

Bonus Episode: COVID-19 Episode, Divorce, and Family Law

Craig: Welcome to the special edition of the Robertson and Easterling Podcast. We are all living in unusual times right now with the global pandemic that we are experiencing. In the third chair today, we have our associate Max Busching. Max is a new lawyer but has a lot of life experience. He is a former basketball coach and teacher. Thanks for joining us Max today.

Max: I'm happy to be here. Hopefully I can contribute something of substance to this conversation.

Matt: Max, we are glad you joined us. I'm glad that you are staying 6ft away from me right now. What an interesting time to be alive and to also start your law career. I certainly hope you never encounter anything like this again. I know it's the first thing like this that I have encountered over a decade of practicing law.

Craig: I have been thinking about the emotional side of this global pandemic that we have been experiencing. I think of different seasons in my life that I remember when I lost one of my brothers when I was really young and that feeling of uneasiness that you get. I remember another time in 6th grade when the challenger space shuttle blew up. Of course, everybody who is hearing my voice remembers exactly where they were when they first heard there was an airplane flown into one of the twin towers and I can't say I had the same experience when I had first heard the word covid-19. I was at a workshop and I had heard that a plane full of Chinese travelers had landed at LAX and there were conversations among the workshop attendees about anxiety associated with that. That was really the first time I had experienced even hearing anything about what was going on the other side of the world. What about you guys? When was the first time that you heard about it?

Matt: You know I am actually having trouble even pinpointing when I first heard about it. I do know that for most people here in MS this has been something that has sort of developed in waves. You first started hearing about it on the fringes and then you started paying attention to it. I am almost ashamed to say but I think the moment that really caught my attention was when all of your major sports leagues cancelled or postponed their seasons. That really got my attention because all of the sudden your watching, something that you know is a huge source of revenue and it just stops in its tracks. One interesting thing about this situation is that in contrast of the tragedies you are mentioning a second ago, almost everyone was on the same side of those tragedies. The covid19 situation is very polarizing. You have a large group of people that think that this is being way overblown and then you have a large group of people that are essentially thinking this is the end of the world and that this is the end of society as we know it and I think the truth is, almost nobody really knows anything and we are trying to figure out how all of this applies to the legal world and what we do on a daily basis right now. I wish that I could say we had all of the answers, but we don't, and we are going to do our best to feel our way through it.

Craig: What about you Max, when is the first time our situation got revealed to you?

Max: Well sports take up a big chunk of my time. I am constantly following ESPN.com and I'm a big NBA fan so for me it was when, I think it was the Utah Jazz playing Oklahoma City Thunder, I don't know if that is correct but Rudy Gobert from Utah Jazz tested positive for it and I think that was when NBA really shut down operations all together and for me that was when, if a multibillion dollar industry was affectively shutting stores, that this thing was serious and that we need to start acting accordingly.

Craig: Alright so, of course as we are recording this podcast the governor has now issued his Shelter in place order and so at our law firm we are taking appropriate measure to ensure safety of our families, our work families, and our clients, we are excluded from the shelter in place order as a essential business but we are trying to be extra careful with our people. We are fortunate that we are able to work from anywhere in the world, but our access to the courts has been drastically limited. What we do on a daily basis really hasn't changed that much in our ability to offer services to our clients, hasn't changed that much, but today's podcast we want to talk a little bit about the broad categories that we work in and what we are seeing happening right now. So, some of you who have been listening before knowing that there are three broad categories associated with divorce in Mississippi. The first category is divorce. The second is issues concerning children, and the third is issues concerning property distribution and alimony. I am going to start with the divorce. What is happening right now is we, having limited access to the court. Mississippi supreme Court has handed down 7 emergency administrative orders. Each order that has been handed down from the supreme court, we are seeing more and more safeguards that are being set in place with regard to the court worker and attorneys and the general public's access to court buildings. Obviously the judiciary is 1/3 of our entire governmental system so the judiciary is not closing but certainly things that our not emergencies that don't have to be dealt with immediately are being put on the back burner and certain divorce cases would fall into that category.

Matt: Right, so in my understanding with what is going on right now is that the supreme court said the courts are going to stay open but it's granted to the discretion of each judge to make decisions about their own individual court rooms and how they are going to run things. What I think we are experiencing in reality in these moments is implement, appropriately so. Most court rooms are closed down with exception of hearing truly essential matters. Now, what the definition of a truly essential matter is, basically left up to the court. I think that right now, routine divorce proceedings are probably not going to be happening period in court rooms in the next 4-8 weeks. That is what I would expect.

