

TODAY'S CO-PARENT

2020 Edition, Issue 1

APRIL, 2020



COVID-19 Co-Parenting Tips

Here are a few tips from Dr. Maggie Kerr, State Specialist with UW-Madison

1. Communicate

Talk with your co-parent and children about the expectations you have for your households about social distancing. Stating your expectations clearly is likely to reduce future conflict. If the children will go between households, each co-parent needs to know who the children will be in contact with at the other house, including other family members and children. Each co-parent needs to know the exposure associated with the people living in the house, including who is still going into work and who may be elderly or immunocompromised. Together, you can decide what works best to keep your families as safe

as possible.

2. Make a plan

Your custody arrangement should be followed, but the Wisconsin Safer at Home order may require additional coordinating. Work with your co-parent to plan for school and day-care closures, travel restrictions, and social distancing. If you are both working full-time at home, consider taking turns with your child so that each parent has some dedicated time to focus. During the Safer at Home order, transporting the child between households is considered an essential activity. Most importantly, communicate your plans to the child so they understand what is

happening. Routines and communication help children feel safe during uncertain times.

3. Be flexible

Your co-parenting plan may need to change on a weekly or daily basis. Be flexible and do not blame the other parent when things need to change. For example, if one of you gets sick, you will need to come up with a new plan. Agree upon other family members who might be able to help with your child if needed

4. Stay in touch

Consider increasing the communication you have with your child via phone, email, video chats, and text during

(Continued on page 6)

Inside this issue:

Covid-19 Co-parenting Tips	1/6
President's Message	2/3
Mark Fremgen on co-parenting bills from Leg Study Committee	3/5
The HARD road, when co-parenting doesn't happen	4/5
WFCF NEEDS YOU	4
Default custody	6/7

We are Wisconsin's Oldest **"Separated Parents Organization"** having been formed in 1988. We have been hosting our Monthly Support and Network Separated Parents Night Out Meetings since 2000 and are a 100% volunteer organization that has always and will always believe that

Kids NEED BOTH Parents

WFCF solely survives on **donations** to continue to provide our **newsletter, helpline service, and monthly meetings in 10 areas** in WI, each month. Donations also make it possible for WFCF to continue **talking with our legislators on the benefits of shared parenting for our children**, and for

their parents, as well as for society as a whole.

There are several ways to help us (WFCF) continue to provide these services.

JOIN: <http://www.wisconsinfathers.org/join.htm>

VOLUNTEER:

<http://www.wisconsinfathers.org/volunteering.htm>

DONATE:

<http://www.wisconsinfathers.org/join.htm>
bottom of the page for donations.

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT *Tommy Bickel*

I hope everyone is staying safe and acting safely in regards to others during the Covid-19 pandemic-what is certainly an unprecedented time in our lifetimes. For separated parents with children, there is a potentially added fear that the situation might be leveraged to create increased separation between children and one of their shared parents. If anything the Covid-19 issue stresses how important family is for children in a time of crisis. Our hope is all parents understand this, and act appropriately regarding the other parent's relationship with their shared children.

Due to health concerns and restaurants shuttering during this period, we have cancelled all of our monthly meetings where people get in person help. These have been happening for 15 years now, and this is the first stoppage that has occurred. We hope to be able to safely start the meetings back up in June as safer-

at-home orders are lifted.

The below bills have either died in this session *due to time constraints* or have one last chance in an **extraordinary Senate session** if that session does occur:

AB 209: <http://www.wisconsinfathers.org/ab209.pdf> Co-

“At the end of the day, the most overwhelming key to a child’s success is the positive involvement of (both) parents.” - Jane Hull

parenting training that is under \$50 or **free** online, does NOT have to be done in person/*together*. Over half the counties in WI now mandate it. This training has proven to help parents work well together as separated **co-parents**.

AB 95: <https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2019/related/proposals/ab95.pdf> Future contingencies allowed in placement orders *if* parents both agree. Without this it is VERY difficult if not impossible for an unmarried parent with a newborn to establish a significant relationship with both parents post infancy. There is a *presumption with the courts that not changing an initial*

placement order is in a child’s best interest. Potential added disruption.

