

Parenting in the Time of Covid- 19

Let's acknowledge that yesterday was hard, today is going to have challenges, and tomorrow is a chance to try again. Be kind to yourself. Parenting and caregiving changed dramatically in the last month and while there are many shared pressures, each individual household is unique, and some situations have additional complications.

SEVEN GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS

(Who are Separated/Divorced/Sharing Custody)

1. Be Healthy

Comply with all CDC, State, and local guidelines and model good behavior for your children: handwashing, wiping down surfaces that are frequently touched, and maintain social distancing.

2. Be Mindful

Be honest about the seriousness of the pandemic but maintain calm. Encourage your children to ask questions and express their concerns. Answer them truthfully at an age appropriate level.

3. Be Compliant

As much as possible, stick with custody agreements and court orders. If a person is in a high risk group and precautions need to be taken, the court will find this reasonable. The court will not tolerate one parent using this situation to frustrate the other parent's contact with the child.

4. Be Creative

Realize that things will change. Some parents might be working extra, some from home, some not at all. If visits are not possible, encourage closeness with the other parent through shared books, movies, games, and FaceTime or Skype.

5. Be Transparent

Provide honest information to your co-parent about exposure risks and agree on what steps you will take to protect your child and each other.

6. Be Generous

Try make up time to the parent that missed out. Family law judges expect reasonable accommodations and will take seriously concerns raised in later filing about parents who are inflexible in these highly unusual circumstances.

7. Be Understanding

The pandemic will pose economic hardship and lead to lost earning for many parents, both those who are paying and receiving child support. If the Child Support Enforcement Division is involved – contact your caseworker – email is best because they are working remotely.

If you're a parent without a co-parent or nearby family create an emergency plan and select a caregiver. Pick someone who will provide children with as much stability as possible – someone who will be warm, patient and allow them to have fun.

Montana Legal Resources

What happens to kids when a parent/guardian is unavailable depends on circumstance – the most universal advice is to make sure your wishes are written down and in an obvious place.

These are hard conversation and decisions. These sites can help explore your options:

An overview of how estate planning affects kids is available from [MSU Extension](#).

A [Power of Attorney for Care of a Child](#) designates a non-parent/guardian to care for a child while you are alive.

<https://courts.mt.gov/Forms/guardianship#6868819-forms>

A [Living Will \(or Advanced Directive\)](#) contains your wishes for end of life care.

<https://media.dojmt.gov/wp-content/uploads/F-My-Choices-Advance-Directive.pdf>

A [Will and Power of Attorney](#), contains instructions for who cares for your kids on your death.

<https://courts.mt.gov/Forms/guardianship#6868819-forms>

This information is not legal advice. Reach out to an attorney with specific questions about your situation.

Montana Legal Services

Association: provides free legal help to eligible clients in Montana.

www.montanalawhelp.org

Helpline: 1.866.666.6899

Montana Legal Justice: provides sliding fee scale services in Missoula

www.montanalegaljustice.com

406.356.6546

This is a time of stress and uncertainty – but we are going through this tough time together.