Craig: That doesn't necessary mean that the procedures are grinding to a halt because we are having orders signed every day, the judges are working, the staff is working, but we are talking about the access to the public. So, let's remember two big ways to get a divorce. You can get a divorce in Mississippi if you have a reason or if you agree. So, the courts are still open and working. We are still filing pleadings and most of the jurisdictions that we are working in have electronic filing and a lot of what lawyers do is paperwork anyway. What we are talking about is in person, on your feet access to a court. Right, Matt?

Matt: Yeah for sure, but I think any matter like abuse matters, I think you'd be able to get a hearing if that's what you need. What I encourage everyone to do is stay in contact with your lawyer. They ought to be able to talk about it with you know. Their offices may be closed, and they may be working remotely but just about everybody I know is still working. I think another important thing that I think we at least need to talk about is the executive orders that have come out from the governor. I know that there are a lot of questions, what effect do these executive orders have on existing court orders. It is actually specifically mentioned in the last executive order of essential travel and about travel to and from custody and visitation agreements, are considered essential. So, what is coming out of these executive orders are, you are supposed to continue on with your normal custody and visitation schedule and exchange.

Max: Going back to court room operations in this time period, I have heard that some chancellors on the coast have been holding hearings via zoom. So, that might be something we are going to be seeing.

Craig: Right, we are already seeing that. I have been doing, probably since we closed our office to the general public, I think I have probably done four or five consultation with potential clients and we have been doing those either on the telephone or via facetime or zoom. So, I want to encourage the listeners that 95% of what your attorneys do on a daily basis are not going to be disrupted and as Matt has already started talking about, I think that the issues concerning child custody and visitation changes, are really where we are going to start seeing a lot of questions. It is really on a case by case basis on what parents are going to be able to do. This is some really unusual times. I think my kids have been out of school for 3 now. We had a, I don't want to say scare, but when president trump closed all travel to and from Europe, my daughter was in France with a French class on a spring break trip and so for a couple hours, we were really concerned about her ability to travel back into the country. So, when we are talking about getting real and personal, for me that is when it started getting real and personal for me and then of course they were encouraging people who had traveled overseas to self-quarantine for 2 weeks so we have spring break and then I think we are two weeks in at this point with regard to schools being closed and it has created a lot of, it is just different the way we are doing things now. My kids have just finished up their second week of distance learning and it has been a challenge. It has been different. I think with each family, especially families where parents are not living under the same roof, are experiencing those kinds of challenges. Have you been getting those kinds of questions too Matt?

Matt: Yeah, I have been getting questions about concerns from clients or former clients that they are concerned that their former spouse weren't following the social distancing guidelines that they were socializing too much and they were worried about the affect that might have when sending their children over there. That is certainly been a grey area but one thing with these executive orders and shelter in place deal is going to do, is make some of the cut and deal drier. Taking away some of the options or some of the folks that weren't listening. They are valid concerns and I understand how some people would be worried about it and that goes back to what I said earlier about some people taking this more seriously than others and how do you make that determination.

Craig: At this point, we just really don't know. Each individual dual custody order is different and each family that is living under these types of circumstances is different and I would advise a client that a court order is in place and should be followed. It seems like if following the court order is against your child's best interest, the first thing to do is to pick up the phone or communicate to the other parent. Now, I understand sometimes that is not possible but even in the few weeks we have been dealing with this, I have seen otherwise very polarized situations that people can work out on their own by simply communicating. You really can't over communicate, and I think in general, people who are parents, want their children to be healthy, happy, and safe. From what I am seeing from news media and recent conversations that I have had with Dr. Scott Benson from the children's safe center, things are going to get worse before they get better.

Matt: Right, if having a constructive conversation with your former spouse or your ex, is just not an option. Something we say around this office all the time, well before this pandemic is sometimes you just have to use your best judgement and the court orders say what they say and they are in affect but if you are faced with a situation where you are going to be placing your child in harms way, it is my opinion that it is genuine, that is going to be able to be communicated to a court if you are ever called on it. At the same time, I would urge people to have as much compassion as possible with what is going on right now. It may be a circumstance where its not a good idea for somebody to exercise their visitation because of their job, maybe they have been exposed to a high number of people with covid-

19. If you are that person, I would say keep your child's best interest at heart and keep your distance and be creative. Come up with different ways to exercise your visitation. Use facetime, zoom, things of that nature. There are way people can communicate and this actually can be a good opportunity to create better communication with your spouse or ex spouse.

