my anxiety. I name the emotions, I am afraid and I am unsure of what to do next. Together we took a breath and each day we move forward. We bake, but there is no schedule. We home school, with no schedule. When I work as scheduled, my 12-year-old daughter sits near me on her phone with earphones in her ears. When I get off the computer, she comes off her phone. We negotiated this together. We relaxed together and made our schedule, one where our mental health and our relationship remain intact during COVID-19.

Parenting aims during these times is to protect relationships, protect mental health, promote and protect communication.

You know what will work for your family, you are the expert on your family. Listen to hear –really hear and comprehend what each person is saying or what your child’s behaviour is saying. Children use behaviours as a communication method.

Where you can (in so far as you can) protect a space for you- be creative. It may be in the shower, it may be going for a walk - but take it. These are extraordinary times and we are doing an extraordinary job. Seek supports if you can, someone at the end of the phone, allow children to watch TV if this is what you need. Schools will reopen, work will restart and a new normal will begin. In the meantime do what we need to do to survive this. We need to be gentle, listen to our own needs, protect ourselves emotionally and psychologically. We need to keep our children physically, emotionally, and psychologically safe and well. If we do not look after ourselves, we cannot look after them.

Sharon Morrisey

Ireland

Quarantine Cookies

Serving Size : 180

- 1 tbsp Baking soda**
- 3 c Brown sugar**
- 3 c Flour**
- 3 c butter**
- 2 Eggs**
- 6 c Oatmeal**

This recipe has been around for a very long time, with slightly different ingredients. Long ago The Community Mental Health Center at St. Lawrence Hospital in Lansing, Michigan, printed it, in the hope of channeling some energies away from throwing bricks, or snarling at Santa Claus. The more you knead, mash, squeeze and beat the bejesus out of the dough, the better you feel and the better the cookies taste. Moreover, the recipe is easy to cut in half. This recipe will make 15 dozen. You can also freeze some of the dough you can't use.

Before you put them on the cookie sheet, you can add special ingredients such as raisins, chopped nuts, dried cranberries or shredded coconut, even chocolate chips.

Put all the ingredients in a huge bowl and mash, knead, or squeeze. Then form it into small balls, about the size of a walnut, on an ungreased cookie sheet. Butter the bottom of a small glass, dip it in granulated sugar and mash the balls flat. Keep doing it. You need butter the glass bottom only once or twice, but re-dip it in sugar for each ball. Then bake at 350 degrees for 10 to 12 min.

It's best to let them sit just a bit before taking up from the cookie sheet. We also cooked them for the 12 min. You need some space between them if you make them any bigger cause they tend to spread out.

Contributors

In the space of less than 2 weeks, 73 contributors responded to our call for essays. Their quick response reflects an understanding of the dire circumstances facing so many families during the pandemic as well as their selfless commitment to be useful and responsive.

Also because the effects of the pandemic are being experienced throughout the world, we have drawn on the expertise of professionals from 10 countries (Australia, Canada, Czech Republic, Ireland, Italy, Poland, South Africa, Trinidad, the UK and the US). Many of our contributors have provided their contact information or websites where you can search for additional guidance and advice.

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Mary-Anne Popescu

Mary-Anne is the Executive Director of the Ontario Association for Family Mediation (OAFM). As an OAFM Accredited Family and Elder Mediator, and Child Protection Mediator in private practice, she works to bring peaceful resolutions that help families adapt to challenges and changes across the life cycle. Mary-Anne is also a roster mediator for the Office of Independent Police Review Director (OIPRD), and the Ministry of Government and Consumer Affairs. In recognition of her volunteer contributions to St. Joseph's Maternal Health Support Program, Mary-Anne received the Ontario Award for Good Citizens, from the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration. Mary-Anne supports diversity and equality as an ally and volunteer for Toronto PFLAG. She served for eight years as a Panel Member on the City of Toronto's Committee of Adjustment. Mary-Anne is also the past Chair of the ADR Institute of Ontario's Family Section and past Board Member of the OAFM.