AB97: <https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2019/related/proposals/ab97.pdf> Involvement and cooperation of both parents is **in a child’s best interest**. Except in certain cases where DV or abuse has oc-

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curred, in the vast majority of situations having **both parents** working together is clearly in their child’s best interest, and is certainly the **best** situation for kids.

AB98: <https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2019/related/proposals/ab98.pdf> Updates a few of the 16 factors and requires Judges/Court Commissioners

(Continued on page 3)



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FROM THE PRESIDENT CONT'D / MARK FREMGEN—STUDY COMM. BILLS

(Continued from page 2)

to provide a written explanation if less than shared placement is ordered. **Parents deserve to know** the reasoning behind why a decision was made that may limit their parental time with their shared children.

The below bill has been signed into law by Governor Evers: **SB158**: <http://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2019/related/proposals/ab166.pdf> streamlining the paternity declaration so it is easier to establish paternity, custody and placement for both parents.

We will work to have the bills that did not make it to completion **reintroduced** in the new session starting January **2021**. We are also preparing two additional new bills for the next legislative session:

A modification to statute 767.41 that iterates ***shared parental involvement by both parents is in a child's best interest***

An addendum to 767 physical placements -. ***The court shall presume, for either temporary or permanent orders, joint physical placement in accordance with maximum time provisions of (2) is in the best interest of the child.***

Our goal as **WFCF** along with **NPO-WI** is to become better at clearly explaining current problems for so many children with separated parents in ways our legislators can understand. We believe this will lead to providing our legislators with **viable legislative solutions**, and to assigning the **appropriate urgency** to these separated family issues. **Every year we wait, thousands of WI children** with separated parents, are left to go through childhood with **only one involved parent** to assist and guide them. That one issue makes all those children much more susceptible to **trouble** in school, **trouble** with police, and **trouble** with drugs, pregnancy, and suicide. **WI currently leads the nation in the number of two involved parents for children**, but thousands and thousands of children in WI are still left to fend with only one involved parent.

Wisconsin can do better, and we will!

Mark Fremgen's response on separated parenting bills that came out of the Legislative Study Committee

A few speakers at the Senate Committee on Insurance, Financial Services, Governmental Oversight and Courts referenced concerns raised by these bills in relation to domestic violence and survivors

of domestic violence, suggesting that this bills will have a negative impact on survivors. End Domestic Abuse of Wisconsin created a study in 2015 which, though it was not properly vetted, made unfair comparisons between case types (stipulated vs. contested) and diverse demographic regions (in particular rural vs urban setting courts), and failed to review the actual transcripts from each case (relying upon clerk notes in the files), it did properly raise the awareness in the courts of a need to do better. In Tess Meuer's article in *The Wisconsin Lawyer (State Bar of Wisconsin)* on this study, she noted, in part, that there is need for better training among judges and commissioners, more particularized training for Guardians ad Litem, and more tools to be utilized in family court.

The Wisconsin Courts have increased judicial training on domestic violence; they employ a legal advisor solely responsible for domestic violence issues and training, and subsidize judges and commissioners attendance at national conferences on domestic violence. The State Supreme Court, in large part due to the Legislative Council Committee's recommended petition for a particular DV training for Guardians ad Litem, approved a modified version in 2019. Finally, these proposed bills will either have little or no negative impact on survivors of domestic violence, or will provide the needed tools that Tess Meuer has advocated above.

AB 95 (contingent placement) was proposed to address the limitations on stipulated agreement between

(continued on page 5)

WFCF NEEDS YOU / THE HARD ROAD WHEN CO-PARENTING DOESN'T HAPPEN

We **need** a new newsletter editor ASAP!

WFCF benefitted greatly from board member Kevin Mo-nahan's skills over the last three years with our newsletter. Kevin singlehandedly brought our newsletter from a mid-90's old look to a new, modern, attractive current look. Kevin now has a large amount of things on his plate, and needs to step down as our newsletter editor. We need a **new person** to step up, that has *Microsoft Publisher* experi-

Over 60 academic studies show shared co-parenting is what's best for the vast majority of WI children

ence, and can donate an hour or two each month toward helping WFCF continue to publish a quarterly or triannual newsletter. Our newsletter goes to all members of WFCF via email, and is published on our Facebook page and website platform, and is mailed to all legislators and over 100 other groups and organizations in WI.

