

Information for Survivors of Domestic Violence

COVID-19 Updates - April 6, 2020

Survivors of domestic violence are facing particularly challenging times during this pandemic, but you are not alone. If you have questions beyond the basic information below, please contact an attorney, or for support, call a local advocate at Safe Connections 314.531.2003 or ALIVE at 314.993.2777.

Can I still get an order of protection?

Yes, and the courts are giving them priority. If the court enters a “put out” order, a sheriff still has authority to remove an abusive person. The court also can enter orders for safety, custody, and support.

In St. Louis City, St. Louis County, Jefferson County, and St. Charles County, you can still file petitions at a courthouse. (NOTE: Some courthouses are screening for COVID before allowing visitors to enter.)

In St. Louis County you can complete and submit an order of protection petition online [on their website](#). Call the court clerk or your local police department to ask about the process for filing a petition for an order of protection. [See blank petition here](#).

Can I travel to exchange my child with the other parent during the statewide stay-at-home order?

Yes, you may travel as needed to follow your custody plans. Court orders for custody and visitation remain in effect and are to be followed. Parents can agree to make changes to the plan, ideally in writing. If it is unsafe to travel under your current custody order, and your ex will not agree to a change, you may need to talk with your lawyer about asking the court for a temporary restraining order. Note: Missouri currently has a statewide stay-at-home order, but local counties can make other orders that are consistent with the statewide health order.

What are Judges and Guardians ad litem (GALs) saying about sharing child custody during the pandemic?

Missouri judges and GALs hope you will work through these times in a way that keeps everyone safe. **They want you to know that your current custody plans remain in effect.** They want all parents to act in a safe way to protect children’s health. They urge you to follow the orders issued by the authorities, such as social distancing and avoiding playgrounds.

They understand it may be difficult to follow your regular custody plan during the pandemic. When it is dangerous or impossible to comply with the custody plan, parents are encouraged to make other arrangements such as Skype or FaceTime or allowing make-up time for missed visits. Contact your attorney or GAL with specific questions. [These Guidelines](#) offer good suggestions also.

NEED HELP? Apply online at www.lsem.org or call 314.534.4200 / 800.444.0514

More COVID-19 information & resources available at www.lsem.org/covid-19-updates or follow us on Facebook



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Do I need to go to court for a conference in April 2020?

Probably not. The Courts have stopped most in-person appearances until May 1, 2020. Some courts may hear cases by video or phone conference calls. The court will send you information about a new court date and the possible use of technology. **Be sure the court has your current mailing address.** If you do not receive a new court date before your current court date, check your case on the court's website, contact your lawyer, or call the court clerk.

What about child support?

The court orders remain in effect for child support or maintenance. This does not guarantee the payments will be received on time, especially with job losses or other difficulties. Unpaid support will continue to grow as a debt. There are ways to collect the debt through the Family Support Division or a lawyer. Child support adjustments can be made through the court process as needed.

How do I apply for legal assistance from Legal Services of Eastern Missouri?

Call 314.534.4200 in the St. Louis region or 800.444.0514 outside of St. Louis between 8:30 am and 5:00 pm Monday through Friday. If we are not available, leave a message and we will call you back as soon as we can. **Alternatively, apply online at <http://lsem.org/get-help-now/>.** We are here to talk with you about your family law case or emergencies. Due to COVID-19 measures, we cannot accept walk-in clients until further notice.

Is there any other place where I can get free legal advice?

You may qualify for help from volunteer lawyers at the Missouri Bar's Free Legal Answers program [here](#). Anyone with a household income at or below 250% of poverty level can get free answers to a multitude of legal questions.

What self-help steps are available to make changes to Missouri child custody orders?

You can file a motion to modify when the current custody order is no longer appropriate for the child because of a major change. You cannot ask for a change to a current custody order though an order of protection case. To file your own motion, [here is a link with more information and forms](#). You can also find information on your local court's website or call the local court clerk to learn more. For information about adjustments click on [this joint statement](#).

As a survivor of domestic violence, are there advocates who can help me?

Yes. Shelter locations are open during the pandemic. [You can find a list of DV shelters here](#), For more local resources [click here](#). For statewide information [click here for the MCADSV website](#) or the [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#).

*These Frequently Asked Questions are not intended as a substitute for legal advice.
For more information or advice about your legal situation, contact a lawyer.*

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