Louisa Whitney

Louisa is an accredited family mediator in Surrey, UK. She helps separating couples to find resolutions tailor made to their families. She also supervises other mediators and trains lawyers, mediator and other professionals. She is found on all social media channels and via www.lkwfamilymediation.co.uk

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Tiziana is a conflict mediator, criminologist, and counselor; she collaborates with legal offices as a consultant. She is a supervisor at various conferences. Tiziana gets great satisfaction providing school mediation at a Higher Institute. She also provides counseling combined with yoga at a maximum-security prison, despite the current difficulties in Italy. Through updates and different courses, she regularly attends (even for pure curiosity). She mixes different skills to get the best results for her clients and certainly also for her family and herself. tmagnaghi@yahoo.it +39 348 2247376

Lorraine Segal, M.A.

Lorraine is a Conflict Management and Communication Consultant, Coach, and Trainer. At Sonoma State University, Lorraine leads the Conflict Management professional development certificate program. Through her business, Conflict Remedy, Ms. Segal works with individuals and organizations to promote harmonious and productive workplaces. Find her blog and more information at ConflictRemedy.com - Lorraine@ConflictRemedy.com

Delma Sweeney

Delma Sweeney: PhD., DASS (Distinction), CQSW, Dip. Supervision. Delma retired as Director of Mediation & Conflict Intervention at the National University of Ireland Maynooth in 2015, having delivered mediation programmes in many specialist mediation fields to masters level for 16 years. With over 24 years experience as a mediator she has worked with many conflict situations, such as family mediation and large-scale multiparty mediation. Delma is an accredited psychotherapist with the Irish Council of Psychotherapy and currently works as a psychotherapist.

American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers (AAML)

American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers provides leadership that promotes the highest degree of professionalism and excellence in the practice of family law.

Association of Family and Conciliation Courts (AFCC)

The Association of Family and Conciliation Courts is an interdisciplinary and international association of professionals dedicated to improving the lives of children and families through the resolution of family conflict.

Georgia Daniels

Georgia went to law school to become a family mediator, got sidetracked into a traditional legal career, took a detour through teaching in public schools, and finally decided, “Now is the time.” That was in 2001. She accepts referrals for all aspects of family mediation, online or in person. Georgia@GeorgiaDaniels.com

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Dale is now adjunct Associate Professor, University of South Australia. She was Head of Social Work and Social Policy, Director, Centre for Peace, Conflict and Mediation and Program Director of postgraduate programs in Mediation and Conflict Management. Her research focused on children and parental separation, family violence and family mediation.

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Forrest is a mediator and collaborative lawyer in San Diego and Los Angeles. He teaches mediation and peacemaking at UCLA School of Law and is the author of 6 books. In 2019, Mr. Mosten received the Lifetime Career Achievement Award from the Academy of Professional Family Mediators.

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Arnie is a psychologist/forensic evaluator/mediator licensed in Pennsylvania, Connecticut and Ohio. Arnie is the past president of the Academy of Family Mediators, the Association for Conflict Resolution and the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts. His time is divided between doing forensic evaluations, psychotherapy, mediation, parenting coordination and teaching.

Academy of Professional Family Mediators (APFM)

From distinguished family mediation pioneers to new mediators beginning their careers, we are an Academy of Professional Family Mediators committed to supporting the work of all family mediators and advancing the field of family mediation.

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Darby Munroe founded Trauma Informed Solutions to prevent and reduce childhood trauma and ACEs. After making it through a high conflict divorce, she wanted to make the process less stressful and traumatic for other families, so she became a certified mediator and conflict coach. darby@traumainformedolutions.com

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Morghan is a Partner at Davidoff Hutcher & Citron LLP in Manhattan. She exclusively handles divorce and family litigation and mediation. Ms. Richardson has been named by Super Lawyers one of New York's Rising Stars (best attorneys who are 40 or under) and by the American Society of Legal Advocates as a Top 40 Family Lawyer Under 40. She is a member of the New York State Bar Association's Section for Women in the Law, and Lawyer Moms of America. Ms. Richardson is selected as a mediator for the New York County Supreme Court's pilot Matrimonial Mediation program. She is licensed to practice in New York, Maryland and D.C.