Our newsletter helps educate people on what is going on legislatively in Wisconsin that affects separated parents

and their children. It also promotes shared and cooperative parenting as it applies, to the best interest of our children when their parents are separated. You can see our previous issues at this link: <http://www.wisconsinfathers.org/media.htm>

Please send an email to wfcftreasurer@outlook.com to apply for this position.

WFCF needs more volunteers no matter how much or how little you can give your experience and contribution can make the difference for someone else..

A small contribution from more people truly makes it easier for everyone to continue the mission of WFCF.

<http://www.wisconsinfathers.org/volunteering.htm>

The HARD road—when Co-parenting doesn't happen

Be the Lifesaver With the Life Raft For Your Children By Joan T. Kloth--Zanard

It can be really tough for a parent especially when they are not seeing their children because the other guardian is blocking access or turning the children against them. But trust me, one day these children are going to come around. And when they do, you need to be there. They are going feel all kinds of negative emotions about what happened and why. They may feel guilty, angry, scared or just unable to even speak about it. For this reason it is imperative you to take care of yourself. You are going to be their lifesaver. You are going to provide the lifeboat when their world comes crashing down. When they finally realize, one day, what has happened to their relationship with you. When they finally learn how to take back the control and take that chance to establish a relationship with you. You need to be the best you can be and that means being healthy all the way around. But how do you do this? I call it striving for HHSS. What is HHSS? It stands for Happy, Healthy, Successful and spiritually positive.

To accomplish this, one must first stop any negative angry talk about the ex. Instead switch to how you can move forward and get around the ex's issues. I am not saying don't fight in court if that is where it keeps taking you. But fight smart in court. If you cannot prove it, don't present it. Only pre-

sent what you know you can prove. If you are asked to walk down the street stark naked, then do it. Show the courts that you put the children first before your own ego.

This is something, Sharon Sherry, my Pilates teacher spoke of the other day, when she said Heart over Ego. This means you put your ego and your wants to the back seat and work from the hearts perspective. This includes apologizing even when we know we are not wrong, because we value the relationship even more. Part of this means that you take a chance. But know that you are making a positive change. The ex will either follow along and make a similar positive change or go off the deep end, spinning even further out of control get the control back.

This is not the same as the saying, "If you cannot beat them join them". But rather working around them. It means being exactly what they do not want you to be.

Having exactly what they do not want you to have.. Moving forward in a positive way in your life. Being the better parent. And here is your HHSS. Being Happy. Being Healthy. Being Successful. Being Spiritually Positive. But what do these four words really mean?

Happiness means that you enjoy your life and who you are. Do not put your life on hold just because the children refuse to see you or tell you they hate you. Move forward with your life.

When we talk Healthy it includes not just your body but your mind. So make sure to exercise, see a therapist when things are stressful, eat right and take care of who you. Success is not about money but about where and what you do in life that makes you lastly, feel good about being you. So if you like helping at the soup kitchen, but the ex condemns it, just do it. If you like working with monkeys but it pays less than your present job, if it makes you feel better about yourself, then do it.

And lastly, Spiritually Positive is not just about religion. It is about believing in yourself and/or something else. These four life sources are not something you have 24/7, but something you strive to have. No one is perfectly HHSS all the time, that's just is not natural. But the more HHSS you are, the more it drives the other parent crazy because this is exactly what they do not want for you.

They want you to suffer and be in pain. They want you to hurt all over. They want you to hate yourself and your life. They want to be in control of how you live and what you live for. So take back that control!

(Continued on page 6)

≧ The studies are absolutely clear on one point:
**Conflict between parents is the best predictor of
 a child's later maladjustment** ≦

- *Dr. Anthony Bernardi*

Continued from page 3– Fremgen

competent adult parents solely because the agreement was triggered or contingent upon a future event. The members of the committee approved the initial language of the proposed bill. Yet, with the assistance of Rep. Brooks facilitating further meetings with members from EDAW and other legislative council committee members, we developed further safeguards by limiting the type of contingencies and limiting certain agreements involving currently incarcerated parents. It went through additional changes in response to the requests from Legal Action. The current bill will not allow any contingent placement agreements, without a court hearing, that may involve a condition of completing domestic abuse counseling or anger management, and will not permit inmates incarcerated for various serious violent offenses from entering such agreements.

