

Here for you and your family during the COVID-19 Pandemic

As the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting lockdown continues, we know that families across the country are facing new and prolonged pressures.

The family team at Hay & Kilner are still very much open for business, offering experience, legal expertise, as well as dedication, compassion and sensitivity to all of our clients.

We have decided that in the face of such unprecedented times, we are offering new clients requiring advice on a family or domestic violence matter a **15 minute free of charge consultation**.

We can help you NOW.

Social distance rules mean we can't meet in person but we are using a range of ways to talk to our clients – including telephone, video conferencing, Zoom & WhatsApp.

To make an appointment or speak with one of our family law experts, please call us one 0191 232 8345, or email any of our team shown on this page.

- Our family team has been a recognised leader in childcare law for over 25 years
- Child panel registered solicitors with over 13 years' experience each
- Members of Resolution
- We offer a free assessment and **legal aid** to those who are eligible.

We are specialists in a number of areas of family law and we want to do our bit during these very difficult times to help families. We have therefore taken the time to set out some key points from the government and court COVID-19 guidance:

SOCIAL SERVICES

Child Protection cases are increasing in light of the current COVID-19 pandemic as schools and childcare providers have closed their doors.

Social workers are still visiting families where children are considered to be potentially at risk of serious harm.

Having a social worker involved with your children can be very worrying and confusing, and the family team at Hay & Kilner offer a sensitive, personalised, and hands-on approach to cases involving children's services including;

- *Child Protection Plans
- *Child in Need Assessments
- *Single Assessments
- *Section 20
- *PLO
- *Care proceedings.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The government has published new guidance in relation to domestic abuse during the COVID-19 pandemic:

KEY POINTS

- The guidance to stay at home **DOES** not apply to people who are facing domestic violence at home
- Domestic abuse **DOES** include physical violence **as well as** online abuse, coercive control, manipulation, and verbal abuse
- There **ARE** still people who can help you if you feel that you are the victim of domestic abuse, such as the police, charity organisations, and the courts.
- If you are at risk of immediate harm contact the police on 999. The National Domestic Abuse Helpline is also still up and running.

CHILD CONTACT AND CO-PARENTING

For families with separated parents, agreeing child contact can be difficult in these times and a cause of conflict. Our family team solicitors are children panel accredited and also members of the North East Resolution Committee.

We are also specialists in assisting parents who are currently not having any contact with their child.

KEY POINTS:

- We think that the overriding message is that parents are strongly urged to exercise fairness and common sense more than ever, putting the child or children's interests before their own.
- This fits in with our approach to all cases involving children at Hay & Kilner
- Where parents do not live in the same household, children under 18 **can be moved** between their parents' homes if it is safe to do so.

- Families should be mindful of the **shielding advice** for those who are considered at high risk of COVID-19. <https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-shielding>
- This establishes an exception to the mandatory 'stay at home' requirement.
- It **does not**, however, mean that children **must** be moved between homes
- The CAFCASS website also contains access to the **Family Justice Youth Board**, which has a useful information sheet about family court cases during COVID-19: <https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/family-justice-young-peoples-board/>

COURT PROCEEDINGS

Families are always encouraged to try to resolve any disputes about children without the need for involving the courts, and even more so in the midst of a national emergency.

However, if required, the **family courts are still open**, operating hearings on a remote basis:

KEY POINTS:

- Whilst the courts are open and still accepting new applications, families should be aware that things may take longer than they normally would.
- Some hearings, such as final hearings where evidence needs to be heard, will likely not be heard by the court at present, but decisions on how cases proceed are made on a case by case basis based on the circumstances.
- We can always recommend alternative ways to resolve disputes, such as ADR and mediation.

WE ARE HERE FOR YOU

Our expert team can offer you the highest levels of legal advice and assure you of dedication, compassion and sensitivity at all times.

Please call us – **free of charge, for a 15 minute consultation** – if you feel we can help in any way. We will do our very best to help you.