Susan S. Raines, PhD

Susan is a Professor and the Associate Director of the School of Conflict Management, Peacebuilding, and Development at Kennesaw State University in suburban Atlanta. She is the author of "Conflict Management for Managers" (Rowman & Littlefield, 2019) and has mediated thousands of disputes inside and outside of the court system.

Hilary Linton

Hilary Linton graduated from journalism school with dreams of becoming a writer during the 1982 recession. Law school was the next best thing. After 14 years of litigation she realized mediation was actually the next best thing. Today Hilary operates Riverdale Mediation Ltd. in Toronto, Ontario, providing family mediation, arbitration, parenting coordination and training.

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Laurie Amaya works as a family law mediator, consulting and collaborative attorney in Pasadena, California, USA. She is an APFM Certified Advanced Practitioner, APFM Senior Mediator, and a Certified Mediator with Mediate.com.

Margaret Considine

Margaret is an Advanced Practice Mediator - Mii and CEDR accredited, a Commercial Negotiator, a Conflict coach, Trainer, a Management Consultant and an author of six books. Margaret holds faculty posts in universities in Ireland, the UK and New Zealand. Margaret holds masters from UCD, NUIM and Trinity College Dublin and is Harvard and Northwestern University trained. Margaret is president of the Mii, President of South Dublin Chamber of Commerce and Chair of Making Connections a charity alleviating loneliness in the elderly. Her best role is as parent of three very different, exciting and demanding teenagers.

Sue Bronson

Sue Bronson, LCSW is Co-Chair of the ACR/FLAFCC Elder Justice Initiative on Eldercaring Coordination and lead trainer. Ms. Bronson is a mediator, trainer, and retired psychotherapist in Milwaukee, WI since 1983 mediating family, elder, and workplace disputes. She teaches mediation at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and is lead author of the Self-Assessment Tool for Mediators, translated into three languages. Sbronson@wi.rr.com | www.EldercaringCoordinationFL.org

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Sue Atkins is an internationally recognised Parenting Expert, Broadcaster, Speaker and Author of the Amazon best-selling books “Parenting Made Easy – How to Raise Happy Children” & “Raising Happy Children for Dummies” one in the famous black and yellow series as well as author of the highly acclaimed Parenting Made Easy CDs, Apps and resources.

Sue is the Parenting Expert for Disney Junior UK and has recorded podcasts and Facebook Live Tea Parties around ‘Parenting Hacks’ & has started filming parenting video tips with The Mummy Diaries TV Series.

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Dr. Fong is a psychologist, mediator and arbitrator who has trained world-wide since 1990. His experience in the court system has resulted in his expert witness in three Canadian provinces in both Provincial and Superior Court. He is the co-author of ‘Mediation’ and as well leading training DVD’s in mediation, which are used by other trainers world-wide.

Jodie Grant

Building upon Social Work foundations, today Jodie is a highly skilled and knowledgeable Family Dispute Resolution Practitioner (FDRP) and Mediator. Commencing work in the Family Law field nearly 20 years ago, Jodie has maintained clinical practice whilst fulfilling education and training roles, leading and supporting professional best practice. Jodie also works as a coach, FDR clinical supervisor, and Restorative Engagement Facilitator/ Direct Personal Response Facilitator. E Jodie.grant@shiftingsands.net.au - www.shiftingsands.net.au

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Robin Brzobohatý

Robin is the leading family mediator in Czech Republic. Since 2015 he was the head of the cross-border family mediation program at the Office for International Legal Protection of Children in Brno. Robin is the Czech contact person for communication with the European Parliament mediator for resolving international parental child abductions. Robin is certified transformative mediator by the Institute for the Study of Conflict Transformation (ISCT), USA.