AB 97 (recognizing cooperation is in the best interest of the child). The law currently recognizes that joint legal custody (decision-making by parents) is in the best interests of the child with certain exceptions (including a rebuttable presumption against JTLC where domestic abuse is involved). Further the law currently presumes that both parents should enjoy regularly occurring and meaningful placement that *maximizes* the placement with each parent. Of course, in both cases, the court may find that facts, such as domestic abuse, drug and alcohol dependency, serious mental impairment, etc..may prevent regularly occurring placement or prevent joint decision-making. AB 96 presumes that cooperation from parents, who are both mentally, physically and emotionally able to do so is in the best interests of the child. Evidence of domestic abuse, not unlike the impact on custody and placement, will certainly be considered as a reasonable explanation as to why cooperation cannot exist in that particular family.

AB 98 (placement factors) If the committee were to compare the language of the current statute with the proposed bill it will note that there were no changes in regards to how the court was to consider domestic abuse allegations. Although the position of the factors in the statute has no bearing on a court's determination (in fact, it is offensive for some of the opponents to suggest that judges and commissioner are swayed simply by the primacy of the factor and will not follow the case law that requires the court to consider **ALL** of the factors), the committee should note that the domestic violence factor is the last (16th factor) in the current statute, and is listed 12th out of 14 factors in the proposed bill.

AB 99 (parenting plans) Mediators have expressed a desire to have parenting plans prior to the mediation process in order to be prepared properly for mediation. Often times, a good portion of the mediation time is spent trying to illicit sufficient information from the parents to determine what are the contested custody and placement issues. Having a completed parenting plan prior to the mediation process will help streamline the process allow the mediators to conduct more meaningful and effective mediation. Further, this requirement is waived when there is evidence of domestic violence (pursuant to the current statute).

“ Think of it as an important business project: you don't always love the person that you are working with, but you work together to get the project done. Co-parents need to adapt this same business model when co-parenting their children”
 - *Kela Price*



COVID-19 ADVICE / THE HARD ROAD / DEFAULT CUSTODY

(Covid 19 Continued from page 1)

this time. If one parent needs to self-quarantine, this increased communication will be important. Use technology to allow your child to visit even when seeing the other parent in person is not possible. There are a variety of apps and websites for staying in touch from a distance. Learn how to use the technology before you absolutely need it. Phone calls are always a great option, too.

5. Remember the basics

This is a stressful time and the uncertainty and changes may cause more frustration than usual. Do your best not to argue in front of the child or to speak negatively about the child's other parent. Keep communication open but limited to relevant information, such as custody arrangements, childcare, school work, and exposure risks.

Other great info:

<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/3210-tips-for-families-coronavirus>

<https://news.wisc.edu/talking-to-kids-about-covid-19-uw-madison-expert-offers-tips/>

<https://fyi.extension.wisc.edu/covid19/category/topics/families/>

Note: Under the authority of Wis. Stat. § 323.12(4) and the **public health emergency declared in Executive Order #72, the Governor suspended the provisions of DCF 152.06(2) and (3) regulating when a lien threshold has been met or exceeded.

This means no new cases will be added to the Child Support Lien Docket until further notice. No changes were made to administrative liens previously recorded.

(The HARD Road when co-parenting doesn't happen continued from page 4)

One of the best ways to do this is to let go of the hatred, the anger, the rage, and the hurt. Do not expect or want an apology, because it quite often it will be meaningless. It is time to have a new Mantra. It is time to say to yourself, 'I am not going to be the person you are trying to make me be, i.e. sad, depressed, and destroyed. I am going to be in control of my life, and do what I have to do to stay in control. I will strive to be HHSS.' And the reality is that people tend to gravitate to those that are HHSS. Being around someone who is always complaining, depressed or angry is pretty stressful. In fact, it is pretty darn draining.

The hope is that whatever you choose to do to get you HHSS, we must still always be there for our children. We must be in the right place emotionally and physically so we can accept them with open arms. We need to be these children's lifesavers for when they finally figure it out. They maybe emotionally overwhelmed with guilt especially if they had a hand in the lies, deceit or emotional bashing. They maybe afraid to speak or to or even hug us. So we need to be able to forgive and forget while allowing them back into our lives.

