



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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CORONAVIRUS AND FAMILY LAW – WHAT PARENTS NEED TO KNOW

Family Law matters can be challenging at the best of times. Stressed parents and shared parenting can be hard to navigate but add in a world-wide pandemic and many people are finding it difficult to cope.

And the rules about what we consider reasonable or appropriate social behaviour are changing rapidly in response to the COVID-19 health crisis which is adding even more pressure to families just hanging on by a thread.

Director, Liz Catton said, “It is a confusing time for all parents and families navigating important decisions which impact upon the health and safety of their children, and arguably even more difficult for separated parents.

“Now more than ever, separated parents will be called upon to focus on the best interest of their children when implementing Court Orders, negotiating interim arrangements, or inevitably, negotiating variations to existing parenting arrangements should this be necessary for a child’s safety and wellbeing.

“Court Orders are not automatically varied or of no effect. They remain in place unless determined otherwise by the Court, or a child’s parents reaching a compromise due to unforeseen events such as those we are experiencing now”, Liz said.

And with recently announced national and international border closures, there is immediate impact upon those children who routinely travel to visit parents living overseas or interstate during school holidays. Closer to home, parenting arrangements will also be impacted as we navigate the requirements of social distancing, quarantine and isolation.

Liz advises, “Now is the time to get prepared, rather than panic.

“Those who are bound by Court Orders, Parenting Plans and even informal arrangements, need to consider negotiating a contingency plan now, to come into effect should the situation for your children change. And as we have seen in recent days this may change quickly”.

The types of issues your plan could address include:

1. Agreed changes to any usual living arrangements urgently required due to a parent or a member of the parent's household being placed in quarantine;
2. Temporary change to child changeover locations if safer options are available;
3. Variations to schooling arrangements and associated expectations and exchange of information between parents;
4. Alternatives for communication between households, including FaceTime, skype, zoom, and other online options and the frequency of communication;
5. Immediate notification should a child become unwell;
6. Temporary changes to supervision if usual supervisors are elderly grandparents.

"What is in the best interests of children undoubtedly is that their parents work collaboratively. This is a time of uncertainty in many aspects of our lives however having a contingency plan will buffer the impact upon your family when usual co-parenting arrangements can no longer work", Liz said.

END RELEASE

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