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Louise Phipps Senft, nationally recognized transformative family Mediator, Attorney, Distinguished Fellow in the International Academy of Mediators, and author of Best-Seller Being Relational: The Seven Ways to Quality Interaction & Lasting Positive Change, Co-Chair of Relational Practices Task Force for the American Bar Association.

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Tammy Lenski, Ed.D.

For two decades Dr. Tammy Lenski has brought the tools and skills of the professional mediator, executive coach, and conflict resolution teacher to help individuals, pairs, and teams navigate disagreements, address friction, and collaborate effectively. The author of two conflict resolution books, Tammy writes a popular conflict resolution blog read by thousands worldwide. She can be reached at tammy@tammylenski.com.

Tzofnat Peleg-Baker

Tzofnat Peleg-Baker, MA Communications, and MA and Ph.D. in Psychology (specialty in conflict and mediation) is a social psychologist, a conflict resolution scholar-practitioner, and mediator for twenty years. Tzofnat is an Adjunct Professor in the professional MBA program, School of Business at Rutgers University-Camden, where she also provides students with mentorship and coaching. She has been training across continents, and as a Board Member and facilitator in peace organizations, she led inter-group dialogues between religious and secular groups, Jews and Arabs, and Israelis and Palestinians. As the Head of Strategy at the Ministry of Justice, Israel, she served on the national team that introduced ADR and mediation in the country. Her experience in innovative democratic and dialogic reforms in schools significantly shaped her contextual-relational approach to transforming conflict. Tzofnat can be reached at: tzofnatpb@gmail.com

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Jane Cooksey

Jane is a Psychologist, Lawyer and Mediator. "I have been exploring how people deal with conflict for many years. By embracing the fear of a difficult conversation, listening and approaching from a state of not-knowing (or not judging) any encounter can be enhanced and transformed, yours or another's."

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Jenifer Joy is a parent educator, digital media adjunct professor, and founded DurableHuman.com and parent ed classroom, Durable U. She makes a line of Durable Human tech hygiene products and wrote How To Be a Durable Human: Revive and Thrive in the Digital Age Through the Power of Self-Design. www.durablehuman.com

Honey Hastings

Honey has been a divorce and parenting mediator in New Hampshire USA since 1995. As a Certified Family Mediator, she facilitates both Family Court and private cases. Hastings regularly presents continuing education workshops for lawyers and mediators. A retired lawyer, she drafts and advocates for family law legislation. HHastings@FamilyMediationNH.com

Sharon Morrissey

Sharon Morrissey is a family mediator who supports individuals and couples through the trauma and anxiety of separation and related issues, notably child custody and access. She has designed and delivered university courses on conflict resolution and recently published a book, 'That's Not My Ending!'. For more information: sharonmorrisseyconflictresolution.ie

Peter Boyle

Peter established the practice in 2009 and currently has two legal offices in Dublin, Ireland providing legal advice to both commercial and private clients. He is a member of the Law Society of Ireland and the Irish Taxation Institute and holds the TEP designation from the Society of Trust & Estate Practitioners. As a former Council member of the Dublin Solicitors Bar Association (DSBA) and Chairman of its Practice Management Committee, Peter is a highly qualified and dedicated legal professional. Email Peter@peterboyle.ie Visit www.peterboyle.ie

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Doirín is a practising solicitor and a trained mediator and collaborative family law practitioner. Doirín practices exclusively in the areas of Family Law and Child Care Law and is equipped to provide clients with expert advice in these areas. Doirín’s view is that the best interests of the children should be paramount in any proceedings concerning them.

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Andi Paus

Andi Paus has been practicing family law litigation for more than twenty-years. She shifted her practice to almost exclusively mediation eight years ago when joining Arizona Mediation Institute. Andi lives in Phoenix, Arizona with her long time significant other, Steve, her teenagers, Carter and Kennedy, and their dog, Thunder. Her family is hosting a foster dog, Lester, during the pandemic. arizonamediation.com andi@arizonamediation.com

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David Hubbard

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Katie Bennett

Katie Bennett, JD, MSW runs Family Mediation Hawai'i, a mediation and collaborative law firm helping families reach child-focused settlement agreements. In addition to private practice, she mediates for the O'ahu Child Welfare Mediation Program at Family Court. A mother of three, Katie strives to reduce the toxic effects sustained parental conflict and litigation have on children. She received the Hawaii Access to Justice Award for Outstanding Pro Bono Service (2014) and the NASW-HI Social Justice and Advocacy Award (2015).

