

**H**asn't everyone been through enough with the pandemic? As parents, we must deal with ever-changing school schedules, exposure alerts turning our daily lives upside down, and the uncertainties for our children's current and future needs.

Perhaps you and your child's other parent cooperate and communicate well when dealing with these issues. However, there are many parents whose co-parenting relationships are strained or non-existent. As a law firm working in the family courts over the past year, we have witnessed many never-before-seen issues and it has been a learning experience for the courts and all parties involved. Here are some tips for custody and co-parenting success during COVID-19:

**1. Coronavirus exposure of a classmate or co-worker:** Yes, your time should be your time, but try not to be greedy at the expense of your family's health. If your child was exposed at school during Mom's time, let Mom hold onto the child until the quarantine period is over. If you were exposed at work to the virus, just be upfront with Dad so he can keep your child safe while you quarantine. This goes back to the golden rule and you would expect the same treatment if the roles were reversed. The deposits into the "trust bank" may pay back in spades with the other parent and you will ensure everyone's health and safety. This is especially true for those on the front lines like medical personnel, grocery clerks, bus drivers and the like. This may be the time for flexibility and understanding from all parties.

**DISCLAIMER:** The Supreme Court of Pennsylvania has mandated that all custody orders should be adhered to during COVID and the pandemic should not be used as an excuse to not comply with orders. Sadly, it had to issue this mandate for those who want to use COVID to deny the other parent custody.

#### 2. Hybrid/Remote School

**Instruction:** As parents, we have all had to sharpen our teaching skills with our kids over the last year regardless of what form of schooling



your child has received. The decisions about whether your child receives in-person, remote learning or hybrid learning is a matter of legal custody. If you share legal custody and cannot agree, you would have to force a judge to decide. The decision is not "which type" of learning your child receives, it is "who" gets to choose. The courts focus on the best interests of the child when picking the parent who will get to make the decision.

If it is remote schooling, it may involve one parent working from home. If the other parent cannot stay home and must work outside of the home, as many do, then how about a compromise of one marking period doing remote and one doing hybrid or in person? This will allow you to see what works best for your child

to thrive in their studies and social development. If you ask the court, you are essentially giving up your autonomy as a parent and are stuck with whatever the judge orders.

**3. Future uncertainties:** Since none of us knows when our children will be vaccinated, how do we plan for the summer? Again, good communication is the key to resolving disputes. If you cannot decide if sending your daughter to sleepaway camp or

letting your son go to Florida with the other parent is safe or advisable, try talking to each other. If communication fails, try engaging with a mediator or a co-parenting counselor to work out your differences. Going to court should be a last resort.

Your co-parenting relationship will far outlast the inconveniences of COVID-19. In the event you cannot work things out through communication, you should consult an attorney to discuss your non-court alternatives, like mediation or a collaborative process, to attempt to avoid litigation.

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