

## Co-Parenting After Separation: Navigating Difficult Relationships

March 11, 2020

Q&A Section (3 Questions)

### Communication/ Emergency Situations

**Question 1:** *"I had to take my little one to the ER. Yes I agree phone calls and texts are not good, but it ended up on the phone then in person. Email seems it wouldn't be time sensitive enough."*

SA Representative Panelist:

"I think that maybe one of the exceptions. When you're taking your kid to an ER, you want your partner or your ex spouse to be aware of what's happening. I think sending a quick text is perfectly fine, but maybe following up with an email. Because from my own experience, I did take my daughter to the ER once and I got berated. Why didn't I ask permission? Why didn't I consult before I did it? I did, I did text but then there was a follow on email to document my decision making and it was recommended that I take her to the ER. I'm giving you some of practical tips."

**Question 1 Continued:**

*"Is it even worth trying to coordinate with a parent like that? In this case, because of the public health concerns I didn't want to take his sibling to the ER, expose him to viruses...Can you take the sibling, I'm going to rush to the ER. Basically the phone hung up, I got a text and bunch of emails and the parent coordinator was copied, so things like that. I was ready to go with my two kids. The last minute the oldest was picked up... in the end, it was such a mess. I really wish I had just taken my kids and not even bothered. Any recommendations from the panel?"*

SA Representative Panelist:

"That's a tough one, I think you reacted in the way you knew best at the time. If you have the right of first refusal in your parenting plan, your ex is kind of the fall back. You kind of have to accommodate that. Maybe sometimes just having a friend...who can pick the kids up from school."

DV LEAP Consultant Panelist:

"I'm not sure if you have a court order in place right now, but as I mentioned before the more detailed you can put into a court order to try to anticipate every possible situation the less likely this type of harassment may occur. So for example, some court orders when there has been a history of domestic violence sometimes there's a third party available. I don't mean a parenting coordinator, but maybe a relative who both people get along with well enough that it's written into the court order that the previously abusive person does not get to contact the survivor, but if there is an emergency, to go through his mother."

Audience Member:

"If you are still surprised by what your ex did, then maybe this is still unfolding for you. It may be an indication that you need to update your impression. If you find yourself telling your friends "I can't believe he did this", "I'm so surprised that this happened", "can you believe that he did this?". It maybe

that you are holding onto expectation of behavior from your parent that have become obsolete. You may want to try updating your expectation so that “oh my goodness, I am not going to engage my ex in this because I know there is such an opportunity for something else”. Don’t expect him to be more responsible or receptive than he actually is.”

### Counter-parenting

**Question 2:** *“I have a question regarding situations where there is a history of domestic abuse and violence, and controlling behavior. Specifically, since we’ve been talking about children, how do you handle situations where clearly, you know we’ve talked about...I know the subject is co-parenting but in this situation the reality as you’ve said expectations are part of parenting. **If you’re dealing with someone who is counter-parenting, how do you handle the situation without looking like you’re putting the kids in the middle** (e.g. when they tell your kids negative things). **How do you respond without making things worse?**”*

DV LEAP Consultant Panelist:

“Having as much written into your court order about this as possible, in advice, is going to be helpful. I don’t mean just the language that neither parents can disparage the other parent, because we know those are in court orders and that doesn’t happen. As much as possible, to separate what you are doing from what the other person is doing. So when the child is with you, then you are in charge of that child, you make the decisions. When the child is with the other parent, then you do not have contact with the other parent. Again, emergencies can come up. I would say write everything you can into the court order.”

Guest Counselor Panelist:

“This is an impossible situation and there is no right answer for it, but at the same time I see a lot of parents in this situation. What I say to them all is “you have to radically accept that this person’s not going to change. They are not going to do anything different, they are going to keep doing it. Because that’s who they are”. Given that, how can you function? How can you work on your relationship with your child?

Having a parent like that for a child is very difficult. It’s confusing so they need help understanding what’s going on. Sometimes, depending on the age of the child, sometimes you may have to say “we don’t get along, it’s hard and I wish we did get along better, I hate that you have to be in the middle of this. Here is what we’re going to do in this family”. “If it gets really hard when you’re in their house, we can have some conversation about that”. Even trying to find a counselor or third party who can help you, sometimes parent need help as much as the kids do to figure out all the stuff that’s going on. Sometimes having that third party come in and looking at it form a different way and saying “hey, let’s flip it and do something a little bit different, it might be a help to you”

Audience Member:

“Don’t bring up anything that is not illegal. Don’t ask them to change anything unless it’s illegal.”

## Legal Representation

**Question 3:** “What were the criteria to be eligible for free legal representation?”

DV LEAP Consultant Panelist:

“If you are a WB employee or spouse [domestic partner], you can contact the Domestic Abuse Prevention Program (DAPP) for a legal consultation- that is not advice but it’s information about options and safety planning. Second, if you’re within the United States, I’ll speak to criteria for legal services programs: legal services programs for long term family law representation generally do have an income eligibility guideline (200% above the poverty line). But there are many legal services programs that will do free representation in Protective Order cases, regardless of income. You can be a bank employee, have a nice income, and you can still get representation for free in Protective Order proceedings particularly in the DMV area.”