Dan Murphy

For 35 years Dan Murphy worked with children and families. He earned an M.S. degree in Education in 1974. He served as Director of St. Elizabeth's Child Development Center for 20 years, facilitating parent support groups and leading the certification process of the Center by the National Association for the Education for Young Children. Dan was also involved in drafting initial policies and procedures for reporting child abuse for Catholic Charities Maine. Dan also developed child welfare best practices among state and local child and family services organizations.

Tania Perlin

Tania is a lawyer, certified mediator, Deputy Judge- small claims court, freelance writer, instructor, and wellness coach. She has been practicing law since 1994. Ms. Perlin is passionate about fostering access to justice by offering alternative ways to resolve disputes in a more compassionate manner, wherein parties are in control of the outcomes. Contact: tania.perlin@gmail.com

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Greg has been a practicing mediator in Australia since 1991. He has mediated more than 1,500 disputes in a diverse range of conflicts including multi-party disputes involving government institutions, commercial and industrial disputes, agricultural disputes, franchise disputes, matrimonial disputes and disputes involving conflict in the workplace.

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Stephen K. Erickson

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Marie Freeman

Marie has had the pleasure of working in many different industries, giving her a wide variety of experience. She had a rewarding career in the mental health sector, before setting up a successful digital marketing company with her husband. After training as a mediator, she developed a special interest in working with separating couples. Marie lives in beautiful county Wicklow, in Ireland, with her husband and two young daughters.

Josepha Madigan

Josepha was appointed as Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht on 30th November 2017. Josepha is a Fine Gael T.D. for Dublin Rathdown. As Minister she has overseen increased investment in the arts, new supports for artists, and robust action to preserve our biodiversity. Josepha is a national legislator. She proposed and won a referendum to reform Ireland's divorce laws. She has also drafted legislation on family law and contempt of court. Prior to her appointment as Minister, Josepha served on the Oireachtas Public Accounts Committee, the Future of Healthcare Committee, and was the Chairperson of the Budgetary Oversight Committee. She was a Fine Gael Councillor for the Stillorgan Ward on Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council, from May 2014 until her election as a T.D. Josepha practiced as a solicitor for twenty years. She won Family Lawyer of the year at the Irish Law Awards 2014. Josepha is also an author of a handbook for family lawyers and their clients entitled "Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Ireland" (Jordan Publishing, 2012).

She studied at Mount Anville School, Trinity College Dublin and Blackhall Place.

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Rosemarie Ferrante is a divorce attorney whose practice focuses on non-adversarial divorce through mediation and collaborative divorce. Rosemarie's goal is to make a positive impact on the divorce process for her clients by giving them the resources and tools they need to help their family transition smoothly through the process of restructuring their family. She is licensed in NY and CT, has offices in Danbury, Stamford and Greenwich, CT and provides online services as well.

Susan Allan

Since 1999 Susan has been America's leading Marriage & Divorce Coach, domestic violence prevention expert and creator of Heartspace® Solutions, The Divorce Forum® A certified Mediator, and Marital Mediation©. Reconciliation results are 99% successful Details are available in Susan's 3 eBooks and 215 videos at <https://www.youtube.com/user/susanallan2001> and her current blog, <http://www.yourtango.com/experts/susan-allan>.

Josh Kraus

Josh is the founder of Fair & Friendly Mediation, where he practices as a family mediator throughout the state of Florida. He is also on the Board of Directors of the Academy of Professional Family Mediators. Please visit www.fairfriendlymediation.com for more information.

