

COVID-19 and Your Family Law Matter

While the entire world is suffering the impact of the COVID-19 virus, those who have a family law matter are facing unexpected and unprecedented issues. The fact that courts are closed temporarily in many jurisdictions is compounding the problem.

The following are some tips for dealing with family law issues related to the COVID 19 pandemic:

Custody

With children being home from school and parents working remotely, along with quarantines and the need to protect vulnerable family members, questions are arising about how to navigate custody matters. Unfortunately, there are many situations where parents are not able to easily communicate with each other, but this is the time for parents to try and set aside any past animosity and to cooperate with each other in the best interests of their children. Custody orders need to be followed despite how inconvenient they may seem. Parents must keep lines of communication open especially regarding any health issues that their children are having or whether anyone in their respective homes is testing positive for the COVID-19 virus, as there may be rules regarding quarantine that must be followed.

Also, for those children who are transitioning between households while schools are closed and lessons are being taught online, parents have a duty to assure that assignments are being completed so there is consistency in learning and the children do not fall behind in their school work. In a time such as this, parents have to do their utmost to put their personal differences aside and truly put their children first.

Financial Obligations

With the volatile stock market and talk of recession, the COVID-19 virus is causing most Americans to question their financial futures. This is especially true of those who have been furloughed or are not able to work for health reasons or because of business closures. Questions are being posed as to how can financial obligations to a spouse or former spouse be maintained in the face of the unprecedented financial impact resulting from the COVID-19 virus. First and foremost, while looming financial obligations can be formidable, there is no reason to panic.

Things are changing daily and hopefully, the abrupt changes that we are seeing will be short-lived and not permanent. Moreover, certain support obligations, such as child support are modifiable and can be altered if one truly suffers a change in financial circumstances. While other obligations and payments may not be modifiable and must be made in accordance with an outstanding court order, it is important to address these issues with your lawyer to see if there is anything that can be done in short order to alleviate some financial pressure.

Court Closures

While most clients do not relish the idea of going to court to address their family law matter, knowing that they always have that option if they cannot otherwise resolve their issues is assuring. In addition, there are those who have been anticipating scheduled court dates for some time and are now learning that these court dates are being postponed due to temporary court closures. Again, there is hope that any current court closures will be short lived and when the courts reopen, they will assuredly do their best to get matters rescheduled as quickly as possible.

Additionally, this situation may give parties some additional time to see if their differences can be resolved by way of negotiation rather than litigation. Further, there are methods of alternate dispute resolution that can still occur despite court closures. Many mediators and arbitrators are adjusting



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their usual way of proceeding to keep matters moving by way of remote communication. Even some court proceedings are still being conducted by way of remote technology.

Dealing with a family law issue, whether it be divorce, custody, or support, is not usually easy and it undoubtedly becomes even more difficult in the face of a pandemic that has abruptly changed life as we know it. Nonetheless, having solid guidance in the face of all this uncertainty is key.

Our team of family law attorneys and staff remain available to assist our existing clients and consult with new clients, using remote communication as needed to provide advice and address problems as they arise.