

# The Top 6

## Tips for **Co-Parenting** in a **Crisis: COVID-19 Edition**



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## TIP #1:

### Double your Communication Efforts with Your Co-Parent



Communication is critical.

The best thing you can do is to communicate with your co-parent. Communicating with your co-parent is already something you are hopefully doing, but this is the time to double your efforts.

Without solid communication between two households in the best of circumstances, nothing works quite right. In a crisis, a lack of communication between two households sets families up for disaster.

Poor communication can create any or ALL of the following:

- ◆ Tension your children will feel in an already uncertain time
- ◆ Breakdown in co-parenting relationship that can lead to long term damage
- ◆ Possible contempt of court or other court-related intervention
- ◆ Costly attorney fees

Health and safety information should always be shared between households, but now more than ever.

DO share what is going on in your household with your co-parent.

DO communicate what your Social Distancing practices are with your co-parent.

DO communicate and get on the same page with messaging to your child about COVID-19.

## TIP #2:

### Remember Your Parenting Plan Still Exists

Your Parenting Plan is a Court Order – that has not changed.

The best thing you can do is to attempt to stick to your parenting plan. Do not deny your co-parent visitation just because you think you can or that the “rules don’t apply.” That actually cannot be further from the truth.

In Washington, Governor Jay Inslee has made it clear that Washington’s “Stay Home, Stay Healthy” order does not prevent compliance with private parenting plans for residents of Washington State.

Furthermore, “the governor encourages parents who are co-parenting under a parenting plan to communicate with one another during this difficult time in order to both maintain family relationships and to protect the best interests and health of each child.” Further information can be found online at [www.governor.wa.gov](http://www.governor.wa.gov).

If you are a parent who is having your parenting time withheld because the other parent is not agreeing to honor your parenting plan, DO try reminding them that the parenting plan still exists and that working out a compromise is needed.

Keep in mind that there can be reasonable exceptions to consider in the current situation and to discuss with your co-parent. Issues may include:

- ◆ At risk parents and family members with compromised immune systems
- ◆ Elderly family members living in a household
- ◆ COVID-19 Exposure or diagnosis in a household
- ◆ Households not practicing social distancing or complying with the Stay at Home Order



## TIP #3:

### Use Your Technology

We live in an era of amazing tech – use it!

When you have to get creative with your visitation time, use your technology to make that happen. If you cannot see your children the same way you normally would, you can still see each other with FaceTime video calls. You can stay in touch in ways that you never could have in years past. Make usage of your technology. Work with your co-parent to set up time for video calls, time to utilize FaceTime, Zoom, or Skype to watch the same movie together or play a game if you cannot have the same visitation.



Be sure to work with your co-parent to establish a shared calendar, exchange photos, videos, and have visits now if you are not already doing these things. COVID-19 is an opportunity to use some of the downtime and our technology to get organized in co-parenting efforts to do things like collaborate on a shared photo album to drop photos from parenting time, create a calendar to post activities across households and schools that both parties will want to know about, and foster positive co-parenting via technology. Make the best out of this time and use your resources!