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Andi Paus has been practicing family law litigation for more than twenty-years. She shifted her practice to almost exclusively mediation eight years ago when joining Arizona Mediation Institute. Andi lives in Phoenix, Arizona with her long time significant other, Steve, her teenagers, Carter and Kennedy, and their dog, Thunder. Her family is hosting a foster dog, Lester, during the pandemic. arizonamediation.com andi@arizonamediation.com

Susanne Terry

Susanne Terry is the editor and a contributor to the newly released *More Justice, More Peace: When Peacemakers Are Advocates*, Rowman & Littlefield/ACR. She and Michael Lang are editors of the *ACR Practitioner's Guide Series*, published by Rowman & Littlefield. She is a facilitator, mediator, coach and organizational consultant and is the Case Supervisor for the Vermont Superior Court Parent Coordination Program. Her newest venture is as a storyteller.

Mark B. Baer

Mark is a mediator, conflict resolution consultant, a non-litigating family law attorney, author and editor, located in Pasadena, California. He most recently co-authored *Divorce and Separation: A Practical Guide to Making Smart Decisions (California Edition)*. His article titled *The Amplification of Bias in Family Law and Its Impact* will be published in the *Journal of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers* in May, 2020.

Virginia L. Colin

Virginia L. Colin, Ph.D. is a professional family mediator in Fairfax, VA. She is the Director of Colin Family Mediation Group LLC and co-author of *The Guide to Low-Cost Divorce in Virginia*. You can contact her at MediatorQ@gmail.com.

Kelly Gering

Based in Omaha, NE, Kelly Gering is the founder of Shared Story, a conflict resolution practice that helps people have the kinds of conversations that matter.

Specializing in high-conflict scenarios, Kelly serves on the Nebraska State Supreme Court's Office of Dispute Resolution panel of private mediators helping families to create solutions that are sustainable and healing. Complimenting her private practice, Kelly is also a special faculty member in Creighton University's graduate program in Negotiation and Conflict Resolution.

Marilyn McKnight

Marilyn is a mediator, trainer, co-founder and co-director of the Erickson Mediation Institute in Minneapolis, who, after an extensive career in public social work, has practiced exclusively in the field of mediation since 1977, and has trained mediators, nationally and internationally. She has been President of several national mediation organizations, pioneered and developed the movement toward the certification of mediators, and has received numerous awards for her prominent work in the mediation field, including the Distinguished Mediator Award by the Academy of Family Mediators. She has co-authored a number of books on mediation, including *Mediating Divorce: A Client's Workbook* (Jossey-Bass, 1998), and *Mediating Divorce: A Step-by-Step Manual* (Jossey-Bass, 2002).

Ellice Halpern

Ellice is the founder of Little Falls Mediation in Arlington, Virginia. She was voted Best Mediator 2020 and 2018 by readers of *Arlington Magazine*; she was also voted Best of the Best 2019, 2018, and 2016 by readers of the *Arlington Sun Gazette*. Ellice is Adjunct Professor of Law at the George Mason University Antonin Scalia Law School, teaching Alternative Dispute Resolution and Mediation since 2017. She also mediates court referred cases in D.C. Courts. Ellice is a graduate of Cornell University and Georgetown University Law Center.

Living Together, Separating, Divorcing: Surviving During a Pandemic

Joyce Odidison

Joyce Odidison, MA, PCC, CTDP, a conflict analyst and corporate wellness trainer for 24 years, is founder of the comprehensive Wellness Improvement System® (WIS) and the Wellness Competency Mindset Teacher Coach Training. Joyce teaches the WIS® Relational Leadership program to boost emotional wellness and preserve mental health at work. Joyce hosts the What's Happening at Work Podcast is Chair of the Global Workplace Wellness Summit, is author of five books, a speaker, Certified Training and Development Practitioner, Certified Professional Coach, and university lecturer.

Lorraine Schaeffer

Lorraine Schaeffer did her BSc at Cornell and MSW at Rutgers before moving to London. She trained as a family mediator in 1995. She became the Director of Mediation at the Institute of Family Therapy in 2000 and taught post graduate courses in Conflict Resolution at Birkbeck, University of London.