This does not mean that we let down our guard and let these children run over us or use us as a doormat. But it means that we love them and accept them unconditionally, listening to them but not letting them take advantage of us. And remember, unless the ex has changed for the better, they will always be looking for a way to pop our life raft and sink the children or us emotionally.

So the stronger we are, the better a lifesaver and lifeguards we can be for our children.

When a baby is born in WI to unmarried parents as is in most other states, unmarried mothers and fathers are treated very differently.

Custody and full placement automatically defaults completely to the mother.

Financial obligations for the newborn conversely are immediately shared **jointly by the mother and the father**. If the parents are not living together, the father then has a child support obligation then assigned.

In WI it is in a **child's best interest** to have the benefit of **both parents jointly being custodians**. 767.41(2)(am). We need to work on **changing the default to joint custody for both parents**. Too many fathers are unaware of the need to file paperwork associated with establishing legal custody of their child. They assume, that by declaring paternity this means they are custodial. It doesn't.

And I would also suggest we strongly consider adding **shared placement** as a default along with joint custody. However, we continue to acknowledge there are situations where joint custody and/or shared placement are not appropriate.

In these situations where it isn't appropriate, simply filing a form with the reasoning and proof

that it is not appropriate should suffice. This situation represents a very small number of instances, especially compared to the number of instances where **joint custody and shared placement is clearly in the child's best interest.**

The default should represent the most common outcome. Historically that may have been sole custody/placement, but since 1990 that has been changing and is no longer the case in the majority of situations here in WI. The Dept. of Children and Families (DCF) has stated that currently **over half** of the separated parents in WI now use the **shared parenting** calculator for support obligations.

This is something that **WFCF** and NPO will be working on legislatively going forward.

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WFCF Lifetime Membership Application

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Date of Birth		Gender <small>(This data may be used in reporting membership population)</small>	Male	Female	Prefer Not to Disclose
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Mailing Address <small>(If Different than Physical Address)</small>					
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Qty	Description	Unit Price	Extended Cost
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	3 x 11 ½ in. Removable Vinyl WFCF "Kids NEED BOTH Parents" Bumper Sticker	\$3.00	
	1 ¼ in. WFCF Logo Lapel Pin	\$5.00	
1	One Time Donation to WFCF 501(c)(3) Not for Profit Organization		
<i>\$ Membership Fees and Donations are IRS Tax Deductible \$</i>		Total	

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MONTHLY SEPARATED PARENT MEETINGS / TEMPORARILY SUSPENDED

WFCF IS NOW OFFERING **120 MEETINGS** IN PERSON MEETINGS
ACROSS THE STATE PER YEAR

Milwaukee:

4th Saturday of the month
8 AM - 9:30 AM at:

Milwaukee market

400 Water St, Milw/ upstairs mezzanine

Madison:

Third Monday of the month
6:15 PM at:

World Buffet at South Town Mall

2451 W Broadway, Monona, WI

Fox Valley:

Third Tuesday of the month
6:30 PM at:

El Jarapeo Mexican Restaurant

1727 Freedom Rd, Little Chute, WI

Central WI:

Second Monday of the month
7:30 PM at:

Korner Kitchen

4890 Hwy H, Edgar, WI

NW WI (Eau Claire):

Third Thursday of each month
6:30 PM at:

Taquera La Poblantia

2436 London Rd, Eau Claire, WI



Green Bay/NE WI:

First Wednesday of the month
6:30 PM at:

Townline Pub

2544 Lineville Rd, Green Bay, WI

La Crosse:

Second Thursday of the month
6:30 PM at:

Sheninigans

2100 Dawson Ave, La Crosse, WI

Janesville:

Second Thursday of the month
6 PM at:

Denny's

2020 Milton Ave, Janesville, WI

Racine:

Third Friday of the month
7:30 PM at:

Asian Buffet

3701 Durand Ave, Racine, WI

Fond du Lac:

Second Monday of the month
6:30 PM at:

Schmitty's Oar House Bar and Grill

N7044 Winnebago Dr, Fond du Lac, WI