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## How to make Covid co-parenting as stress-free as possible



**If you're one of the UK's 2.4m separated families trying to navigate Covid co-parenting alone, you definitely need barrister Ceri White's expert advice**

Over a month into lockdown and spare a thought for the 2.4 million **separated families** in the UK regularly exchanging children and their accompanying soft toys.

After initial confusion, the government confirmed that 'where parents do not live in the same household, children under 18 can be moved between their parents' homes' but the volume of calls to barrister **Ceri White's** family chambers at **4PB** indicate things are not that simple and clear cut.

'The guidance from the courts is that because a child 'can' travel for contact does not mean they 'must' and a sensible assessment of the individual circumstances should be made,' explains White. 'And complications are varied – from shielding for the vulnerable, parental jobs with significant Covid exposure or the occasional attempt to disrupt contact using the virus as an excuse.'

So where does that leave many Covid **co-parenting** exes? In a murky and stressful world where many are trying to make the best of a challenging situation. Couples who are still on friendly terms, like several of White's clients, are attempting to isolate with each other, for better or worse. In contrast, White has had to make applications to restore interim contact for some clients after parents retained children during weekend contact or refused to allow any contact at all.

So, what can you do to make Covid co-parenting as stress-free as possible? Here is White's four-step co-parenting checklist...



### 1. Covid co-parenting: put the children first

This is not the time for seeking tactical advantage. **Children** thrive best on a routine and, with school closed and meeting with friends barred, any routine that can be maintained, should be. Clearly, if someone is showing symptoms or self isolating, the children cannot travel. In those circumstances, maintain contact via video, phone and text (frequent and short works best for most children but you know them best).

Reassure the children that they will see the other parent soon – and make sure they do. Be aware that your children are likely to be very anxious for the **health and wellbeing** of everyone they love, and that includes their other parent and wider family. They will not seek the reassurance they need from you if they are conscious of you holding negative feelings towards the other parent.

### 2. Covid co-parenting: communication is key

Up front, clear and above all *polite* communications is critical here. If arrangements need to be changed, tackle it head on. Tell a co-parent about any difficulties (be that vulnerable household members or symptoms) as quickly as possible. Be conscious the children are at home 24/ 7 and likely to overhear any calls between you.

Perhaps save those discussions until the children are asleep or when you are on your daily walk. If you agree changes to the arrangements, confirm them by email so you both have a written record.

### 3. Covid co-parenting: put yourself in your exes' shoes

You are worried about the children spending time with your ex, who happens to be a **frontline key worker**: he is equally worried that he will not see his kids for months. Neither of you is wrong – a little empathy for the other's predicament goes a long way to calming tensions. These are difficult decisions and, however much you do not get on, they have to be made together. Which brings me onto...

### 4. Covid co-parenting: mediation is here to help

Mediators are still working, just via video conferencing. They are assisting thousands of couples to work out what co-parenting looks like during a pandemic. If you cannot agree on what to do, find a mediator to help you via the **Family Mediation Council**. While courts remain open for urgent matters, by telephone or occasionally video, mediation should be attempted first where possible.