Chip Rose, JD

Chip Rose has been a major contributor to the field of family mediation and collaborative practice since 1990. An active private practitioner of family mediation since 1980, he has provided training, techniques and practice models throughout the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom. He is past president of the Academy of Professional Family Mediators, as well as being a founding board member and the recipient of APFM's inaugural Lifetime Achievement Award. Retired and living in Oregon, he is still active in the field and can be contacted at <mailto:chiprosemediation@gmail.com>.

Kristyn Carmichael

Kristyn Carmichael is a full-time Professional Divorce and Family Mediator, and Assistant Director of Mediation Services at The Aurit Center for Divorce Mediation in Scottsdale, Arizona, as well as a licensed Arizona attorney. Kristyn is also a Board member and the co-chair of Membership for the Academy of Professional Family Mediators (APFM).

Kenneth Cloke

Kenneth is a mediator, arbitrator, coach, consultant and trainer, specializing in resolving complex multi-party disputes, including transnational, marital, divorce, family, grievance and workplace disputes, organizational, public policy, and school conflicts, and designing preventative conflict resolution systems. He has worked in over 25 countries and is founder and first President of Mediators Beyond Borders. He has published 15 books on conflict resolution, recently *The Crossroads of Conflict and Politics*, *Dialogue and the Evolution of Democracy*.

Linda Fieldstone

Linda Fieldstone, M.Ed., is Co-Chair of the ACR/FLAFCC Elder Justice Initiative on Eldercaring Coordination and provides conflict resolution opportunities to families of all ages since being Supervisor of Family Court Services, Miami-Dade, Florida, servicing families in the court for 26 years. Linda is past president of the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts and involved in research, writing, training and consultation internationally. LindaFieldstone@outlook.com | www.EldercaringCoordinationFL.org

Fiona McAuslan

Fiona McAuslan is Director of the Legal Aid Board's Family Mediation Service in Ireland. Before this position, she worked as a mediator for the service and had a busy private practice working in all aspects of mediation. Fiona is also an experienced trainer and Conflict Coach. Over the last ten years, Fiona has worked with Peter Nicholson and Michael Lang on many publications such as the SALT Programme, a teacher resource programme that introduces appropriate conflict resolution and negotiation skills to children. The resolving book series includes Resolving bullying, Anger, Sibling Rivalry, and Bereavement and, more recently, the "Living with Separation and Divorce in Ireland" book that is now in the process of syndication in the US with a specific book for each state.

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www.resolvingbooks.com

Michael Lang

Michael is a practitioner, educator, author, and advocate for mediation for over 35 years. He is a leading voice in the field of separation, divorce, and mediation and has assisted hundreds of separating and divorcing couples. As a trainer, he designs and presents mediation and conflict management courses and workshops in court systems, government agencies, not-for-profit organizations, and university faculties. As an educator, Michael created one of the first graduate programs in conflict resolution in the U.S. He has been a visiting faculty member at several law schools and graduate programs and has been a featured speaker at professional meetings globally. Michael is the co-author of *The Making of a Mediator: Developing Artistry in Practice*. Most recently, Michael published "The Guide to Reflective Practice in Conflict Resolution", the first publication in the Practitioners Guide Series, a joint venture of the Association for Conflict Resolution and Rowman & Littlefield, with Susanne Terry. In connection with the book, Michael leads monthly reflective practice groups via video conference, presents webinars on reflective practice, and created a video series, "In Their Voices". Videos in this series may be viewed on his website:

www.thereflectivepractitioner.com/videoconversations and on YouTube.

