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A Family Attorney's Notes on Extending Grace and Kindness During Shelter in Place

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As a divorce lawyer with over 25 years of experience, I thought I had seen everything. Covid-19 is something that nobody has seen before. However, as I have met with my divorce clients on a day-to-day basis over the past 25 years, I have noticed a few common struggles that bring clients to my office. The fallout of Covid-19 and the stress it puts on families is only going to exasperate these struggles.

- **Spouses struggle with money.** In many of the divorce cases spouses have a different approach to money. Some spouses are spenders, and others are savers. When the spouses cannot find a happy medium, they often find themselves in my office. With Covid-19, money is a particularly hot button. Take a deep breath. Talk to your spouse about your financial concerns. Avoiding the discussion may be easier in the short run, but in the long run it leads to resentment and you may find yourself in my office.
- **Spouses have different approaches to parenting.** Prior to quarantine, families had a routine. Each parent had a different role and different parenting responsibilities. With parents working from home and their children now attending school from home, that dynamic is going to shift. Some parents are more tolerant, and other parents are more structured. Again, listen to each other. Take a deep breath, allow each parent's voice to be heard and concentrate on what is best for your child and your family. If you fail to do so, you could find yourself in my office needing my services.
- **Spouses "grow apart."** The most common theme I hear in my divorce cases is that "we have grown apart." What this means is that you stopped being friends with your partner. You no longer share what is important to you with them. While we all are "sheltering in place" take some time to reconnect. Reminisce about the fun that you have had together and discuss what you are looking forward to in the future. Reintroduce yourself to the best friend you had when you were married. Reconnecting will help you avoid making an appointment with me.

As a divorce lawyer, multiple people have joked with me that my caseload will grow exponentially once the shelter-in-place orders have lifted. Although these comments are intended to be a joke, they do ring true. The fallout of Covid-19 is stressful to all of us. Stress exacerbates weaknesses in our relationships, causing larger fractures. Take this unique time to reconnect with your partner in a productive way. Yet, still give each other the space to process what is happening to the world and the impact that has on your family. The more kind, patient, and thoughtful we can be to the ones we love during this intense time, the less likely you will need my services in the future.

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