



COVID-19: Family issues and support

COVID-19 is changing the world as we know it. It has put pressure on everyone and touched every aspect of our lives. If you are in a difficult family situation, that pressure is amplified.

As well as continuing to advise our clients on all family law issues, we are assisting clients with some of the following issues which are particularly relevant at this time:

- **How children spend time with their other parent and move between homes during lockdown**
This can be a particularly tricky issue for parents, and has featured in the news having affected many households. We can guide you through this and help you to find a resolution that is in line with the [Government Staying at Home and Social Distancing Guidance](#) and [The Health Protection \(Coronavirus, Restrictions\) \(England\) Regulations 2020](#) and the [President of the Family Division's Guidance](#) as well as - crucially - what is in the best interests of your children.
- **Escalating tensions in the home environment leading to domestic abuse**
There has been an unprecedented rise in calls to domestic abuse helplines during lockdown. **Domestic abuse** comes in many forms, not just physical violence. It can happen to anyone, irrespective of social standing or celebrity status. If you are worried about your safety, we can help. There are steps that you can take to protect yourself or any children in your family, for example seeking an urgent injunction. Don't suffer in silence. If you are in immediate danger, call the **police** on **999** and dial **55** if you cannot speak.
- **How maintenance payments are affected by redundancy/furlough**
Across the country, people are losing their jobs. This means making maintenance payments can be problematic, which is causing problems for those who are subject to an order and unable to pay, and those reliant on maintenance payments from an ex-partner to support them and/or their children. The message from the courts is that maintenance payments should not just be stopped; you must try to reach agreement with your former partner, or failing that, issue a court application. We can help you to resolve disputes about maintenance and ensure that you are able to meet your costs at this time.

- **How COVID-19 is impacting upon financial settlements**
COVID-19 is heavily impacting upon the financial position of individuals and their businesses. It is also impacting valuations and restricting people's ability to move home and relocate. No one knows precisely how long this will last. Some individuals are unable to meet obligation under a financial settlement agreed before the pandemic began. These are challenges that can be overcome and addressed with specialist advice.
- **Court applications and hearings during COVID-19**
The courts have made huge changes to their processes, to respond quickly to this crisis and enable applications to be made electronically and for hearings to take place remotely. However, they are under pressure and are therefore focussing on urgent issues. We have on the ground experience and can help you to navigate the current court processes, by making the appropriate applications for you, or advising you on alternative routes to resolution until the courts are back to running at full capacity. We can also advise you on the status of existing court applications and how you can progress them.
- **Alternative Dispute Resolution**
We regularly use alternative forms of dispute resolution - such as mediation, arbitration and private, out of court hearings - in both financial and children matters to help our clients reach a swift, private, resolution. The courts actively encourage this for both financial disputes and disputes concerning children. We work with top barristers chambers and experts to facilitate remote mediation and private hearings to resolve disputes if an adjudicator is needed.

Who are we?

We are a very highly regarded team of lawyers, led by Head of the Family group **Catherine Bedford** and partners **Nicholas Westley** and **Mark Irving**.

Our team includes senior associates **Alex Ward**, **Lidia Cantele**, **Guy Mawson** and **Daisy Minns Shearer**; as well as associate lawyers **Becky Storer**, **Eleanor Haidon** and **Naomi Myatt**. A complete list of all team members is set out below, together with photos so that you can put a face to our names.

All lawyers at Harbottle & Lewis operate at the top of their disciplines. We work together as a team, to pool our expert knowledge and offer the best possible service to our clients. We work closely together with other departments at the Firm, including our **Reputation Protection**, **Private Client & Tax**, **Property** and **Employment** teams, where their expertise can add value and assist with solutions. This is to ensure that our clients have maximum support, on each aspect required, every step of the way.

What do we do?

In addition to the specific issues outlined above, we can help you with any private family law issue, such as:

- Getting divorced
- Resolving your financial claims on divorce (including maintenance and capital claims)
- Advising on arrangements for children, including in high conflict cases
- Advising on the correct level of maintenance (including variation applications)
- Advising cohabittees and unmarried couples on separation
- Resolving property disputes between cohabittees
- Pre and post nuptial agreements, or cohabitation agreements (including varying these)

- Contesting Wills or provision from estates on death
- Resolving financial claims on behalf of children (maintenance, school fees and capital provision)
- Helping you to work out the arrangements for children (where they live or stay, and when)
- Leave to remove applications (if you want to move overseas or to a different part of the country)
- Securing protection for domestic violence victims - including obtaining emergency injunctions such as non-molestation and occupation orders
- Advising you on the most effective method to resolve your matter - whether that is through the traditional court process, or alternative dispute resolution methods - such as mediation, arbitration or at private (out of court) hearings

During COVID-19

Supported by a fantastic team and all of the required technology, we have adapted quickly to remote working to ensure we continue to offer unfailing support to our clients at this unprecedented time. As well as running our normal service, we can offer video meetings, including securing expert advice.

In addition to continuing to support our clients in relation to the above issues, we are focussing on the particular issues that COVID-19 has created for each individual family.

Why Harbottle & Lewis?

We have a proven track record of handling complex family law issues with sensitivity and compassion, quietly and efficiently. We will fight your corner but we will do so with respect and consideration for your family.

We provide an incomparable level of service and adopt a flexible and tailored approach to ensure that each client can achieve the best possible outcome. We act quickly and we listen to you.

We are at the forefront of the field, acting in some of the most high profile, challenging and sensitive family law matters. We act for high net worth individuals and their partners from the business world, creative industries, entrepreneurs and frequently for clients with public profiles to protect. We also have a wealth of experience in representing clients with complex and unusual matters relating to their children.

Testimonials - what people say about us

“Any family team needs first of all a real leader at the top. This team has it in Catherine Bedford, who has a genuinely exceptional ability to attract and retain really high quality clients.”

“It has a high-end practice with a dusting of celebrity clients. The team has a high profile in this field, and is regarded as efficient and tough.”

“They offer strength and breadth across the board in family law.”

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