

Parenting in a pandemic: how do the new UK rules impact you?

20 OCTOBER 2020

CATEGORY:
ARTICLE



Coronavirus – parenting through a pandemic

My advice to separating parents is always to try to see things from the children's perspective and to try to provide certainty and consistency when making arrangements for who they live and spend time with, so that their children know what to expect. However, during a pandemic that is hard to achieve: with guidance changing, infection rates increasing and concern rising, remaining calm and consistent becomes increasingly difficult. Parents will often have different perspectives on what is safe and what is allowed.

The uncertainty was highlighted this weekend when on Friday Boris Johnson, during his Downing Street press conference suggested (with a caveat to check the Guidance) that a child living in a medium tier house might not be able to spend time with a parent in a higher tier location. Whilst the Guidance is absolutely clear that in all tiers there is an exemption to the rules regarding different households gathering where children spend time between the households of their separated parents, it was not clear that the same exemption applies when it comes to travelling between tiers for contact arrangements. A government spokesperson since clarified that people are allowed to form childcare and individual support bubbles across tiers so that a parent in a Tier 2 area would be able to travel to look after a child in a Tier 3 area. Whilst spending time with each parent might not usually be described as 'childcare' (as this usually refers to someone other than the parents looking after the children), it appears to apply to separated parents in this instance.

Childcare arrangements under the new rules

The new rules regarding gatherings and households mixing include exemptions for childcare arrangements, whether they are of a formal nature (nannies, nurseries and childminders) or an informal nature (friends and family). There are also exceptions for the legal gathering limit of supervised activities provided for children including wraparound care, youth groups and activities and children's playgroups.

Where there is an informal childcare arrangement this is described as being in a 'childcare bubble'. The rules state that different households can mix where informal childcare is being provided to a child aged 13 or under.

This will no doubt come as a relief to all of those parents who rely on childcare arrangements as a source of support and to enable them to work and provide for their families.

Communication can help in the absence of certainty or clarity

Communication is key to finding solutions to issues in relation to children. With uncertainty and often anxiety in relation to interpreting guidance and staying safe, it is important to try to articulate to your former partner what your concerns are and to listen to, and try to understand, their concerns. Taking advice as to the parameters within which to work can really help to find solutions during this difficult time. As ever, it is so important to put the needs and best interests of your children at the heart of all discussions.

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