

Supporting women to access family law supports during the COVID-19 crisis

March 25, 2020

Luke's Place Support and Resource Centre wants everyone supporting women fleeing abuse to have up-to-date information about what family law services and supports are available across Ontario at this time.

Family Courts

On Thursday March 19th, we met with Chief Justice Morawetz of the Superior Court of Justice and senior family law judge Justice Stephenson as well as their senior staff to discuss the importance of women fleeing abuse being able to access the court quickly. It was a positive and constructive meeting, and we continue to work collaboratively to share information and strategies.

Here are key points for you to share with your clients:

- Ontario's courts have suspended their regular operations
- Filing counters remain open with reduced hours (10 a.m. – 12 noon and 2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.), **but this could change at any time**
- Documents **for urgent matters only** can be filed electronically:
<https://www.ontario.ca/page/file-divorce-application-online>
- Duty counsel services are being provided remotely by Legal Aid Ontario. How this is being done will vary from one court jurisdiction to another. For more information:
<https://www.legalaid.on.ca/news/covid-19-update-on-our-client-services/>
- Information and Referral Coordinator services will be available electronically. See below for contact information for IRCs across the province
- There will be some flexibility and understanding that not all documents being filed will be as professionally put together and as complete as is usually required. As long as affidavits contain detailed evidence, this should be acceptable
- Urgent matters that will be heard by the court include: custody, access, child protection, failure to return children, restraining orders, exclusive possession of the matrimonial home and, especially when the financial situation may preclude a woman from being able to get to a safe place, support
- Triage judges are in place at each family court to determine which cases are urgent
- See the end of this document for a tip sheet on safety planning for women living with an abusive partner

Accessing family law advice and assistance

Virtual Legal Clinic

Luke's Place is opening its Virtual Legal Clinic (VLC) to women using any VAW service in any part of Ontario in order to increase access to family law support for women fleeing abuse. The VLC connects a woman with a family law lawyer via a web-based video conferencing program, for a summary legal advice consultation.

We have modified our protocols for using the VLC so that women can access a consultation whether or not they are in a shelter. Appointment requests must come through a VAW/woman-serving organization.

To learn more about the VLC, see information on our website at: <https://lukesplace.ca/for-women/lukes-place-virtual-legal-clinic/>

If you would like your clients to be able to access the VLC, please contact us at: kathryn@lukesplace.ca and/or 905-728-0978 ext. 230.

Other special legal services

LAO's Client Lawyer Service Centre can be reached at 1-800-668-8257, for summary legal advice about a family law issue.

Please note that, for the time being, financial eligibility requirements for summary legal advice **are being waived.**

<https://www.legalaid.on.ca/news/changes-to-summary-legal-advice-services-at-legal-aid-ontario-due-to-covid-19-pandemic/>

The Law Society of Ontario has opened a new help line for people requiring urgent legal assistance: 1-800-268-7568 or 416-947-3310

FCSW services

If your agency is not responsible for delivering the Family Court Support Worker program, you may want to refer clients with family law issues to the service in your community. FCSWs provide support and assistance to survivors of domestic violence throughout their family court case. This includes safety planning, assistance with collecting evidence and preparing court documents and court accompaniment. You can find the agency delivering the FCSW program in your community at:

https://www.attorneygeneral.jus.gov.on.ca/english/ovss/family_court_support_worker_program/service_providers.php

Online resources

Finding family law support across Ontario: <https://lukesplace.ca/resources/family-law-support-services-for-women/>

Family court survival workbook for women: <https://familycourtandbeyond.ca/>

Legal information, news and strategies for women and their advocates:
<https://lukesplace.ca/news/>

Family law webinars: <https://lukesplace.ca/family-law-information-lukes-place-cleo-webinars/>

Information about other legal issues relevant to the COVID-19 crisis (e.g. housing, employment): <https://stepstojustice.ca/covid-19>

