**COVID-19 Guidance for children and families**

Cafcass has put together the following guidance to support children and families as the situation surrounding COVID-19 develops. We will do everything we can to help you and make sure that our service continues to run as effectively as possible. This information will be regularly updated. If the information below does not answer your questions, please get in contact with us here.

**Advice for families on effective co-parenting and child arrangements**

On 23 March, the government published full guidance on staying at home and away from others, which clarified that where parents do not live in the same household, children under 18 can be moved between their parents’ homes. On 24 March, the President of the Family Division, Sir Andrew McFarlane, provided additional advice on compliance with Family Court Child Arrangement Orders.

Our National Improvement Service has put together some advice to encourage effective co-parenting and help maintain your child’s routine in these uncertain times. It is important that families amicably try to find solutions that are in the best interests of the child and the health of those around them.

Follow this link: <https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/download/12285/>

**Advice for children and young people on coronavirus**

The Family Justice Young People’s Board (FJYPB) has published a new COVID-19 information booklet for children and young people which is packed full of great advice. Here is the link:

<https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/download/12341/>

The booklet includes ‘top tips’ for keeping in touch with family and friends, how to make the best of being at home, and what to do if feeling unsafe or unwell. FJYPB members also give their thoughts on how COVID-19 is affecting them.

**Should my child still travel between parents as per the court order?**

The Government has now clarified that where parents do not live in the same household, children under 18 can be moved between their parents’ homes.

The President of the Family Division has issued advice about compliance with child arrangement orders during the current Coronavirus crisis. This states that whilst children can be moved between separated parents it does not mean that children must be moved between homes.

The decision about whether a child is to move between parental homes is for the child’s parents to make in the best interests of the child after an assessment of the circumstances, including the child’s present health, the risk of infection and the presence of any recognised vulnerable individuals in one household or the other.

If you are concerned your child has an existing health condition, you’re pregnant, or someone in your household has a health condition that makes them vulnerable to the impact of the virus then you should follow the Public Health England medical advice.

“The key message should be that, where Coronavirus restrictions cause the letter of a court order to be varied, the spirit of the order should nevertheless be delivered by making safe alternative arrangements for the child.”

Please read the Cafcass advice on effective co-parenting during a pandemic for further guidance on complying with a Child Arrangements Order in these circumstances. Follow this link:

<https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/download/12285/>

**Co-parenting and child arrangements in a global pandemic – advice for families**

✓ In these uncertain times, maintaining a sense of routine will help your child to feel safe and secure. Whilst your child's school may be closed, consider sticking to normal meal and bedtimes and any other family rituals your child takes comfort in - for example movie night or reading a book together before bed.

✓ Unless there are justified medical/ self-isolation issues, (or some future nationally issued guidance or expectation associated with leaving the house in your area) children should also maintain their usual routine of spending time with each of their parents. If there is a Child Arrangements Order in place this should be complied with unless to do so would put your child, or others at risk. This will help your child to feel a sense of consistency, whilst also reassuring them that the parent they don't always live with is safe and healthy.

✓ If you're not able to maintain your child's routine due to illness or self-isolation, or non-availability of people who ordinarily support your child’s contact, then communicate clearly and honestly with your co-parent. If it is not safe for you to communicate directly (for example if there has been a history of domestic abuse) then consider using a trusted third party to help you.

✓ Think creatively about how you can support your child to stay in touch with their other parent and family members during any period of self-isolation. Skype and Facetime can be great ways to catch up and can be used to read stories, sing and play together. With older children you could also consider a watch party – where you gather online to watch a movie or video, commenting and ‘reacting’ in real time.

✓ If any court directed spending time arrangements are missed, think about how you and your coparent may be able to ‘make up’ your child’s time after the restrictions are lifted. Remember, any rearranged spending time arrangements should always be for your child’s benefit and should not be used as a source of tension or conflict – especially at a time when your child is likely to be feeling anxious about the effects of the pandemic.

Did you know? The Family Procedure Rules 2010 allow for remote hearings in appropriate cases. This could mean hearings take place via email, video, telephone or Skype. The government has issued guidance here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/hmcts-telephone-and-video-hearings-during-coronavirus-outbreak>

How to talk to your child about Covid19:

“Provide facts about what has happened, explain what is going on now and give them clear information about how to reduce their risk of being infected by the disease in words that they can understand depending on their age” World Health Organisation, March 2020 .

✓ Be extra vigilant when making sure that children cannot hear discussions about the court case.