



COVID-19

What Matters Becomes Clear...Hopefully

‘...there is no mystery of human behavior that cannot be solved inside your head or your heart.’ (Gavin de Becker, *The Gift of Fear*)

A recent article in the *Globe and Mail* (‘Pandemic complicates parental-access battles’ April 11, 2020) suggest lawyers are busier than ever as separated parents clash over *changing custody orders* for their children.

The renewed conflict rests on failed logic by mothers and fathers; namely, that dads are incapable of providing a safe environment for their children; and mothers, who work in health care, service industries, etc., are a high risk to their children.

Mothers and fathers place paramount importance on the safety of their children!

Parents seeking to change parenting orders *already have existing mom’s home/dad’s home, care arrangements, and safety was a settled matter.* The parent seeking a change is ‘using’ the judicial system to deliver a blow to the heart of the child’s other parent.

Parenting trust, that is hard earned and always a work in progress following a separation, falls victim, and there is a return to chaos and uncertainty for children, parents and grandparents.

The family disruption from the 2007-08 financial crisis was a forerunner to the COVID-19 crisis for separated families. The loss of employment, and income reduced to E.I. resulted in conflict over child support and extraordinary expenses for a child’s activities.

The out of work parent often attempted to cobble together part-time employment that was temporary with unpredictable hours. Parenting schedules for many families were disrupted, at a time when flexibility and reassurance was necessary more than ever.

For children and parents *to remain connected* in a crisis, there must be a recognition of the *challenges that threaten changed families. This is not easy, for many separated parents lost positive communication prior to and since ending their intimate relationship.*

However, the parenting agreement provides guardrails through the terms of co-parenting for the unexpected ‘life getting in the way’ crisis.

COVID-19 has been from the outset a financial and care of child(ren) crisis. Most separated families have a parent(s) facing loss of income from a prolonged layoff, business closings, and the lack of alternative employment.

Parents are *now available or less available* in mom's house and dad's house, at a time when everyone feels at risk. Grandparents, who may play a significant role in childcare or simply by being available as needed, are the most at-risk population.

Adversarial legal actions, described by a local lawyer as blood-sport', consistently fail to *build integral parenting relationships. Decision-making now is being forfeited by parents*, who have common goals, namely: to love, protect and be an integral, lifelong parent.

The Law Commission of Ontario (2010) study found that **users (you and I)** of Family Law asserted that *too often solvable problems became unsolvable outcomes. In other words, the outcomes were not just benign, but often made matters more difficult, often for a lifetime.*

It is difficult to imagine a worse case scenario for disruption and human loss than the COVID-19 crisis. *But the cliché about life being too short has never been more appropriate for separated families.*

Solvable or unsolvable outcomes (2020) for separated parents rest in their 'heads and hearts', and the commitment made when they became a mom or dad. *In truth (consider for a moment here), the same commitment was made by each parent on the day they separated and created two homes.*

Going to Court resurrects the common fear in both parents that they are going lose their child to the other parent.

COVID-19 offers parents an opportunity to model the kind of relationship that our children need and deserve.

Respectful conversations built on flexibility and maximizing parenting opportunities are rewarded with children not being caught in a destructive, tug of war. *Goodwill and trust are built, not lost, by expanding the parenting guardrails.*

The parenting dialogue is initiated by; a) providing the other parent with each other's safety plan and ideas to make each parent and child comfortable; b) engaging in give and take exchanges about the structure of the child's day that begins with school instruction, technology usage and enrichment activities; c) each parent creating or expanding on an activity that is their special 'thing with their child; d) providing an opportunity for the parent and child to enjoy face-time, *check-in every day, when they do not have their child;*

Separated families are going to be *severely tested over child support, extraordinary expenses, and parenting arrangements*. Finding ways to engage the other parent in child focused ways is *an opportunity to be the parents you wish to be and lead to a more peaceful approach to settle issues from the pandemic's fall-out*.

It is a choice!

'Your relationship is only measured by how much your child feels your love, your commitment, and what you're able to bring to that relationship.' (Judith Wallerstein: *What About the Kids*)

*Please provide FEEDBACK re: ideas, activities, problems, frustrations, good news stories, etc., **that we could share more broadly to support other families in a Mom's Home, Dad's Home.***

Barry (father to three, grandpa to six)

Kids n Dad Shared Support (KND)

barry@kidsndad.com;

Home to the Family Renewal Resources Project (FRRP)

Reg. Charity # 82166 9744 RR 0001