

Family Matters

THE NEWSLETTER OF BERRY FAMILY LAW: AUTUMN2020



A message from our Managing Partner James Turnbull

As COVID-19 continues to develop, we extend our thoughts to those affected by the virus, and our gratitude for the healthcare professionals and others who are helping our community through this difficult time.

Measures recommended by the Commonwealth and Victorian Governments' Health Departments have been adopted to ensure our clients and team should not be impacted. The health and safety of our clients and team are really paramount.

We have ensured seamless ongoing operation through the activation of the firm's Business Continuity Plan. Berry Family Law can and shall, through that plan, continue to run efficiently and service our clients.

Our landline number, 9397 2488 operates and has been remotely trialled. It will continue to work even if circumstances forces office closures. Emails have always been available to our lawyers remotely. That will not change.

We are offering video or voice conference meetings, should that be any client's preference. Zoom video conferencing has been set up in each office and it is also available remotely. Protocols are already in place for face to face meetings.

The Family Courts have implemented hearings by video link. We have adapted to that and achieved good outcomes for clients already.

All of our team have now trialled working from home, and we can report due to our up to date IT capability, that has worked well.

This is an unprecedented time for everyone, and the situation is changing daily. Please be assured that we will keep you informed of any relevant changes or updates as necessary. Our team will work with you to get through this. You can remain confident that the quality of our advice and assistance to our clients will not change.



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Top Ten Guide for Parents during Covid19

The pressures and stresses associated with COVID can be difficult and may provoke anxiety. These suggestions may help.

1. Stay healthy

Model best practice habits for your children to minimise the risk of spread of the virus – e.g. hand washing and social distancing. Simple routines become habit forming. Let the other parent know that you are following these habits – we all worry that others are not taking things as seriously as we should. Assurances can bring peace of mind and good will. Consistency in both homes is ideal.

2. Be present and considered

This is a serious health challenge. Children will have heard much through their schools, networks and media. Children are not necessarily able to process all of this information and can become confused and scared.

3. Meeting your obligations

If your parenting is regulated by a court order, you must still meet its obligations unless a reasonable excuse applies. If arrangements become unclear or cannot be met (e.g. quarantine, travel restrictions or as schools close) use common sense first. Contact us for any advice you need. If you anticipate a change, give the other parent notice as soon as you can.

4. Adapt

If schools are closed and changeover was there, nominate another suitable neutral location. Sporting activities or activities parents planned to do with children during school holidays or weekends are unlikely to be available. Think about if you will be required to work from home and if that is feasible when children are in your care. If time arrangements with the other parent cannot occur, find other ways – including digital communications.

5. Be open

Try to be on the same page with the other parent about your respective households actions to limit exposure to the virus and to shield the children. If a child is showing any symptoms, that information should be shared immediately with the other parent, and an agreed response implemented. Know what your own self-isolation plan will be. Share that with the other parent if necessary.

6. Be mutual

Think about how you would like the other parent to engage with you about these issues, and model that engagement. Be flexible if that is good for the children. Ask for flexibility in return.

7. Be compassionate

Very few people can apply certainty right now. Being calm in times of high stress is hard –but you are more likely to reduce the conflict if both are making the best effort possible.

8. Be solution focussed

Now, more than ever, the need for parents to find compromise in the interests of children, is absolutely clear. Courts and dispute resolution services may be hard to access. Common sense and respectful engagement may be the surest path. It's an opportunity to find new ways to solve old problems. We have a solid list of counsellors who are able to help, many of whom have set up video conferencing facilities.

9. Help out to the extent you can

People may lose jobs or income. This may impact child support. Try to be understanding. Financial worry may exist in both households. Your legacy can be that both parents cooperated to find solutions for your children.

10. Be patient and positive

This situation will not resolve overnight. Changes will continue. Stay connected. You are the children's beacon at this time.

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