Family Mediation and Information Services – Information and Referral Coordinator Contact Information

| Location | Service Provider | IRC Contact - Telephone | IRC Contact – Email |
|------------------------------|--|---|--|
| Barrie | Lisa Wice The Mediation Centre of Simcoe County Inc. | 705-739-6446 | Barrieflic@gmail.com |
| Bracebridge | | | |
| Belleville/Picton/Bancroft | Vicky Visca Vicky Visca & Associates | 613-969-9949 | vicky@vickyvisca.ca |
| Kingston | | 613-766-0795 | |
| Brampton | Antoinette Clarke Peel Family Mediation Services | 905-452-7367 or 1-844-452-7367 IRC: 905-453-7795 | info@peelfamilymediation.org |
| Orangeville | | 905-452-7367 or 1-844-452-7367 | |
| Hamilton Court office | Tamara Bodnaruk-Wide AXIS Family Mediation Inc. | 905-645-5252 x2515 | alicia@axisfamilymediation.com amanda@axisfamilymediation.com |
| Waterloo Region Court Office | | 519-749-8989 | mike@axisfamilymediation.com tonya@axisfamilymediation.com |
| Guelph Court Office | | 519-824-4100 x218 | tonya@axisfamilymediation.com |
| Simcoe Court Office | Tamara Bodnaruk-Wide AXIS Family Mediation Inc. | 226-931-1617 | heather@axisfamilymediation.com |
| Cayuga Court Office | | 226-931-1617 | heather@axisfamilymediation.com |
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|---------------------------------|---|---|--|
| Brantford Superior Court Office | Tamara Bodnaruk-Wide AXIS Family Mediation Inc. | 226-920-8109 | derek@axisfamilymediation.com |
| Brantford Ontario Court Office | | 226-920-8109 | derek@axisfamilymediation.com |
| St. Catharines Court Office | Tamara Bodnaruk-Wide AXIS Family Mediation Inc. | 905-988-6200 x475 | chris@axisfamilymediation.com |
| Welland Court Office | | 905-735-0010 x299 | chris@axisfamilymediation.com |
| Brockville | Keith Fraser | 613-341-2816 | kfraser@on.aibn.com |
| Perth | | | |
| Chatham | Kathleen Chapman The Mediation Centre Inc. | 1-888-796-0483 x704 or 519-673-1219 | chatham@mediationsouth.com |
| Goderich | | 1-888-796-0483 x706 or 519-673-1219 | goderich@mediationsouth.com |
| London | | 1-888-796-0483 x700 or 519-673-1219 | flic@mediationcentre.com |
| Owen Sound | | 1-888-796-0483 x708 or 519-673-1219 | owensound@mediationsouth.com |
| Sarnia | | 1-888-796-0483 x705 or 519-673-1219 | sarnia@mediationsouth.com |
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|---------------------|---|---|--|
| Stratford | Kathleen Chapman The Mediation Centre Inc. | 1-888-796-0483 x702 or 519-673-1219 | stratford@mediationsouth.com |
| St. Thomas | | 1-888-796-0483 x701 or 519-673-1219 | stthomas@mediationsouth.com |
| Walkerton | Kathleen Chapman The Mediation Centre Inc. | 1-888-796-0483 x707 or 519-673-1219 | walkerton@mediationsouth.com |
| Woodstock | | 1-888-796-0483 x703 or 519-673-1219 | woodstock@mediationsouth.com |
| Milton | Maggie Hall The Mediation Centre of Hamilton-Wentworth Inc. | 905-878-7281 x3439 or 905-849-0417 | Joanwilliams.mediator@gmail.com jim@jimfitch.ca centre@mediation.on.ca |
| Napanee | Lorena Thompson | 613-540-3444 | thompsonmediationservices@gmail.com |
| Newmarket | Dean Rokos York Hills Centre for Children, Youth and Families | 905-853-4816 | IRC@yorkhills.ca |
| Kenora/Fort Frances | Kathleen Chapman/Maggie Hall Mediation North Inc. | 807-464-2993 1-888-935-5455 | Randyjackson.irc@gmail.com centre@mediationnorth.ca |
| Dryden | | 807-220-4855 1-888-935-5455 | Ve3jns@msn.com centre@mediationnorth.ca |

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| Thunder Bay | Kathleen Chapman/Maggie Hall Mediation North Inc. | 807-475-3500 807-633-8696 1-888-935-5455 | Flic.mediationnorth@gmail.com centre@mediationnorth.ca |
| Timmins/Cochrane/ Kapuskasing/Hearst | Kathleen Chapman/Maggie Hall Mediation North Inc. | 1-888-935-5455 Fax:1-844-332-1938 | Jsimard.flic@gmail.com centre@mediationnorth.ca |
| Haileybury/ Kirkland Lake | | 1-888-935-5455 | centre@mediationnorth.ca |
| North Bay | | 1-888-935-5455 | pcartwrightservices@gmail.com centre@mediationnorth.ca |
| Sudbury | | 1-888-935-5455 | centre@mediationnorth.ca |
| Gore Bay, Wikwemikong, Espanola | | 1-888-935-5455 | centre@mediationnorth.ca |
| Elliot Lake | 1-888-935-5455 | centre@mediationnorth.ca | |
| Sault Ste Marie | Kathleen Chapman/Maggie Hall Mediation North Inc. | 1-888-935-5455 | fowlermediation@gmail.com Silvija.raginskis@shaw.ca centre@mediationnorth.ca |
| Parry Sound | | 1-888-935-5455 | centre@mediationnorth.ca |
| Oshawa | Darlene Murphy Durham Mediation Centre Inc. | 905-579-1988 | Info@durhammediationcentre.org |

