

When You Change the Things You Look At, The Things You Look at Change

With public health officials urging people to stay indoors, parents who share parenting responsibilities for their children are faced with a challenge of how to continue the parenting arrangements despite the COVID-19 isolation protocols.

Maybe one parent is concerned the other parent isn't taking proper precautions to protect their children from COVID-19.

Maybe one parent is still going into a populated workplace or one that has exposure to the public: stepchildren travelling between families, or elderly family members in one of the households.

Firstly, there should be the presumption that existing parenting arrangements and schedules will continue, and the question is not 'if' but 'how'?

A first step might be to agree that both parents will take the necessary precautions to ensure they're complying with public health guidelines, such as physical distancing, hand washing, minimize being in crowded places and keeping hands away from your child's face and your own.

The next question might be, how do you parent when no one can get within 6 feet of each other? The answer is to use 'common sense'.

Short of complete isolation in glass cubicles that separate us from each other or sending all the children away (after appropriate testing of the children and caregivers) to country homes (remember World War II when children were sent away to be safe from the bombings of the big cities?) we all need to

temper our legitimate concerns with prudent decisions on how to minimize the risks of exposure.

What if one parent suspects the other one is not taking enough protective measures?

How about going back to Parenting 101 and talking about these concerns. Collaborating to create 'family protocols' that will keep everyone safe – or as safe as we can be without requiring we impose solitary confinement on everyone.

"It's really important for parents to come up with solutions; we need to all be solution-focused." The 'experts' say.

Translation: "To come up with solutions, parents should be solution focused!!" Well, duh! How helpful is that??

You may not arrive at a solution that each parent (and child) finds 100% satisfactory. Even then, it is better to come up with a workable solution- aside from 'let's keep fighting about it'.

I sometimes wonder how parenting plans would be different if parenting was assumed to be 50/50 and child support was paid by the parent getting more than 40% of the parenting time. To put this in another way, what if the child support regime was based on money being paid to the parent with whom the child spends less than 40 % of the available parenting time rather than the other way around?

What if the Federal and Provincial governments 'suspended' child support payments for the remainder of the present Pandemic? Or, maybe, it

becomes 'the law' that if a child contracts COVID-19, the parents are to be assigned blamed in the same proportion as their respective parenting time?

Here is another possible solution – the parent who misses parenting time will get that time added on as a block of parenting time upon the present isolation protocols being lifted? Would that change the things parents look at? Would that make the things they look at change?

Courts are closed and only urgent matters are being heard, so families now have the opportunity to start building their 'solution focused' muscles.

Parents who are struggling can make use of family law mediators, like myself, via telephone, using cell phone apps or video conferencing to help them come up with a solution.

The aim should always be for parents to ensure their children are able to see both parents. Facetime, video conferencing and frequent telephone calls are solutions – added to in-person time unless it would knowingly endanger the child.

What does everyone think is happening in families where both parents are in the same home? Is one parent banning the other from the house? Isolating mum or dad immediately upon return from 'the outside' and sending meals on a skateboard so that no one comes within 6 feet of each other? Isolating children in their rooms with only the company of their cell phone and computer, both of which have been thoroughly wiped down with the Lysol wipes found forgotten under the kitchen sink from the last time someone was

sick, and a bottle of sanitizer? (I think I hear the children of Canada screaming pick that one please!!)

Here is the bottom line. For the sake of your child, parents must find ways to maintain the child's relationship with the other parent.

So, stop asking "if" and start asking "how".