

Seven positives separated families have found during the pandemic



COVID-19 TIP SHEET

COVID-19 has brought anxiety, panic and fear into the lives of many families. In the midst of these feelings, however, many separated families have found positives to take out of this time of social distancing and increased time at home.

This resource shares some examples of such positives, which could become part of your family's story going forward, if you have been affected by separation.

1. Families have found perspective

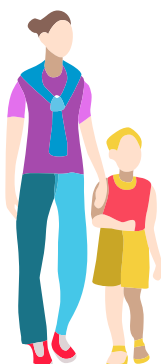
COVID-19 has given many families a perspective that they may not have had before the pandemic. For instance, parents might have responded with frustration and anger to a challenging co-parenting arrangement prior to the pandemic.

More recently though, such potentially challenging situations seem to have been handled differently and with greater calmness. It seems that for many, the focus has been a different challenge or problem to solve, with more effort and energy placed on harmony.

For example, typically when parents were in conflict, one parent might have spoken negatively about the other parent in front of the children, resulting in the children feeling distressed and conflicted about their loyalty to both parents.

During COVID-19, however, many parents we have worked with in family dispute resolution (mediation), have been able to agree to protect children from their conflict and therefore from distress.

This demonstrates parents' empathy toward each other and their active choice to tune in to their children's needs rather than continue a cycle of blame and conflict.



Many parents are reporting to us during mediation that, in the past, communication with the other parent was difficult and often associated with negative assumptions and fault-finding in the other parent.

In contrast, parents are now reporting that there has been increased communication which has helped them to work together as co-parents and find solutions, such as distance learning strategies, and that they have been better able to empathise with the other parent's personal circumstances.

Examples have included:

- families who are normally in high conflict finding new routines
- shopping for one another so the children don't have to go to a supermarket
- parents who have many arguments about changeovers finding they have greater problem-solving capacity
- parents collaborating and cooperating over home-schooling arrangements.

2. Families have found new routines

COVID-19 has forced all of us to do things in new ways. For parents, this has often meant changed parenting or child-care arrangements, distance learning and more time at home, among a wide range of other changes.

While challenging at times, many families have found a new routine and have been able to adapt to the trying circumstances, and there have even been benefits to the new routines.

For example, parents have shared the responsibilities of distance learning and caring for children by allowing their co-parent into their own home, where safe and appropriate, which has also helped to establish trust and cooperation, by focusing on what is most important during this time.

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3. Families have been able to work around practical differences for the first time

The changed circumstances have brought new-found opportunities around co-parenting and shared parenting arrangements.

Issues such as changing a drop-off arrangement to a different suburb a few kilometres away may have been a major obstacle pre-COVID-19, but now many parents are telling us that they're finding ways around some of these practical problems for the first time and they hope to continue to work together as co-parents moving forward post-COVID-19.



Similarly, families have been able to be cooperative in adjusting arrangements to assist each other to manage their work commitments, particularly working from home commitments, while caring for children at home.

This has occurred even in the context of ongoing negotiations about longer-term parenting arrangements.

4. Families have 'checked in' before they criticise

The pandemic has enabled some families to be more constructive with how they 'check in' with the other parent.

Sometimes, when a child tells one parent something concerning which relates to the other parent or time spent with them, parents may contact each other, at times in a reactive and upset emotional state. Such an approach inevitably leads to a defensive reaction and can escalate the conflict.

While parents, naturally, have many valid reasons to be concerned during COVID-19, some have been far more constructive in the ways they have 'checked in' and, not surprisingly, have received better responses.



5. Families have found things to be thankful for

COVID-19 has enabled those who are healthy and well to be thankful for their health and other positives in their lives. Thankfulness and the expression of gratitude is encouraged in positive psychology, and has now been utilised by many sporting teams, including in the AFL, as well as business and other areas of life.

Some families have introduced new rituals that highlight and reinforce the positives, which in turn promotes healthy relationships between parents, family members and with children.

For example, families have had discussions with their children each day about what they are thankful for, to reinforce the positives during this difficult time.

6. Families have learnt to communicate in different and in more helpful ways

COVID-19 has meant that some parents have picked up the phone and had a conversation with the other parent (where it was safe to do so), or communicated in other constructive ways for the first time in a long time.

Separated parents have reported that they are more confident and comfortable trying to communicate in different ways, often resulting in less conflict and ultimately children feeling increased safety and security during the pandemic.

7. Families are more involved in their children's day-to-day experiences

Some parents have enjoyed becoming more involved in the day-to-day experiences of their children's lives, particularly those parents who may have had less time than they desired with their children in their usual parenting arrangements pre-COVID-19.

For other parents, periods of lockdown and remote learning have provided an opportunity to understand their children's educational and learning requirements, as well as a greater comprehension of the individual needs for children.

This new insight will indirectly assist with parents having a shared developmental perspective post-separation for each child and we hope will promote a new way for families to work together moving forward post-COVID-19.

Moving forwards: Consider your post-separation parenting approaches

COVID-19 has brought with it many challenges and even disappointments for parents, children and family members, and these can impact emotional and psychological wellbeing. However, in the midst of this unprecedented time, there is an opportunity for separated parents to gain perspective and navigate a new pathway forward.

Many families have been proactive in finding such solutions and we hope that this information sheet provides some inspiration for you to take positive action for your family.

The Family Court has issued directives which encourage parents to find collaborative ways to work through parenting issues, or to seek support through family dispute resolution (FDR) before progressing to Court proceedings.

We acknowledge that separation is a traumatic time for parents and families, and that for some families going through separation, this painful time has been made even more difficult by the complexities of living and work situations associated with COVID-19.

In some cases, in order to resolve parenting disputes, change arrangements or agree on parenting plans, separated parents will need time, to work together and/or professional support such as mediation.

Useful resources

- **Get started with family dispute resolution:** www.rav.org.au/family-dispute-resolution/parenting
- **Access free resources about separation:** www.rav.org.au/resources
- **Join our Parenting After Separation Seminar program:** www.rav.org.au/separation-courses/pass
- **Visit the Family Relationships Online website:** www.familyrelationships.gov.au/separation

Need support?

We're committed to safely supporting Victorians throughout the evolving COVID-19 situation. Visit www.rav.org.au/COVID-19 to access more free resources and find out how we can assist you.

About us

Relationships Australia Victoria has over 70 years' experience providing family and relationship support services across Melbourne and Victoria.



We are committed to providing safe, inclusive and accessible services for all people.

We acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners of the lands and waterways of Australia and we support Aboriginal people's right to self-determination and culturally safe services.

We recognise the lifelong impacts of childhood trauma.

We recognise those who had children taken away from them.