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|--------------|--|--|---|
| Ottawa | Michael Kushnir | 613-239-1406 | kwmediation@gmail.com |
| Cornwall | | 613-933-8666 | |
| L'Orignal | | 613-675-1829 | |
| Pembroke | Dan Lanoue | 613-799-9562 | renfrewcountymediation@gmail.com |
| Peterborough | Dorothy Ryan Kawartha Family Court Assessment Service | 705-876-6915 | audrey.lea@flic.kfcas.ca brenda.kotras@flic.kfcas.ca alicia.thibadeau@kfcas.ca |
| Cobourg | | 905-372-3751 x128 | monica.walsh@flic.kfcas.ca alicia.thibadeau@kfcas.ca |
| Lindsay | | 705-324-1400 x413 | claudette.riley@flic.kfcas.ca kathy.dunne@flic.kfcas.ca alicia.thibadeau@kfcas.ca |
| Toronto OCJs | Hilary Linton mediate393 inc. | 416-593-5393 | mediate47@mediate393.ca for matters at 47 mediate311@mediate393.ca for matters at 311 info@mediate393.ca |
| Toronto SCJ | | | mediate393@mediate393.ca info@mediate393.ca |
| BFC | Jennifer Suzor Bridging Family Conflict Inc. | 519-973-6620 x4264. Alternate: 519-946-0808 | Kelly.christian.irc@gmail.com |

Safety Tips for Women Still Living with an Abusive Partner

- 1. Don't take this tip sheet home unless you know your abuser won't be able to find it.**
- 2. In an emergency, dial 911 for immediate assistance.**
3. Connect with the women's shelter in your community (you can find a list at <https://www.sheltersafe.ca/>). Even if you don't stay at the shelter, staff can provide outreach services to support you and can help you make an emergency escape plan as well as a safety plan.
4. Check out <https://familycourtandbeyond.ca/> for safety planning tips and information about family law and family court.
5. Clear the call display frequently on all phones your partner might access, so he can't see who you have been calling or receiving calls from.
6. Clear your browser history every time you use your computer.
7. Talk to a women's counsellor about tech safety and maintaining privacy online.
8. Find or make a safe room in your house: this should be a room with a solid door and a lock or, if not a lock, a room in which you can move a piece of heavy furniture in front of the door. It should also have a window big enough for you to get out through if you have to.
9. Kitchens can be unsafe because they contain knives, heavy pots and stovetops, all of which can be used to hurt you. Bathrooms can also be unsafe because they don't usually have a second exit. Try to stay out of these rooms during an assault or fight.
10. Make a list of any weapons, especially firearms, that your partner has and where they are in the house. Keep this list somewhere private but easy for you to find quickly.
11. If possible, carry your cell phone with you at all times, tucked away so it is hard for your abuser to take it from you. Have key telephone numbers saved on it, including any that you might need to quick dial during an assault.
12. If your partner is frequently physically violent towards you, avoid wearing scarves or jewellery that he could use to strangle you.
13. During an assault, make yourself as small as possible and, if you can, put yourself in a corner or behind or under a large piece of furniture. Try to cover your face and your chest/abdominal part of your body.
14. Know where every exit in your house is.
15. If you have a car, keep the gas tank full and back into the driveway, if possible. Have a trustworthy mechanic check the car for GPS. Keep a set of car keys somewhere secret just outside the house where you can grab them quickly if you need to. Stash some cash there, too, if you can.
16. If you have a neighbour you trust, ask if they can leave a key to their house somewhere safe for you in case you need to get to a safe space quickly. Tell your kids they can go to this neighbour for help at any time.
17. Talk to your children in a way that is age-appropriate so they can be and feel safe. Develop a code word with your kids and use that word when (and only when) you need them to dial 911 and/or run to a neighbour for help.