## TIP #4:

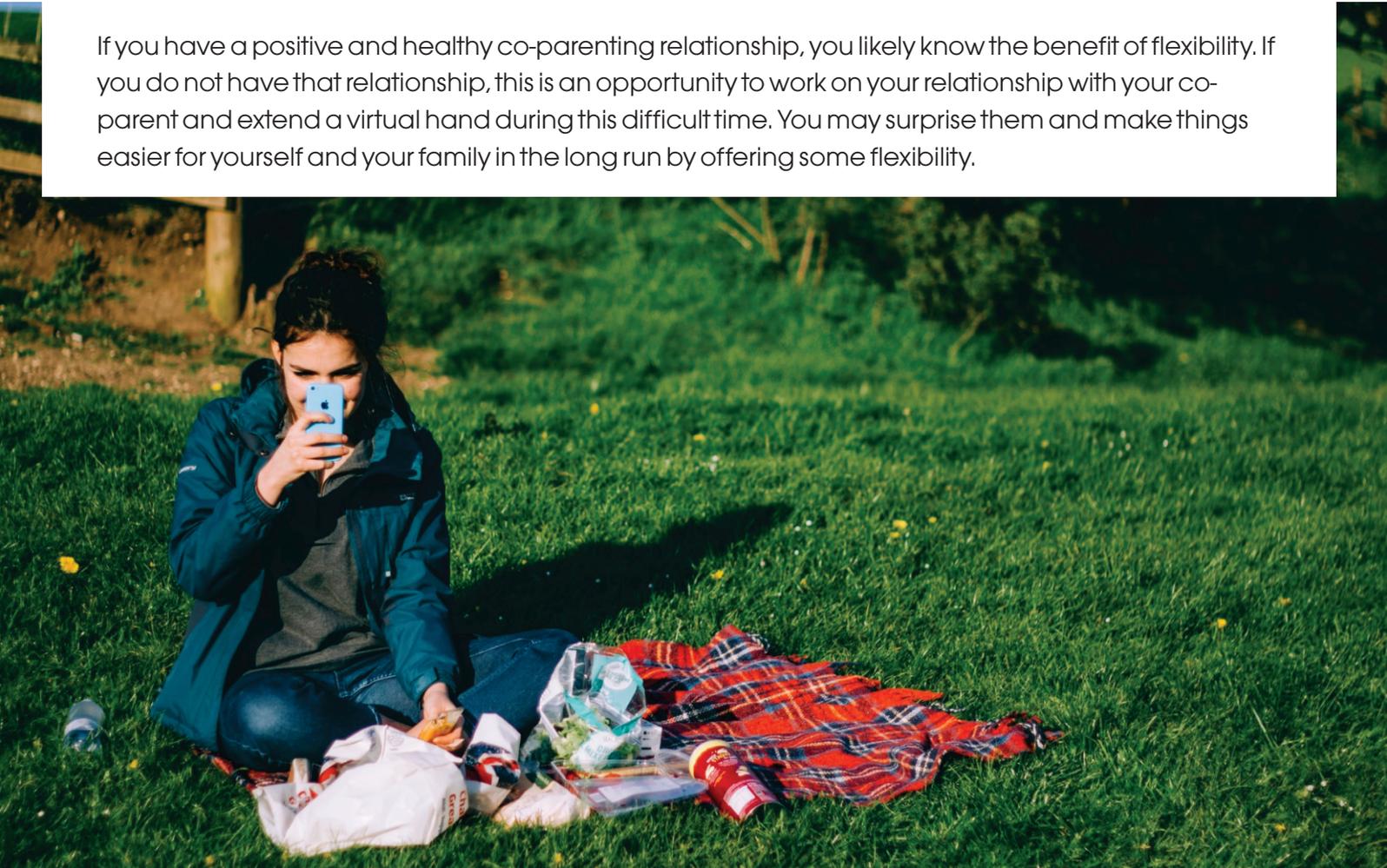
### Be Flexible and Behave Well

You will likely be judged for how you behave during this time by your children, your co-parent, and possibly by the court and other professionals.

During this time nothing is more important than flexibility. We have already talked about communicating and adhering to the parenting plan if you can. However, we have also talked about using your technology when you cannot or when things just will not work out as planned. Things are changing daily during this uncertain time, so flexibility is a must. This is not the time to be rigid and combative with a co-parent. It is the time to be flexible, reasonable, and understanding. We are all in this together! Your children will remember how you responded to this. They will remember how they felt. Your co-parent will remember how you responded in a crisis. If you are inflexible and do not behave well, your issues may end up in court and under a microscope where you will be judged by the court.

Courts do not like to see parents being inflexible and difficult over inconsequential matters during times of crisis. Be the bigger person if it comes down to it. Maintain calm for your household and your child.

If you have a positive and healthy co-parenting relationship, you likely know the benefit of flexibility. If you do not have that relationship, this is an opportunity to work on your relationship with your co-parent and extend a virtual hand during this difficult time. You may surprise them and make things easier for yourself and your family in the long run by offering some flexibility.



## TIP #5:

### Keep the Focus on the Kids

This is a tough and unprecedented time, but what if you were a child? Can you imagine if you were all of a sudden unable to see friends, your school was closed, and every routine you knew was gone? Some of that is happening to you, but for your child it is magnified to the extreme.

As you discuss issues with your co-parent, the common denominator should be simple: keep the focus on your children. Talk about what is best for them when it comes to residential time, health, safety, well-being and happiness. Make sure that you remember the reason your co-parent is in your life is because you share a child or children together, and you have a shared responsibility to do what is in their best interests, especially during this time.

This is a great time to connect about what your child is doing to stay on top of schoolwork while at home and how you can both support that in two households and what needs your child may have for supplies. It is also the best time to talk about your children's emotional needs and how they are coping with the changes to their lives and how you can support them.

This is not the time to weaponize your children against the other parent, to focus on the minor things you may not like or think the other parent is doing wrong, and to generally take the focus off your children. Your child's life is already upside-down. Work with your co-parent to present a unified front in creating as much normalcy as possible and keeping the focus on them during this time.



## TIP #6:

### If You Can't Work It Out, Consider Dispute Resolution

If you and your co-parent always agreed, you probably would not have downloaded this e-book.

You might still be together. Even co-parents who get along most of the time run into situations where they do not agree. The situation we face with COVID-19 is unprecedented, so with co-parenting relationships that are already shaky it can make for very difficult times. For the best of relationships, it can make for tougher times than normal.

When overcommunicating, being the bigger person, being flexible, and trying to meet in the middle do not manage to work things out, what do you do?

You will have choices to seek court intervention or seek dispute resolution. While there are benefits of both, in the current climate of uncertainty and a need for immediate solutions and less conflict, dispute resolution is an excellent option to consider in reaching compromises and finding answers to disagreements between co-parents.

Dispute resolution can most commonly take the form of mediation or arbitration. Working with your attorney and a mediator to help craft a solution and negotiate a resolution with your co-parent, rather than ending up in court can be more cost-effective, less high conflict, and more solutions-oriented.

Arbitration may also be an effective option. A consultation with an attorney to discuss your options is the first step in evaluating your specific situation and what dispute resolution options make the most sense for you or may be required by your current parenting plan.





## ABOUT US

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At Dellino Law Group, we've been through every kind of stressful and crazy situation. We understand the serious legal issues you are facing and the emotional toll these kinds of situations can take. We will get you through this and give you a safe place to come for answers and help. [Contact us today!](#)

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