Peter Nicholson

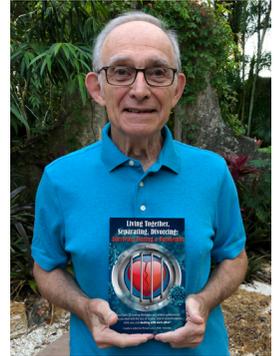
Peter is a marketing and communications expert and has built a very successful marketing and advertising business over the last twenty years and leads a very talented group of marketing and design professionals in his company OGX in Dublin, Ireland. Peter sits on several boards and guides and mentors many companies and their senior people thought all areas of marketing their message, product, or service. Besides working with government agencies, multinationals, and high potential companies, he spends some of his free time developing programmes and publications based on improving awareness and identity, developing talents and enhancing the quality of life, and the realisation of an individual's and institutions aspirations.

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www.resolvingbooks.com | www.divorcebookflorida.com

A final word from us

Michael Lang

In the relative quiet of sheltering during the pandemic, I woke up one morning a couple of weeks ago to an email from Peter in Dublin, he said that he had a mad idea and suggested we produce a book to help families strained by forced confinement and shoved suddenly into reconfiguring their lives by the impact of COVID-19. The ebook you are reading is the product of that idea, possible only because of the generous and inspired contributions from more than 70 professionals and as a result of Peter's unflinching efforts to format, illustrate and produce the book.



This book is not my first adventure in publishing with Peter and our long term collaborator Fiona. We are in the middle of developing on a series of books for people who are considering or in the process of separation and divorce. That series, Divorce and Separation: A Practical Guide to Making Smart Decisions, supported by the exceptional work of local editors, now includes editions for 5 states, with versions for 10 more states in process - eventually we will get to every state in America.

Peter Nicholson

This project has been a worldwide from the initial idea that took wings when my very dear friend and colleague Michael suggesting that we reach out to Mediators around the world and ask if anyone was interested in assisting us in this very short term adventure.

It took about twenty minutes after he sent out a few emails before we got our answer. Leading mediators and related professionals stepped up to the challenge.

Over one week, we received terrific pieces of crafted knowledge and handed it over to my team in OGX, who turned it into this book while putting up with Michael and my never-ending requests for changes and inputs!



I want to thank everyone involved, especially Michael, and sincerely hope these messages in these pages get into the hands of people that need it right now. Lastly, I would like to thank Karen, my beautiful wife, who has put up with me over the last thirty years or so but especially during the previous two mad weeks of developing this book.

Copyright Message

There is no Copyright on the content created in this publication. It is a gift from about eighty people who took the time to write valuable advice, who edited and molded the material, who created the visuals, designed the book, and managed to get it into your hands.

Not-For-Profit

It is our goal for people to benefit from this publication. All contributors, including the authors, editors, and the OGX design team, provided their services free of charge. Although there may be a nominal charge for the book in some channels, any profit that is accumulated will be given to related charities.

This project was kindly sponsored by OGX Group

Design and book production, website development, social media set up and management, and creation of all promotional material was sponsored and produced by OGX Group, who turned the publication around in a week and published it on Amazon on everyone’s behalf.



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Produced during the COVID-19 Pandemic May 2020
by Michael Lang and Peter Nicholson

Living Together, Separating, Divorcing: Surviving During a Pandemic

Created & edited by Michael Lang & Peter Nicholson



Everything is going to be
alright, maybe not today,
but eventually.

Advice from over 70 leading Mediators and related professionals to help you deal with the loss of income, lack of accommodation, child care, and **dealing with each other!**

Families are under attack. Of course, we all worried about the pandemic. Families are also overwhelmed by the staggering effects of daily confinement, managing children's education, the uncertain economy income, and anxiety about the future.

Would you like practical advice for getting through the pandemic?
Would your family be helped by some tips for handling the daily challenges?

Read this book. It's filled with useful information for coping with the daily stresses and tensions brought about by the pandemic.

Read this book. It's helpful if you're a couple, together or separated, working well as partners or can't communicate.

It's helpful if you are parents of toddlers or you have adult children now living with you. It's helpful you are concerned about an elderly or ailing family member.

We are all in the stormy seas of COVID-19.
Read this book for help so you can make it safely to shore.

Visit our website for more advice at
www.Pandemic-Relationships.com



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