

Information for Survivors of Domestic Violence

COVID-19 Updates - 1/28/2021

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 at 314.531.2003 or ALIVE at 314.993.2777.

Can I get an order of protection during the pandemic?

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, St. Charles County, and other counties, you can still file petitions at a courthouse. (NOTE: Courthouses are screening for COVID and are requiring people to wear masks before allowing visitors to enter.)

In St. Louis County you can complete and submit an order of protection petition online on their website. In St. Louis City, you also can file a petition online on their website. You can also try to call the local 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.

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 plan court orders 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 physical distancing and wearing masks.

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 using 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.

Do I have to go in person to court for a conference during the pandemic?

Possibly. On July 24, 2020, the Missouri Supreme Court issued modified Operational Directives for Missouri courts to follow as they use four phases (0-3) in the reopening of the courts. You may check the phase for your county here. Each local court is easing the restrictions at their discretion while using the Operational Directives. The Missouri Supreme Court has asked county courts to limit in-person hearings and use remote technology when possible. Some courts are hearing cases by video or phone conference calls. Other courts may hold the hearing in person. Even in those situations, you may ask the court to allow you to attend remotely. The court will send you information about a new court date, the possible use of technology, and the process for in-person court proceedings. **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.

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



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What about child support?

The court orders remain in effect for child support and 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 may be ways to collect the debt through the Missouri Family Support Division ([Click here](#) for their website) or a lawyer. Adjustments to child support may be made through the court process.

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](#). If you have a household income at or below 250% of poverty level, you may be eligible to 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. 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 to child custody schedules, click on [this joint statement](#). You cannot ask for a change to a current custody order through an order of protection case.

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

Yes. Shelter locations are open during the pandemic, but may be at reduced capacity. [You can find a list of domestic violence shelters here](#). For more local resources [click here](#). For statewide information [click here for the MCADSV website](#), or for national information, contact 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.*

Reviewed 1/27/2021

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