Craig: That really is the key in all of this, is just communication really.

Lee: Hey Matt and Craig, thanks for having me back on the podcast again, Lee Smith, clinical director of Cornerstone Counseling. I was on another podcast and I really appreciate what you guys are doing with this special Covid-19 episode. What we are experiencing right now in mental health through covid-19 is really unique. I think a lot of people who had previous battles and struggles that they were walking through, whether that was anxiety or depression, marital issues, or other things that are going on in their life, the reality is, most of those things have not stopped. What actually has happened is seen a intensity form around shoes that people were previously dealing with prior to covid-19. We are seeing a lot right now in our office, is people with a lot of fear that are struggling with anxiety and are just extremely overwhelmed and another thing that we are seeing is just a lot of sensory overload. People have all types of news coming at them left and right and it is really hard to process the amount of information that is coming at us at a rapid pace and sometimes conflicting information. It is hard to know what to believe sometimes and so all this combined really can create sensory overload and really just a paralysis over people. It is really unique what you see in two groups of people. Those people who kind of like to live with a high level of control, I think if we are honest, most of us would say I like being in control of my life. I think what Covid-19 has taught us is that we really have less control over things than we do so maybe the illusion of control has been busted for many of us and for those who like to be in control, this has been an eye opener for them and has honestly been very difficult to accept. Another group of people that I find is challenged right now by all that covid-19 and all that social isolation has been created, are people who are extreme extroverts. People who love to be connected with people, be at the parties, be in the large groups and gatherings, this is a really difficult time for them. I heard a pastor Sunday open his message up by saying pray for me, I love being with people but I can't do that right now so as a pastor I am asking you to pray for me right now. I thought it was a phenomenal way to begin you r message. That just leads me to say that I think the most important thing we can do right now is talk about your experience. How are you experiencing covid-19 and all the things that covid-19 is bringing about in your life. How is it impacting you personally, financially, and your relationship? Put language to it, put words to it and encourage people to share and connect. I think that is one of the things we are trying to encourage people to do is stay connected right now through technology or through zoom calls and different video chat systems out there. Try and stay connected with people as much as you can and that leads me to say, in our office, we are currently doing about 90% of our sessions over telehealth right now and it is such an incredible platform that we are able to offer our clients to stay connected with them and to make sure everybody stays physically healthy and right now about 90% of our patients are utilizing telehealth and getting more comfortable with it every day. For people who have blue cross blue shield in MS, we are waving copays right now for them. It is a great time to stay connected with a counselor and talk through your experiences as we walk through these uncertain days. As a family, everyday is different for us in the Smith house today, everyday is a new day. We are trying to make new adjustments each day, adapt to a new routine and create new routines and I think what we are really learning is that we have to have grace for each other every day. Everyone is being impacted from this and we all need grace during this time. I would say try to find new routines, try

to stick with them. Try to have conversations with your kids, get them to talk, get them to use words about how they are experiencing what is going on around them right now. I think that is a good update from the Smith's and what we are seeing from a mental health point and just want to tell everybody to stay healthy and let us know how we can help you.

Student: Hi, I am an 8th grade student who is fourteen, because of covid-19 we have moved to class at home and basically how that has been going is, once a week we will get a syllabus of what we do that week and there are certain times that we meet with a teacher to ask questions. That is a super helpful time for some of the teachers but some of the teachers they aren't as helpful as they could be so sometimes it can get really confusing and you can feel like you're a little bit in over your head in what you are doing, but for the most part its been good. It is a good learning experience for college on how to be patient and self-driven, you have a project do on Thursday so are you going to wait till the last minute or are you going to get it done. For me personal, Covid-19 is not really scary for the most part, its just annoying. You are stuck in your house, you can talk to anyone, you can't get help, you can't go eat, you can't communicate with some of your good friends. For me, I haven't seen some of my friends because we just had spring break, in probably four weeks. For sports it is a good break and it is a good opportunity to know how much opportunity you have and how much you know sports mean to you. For me, I haven't had a break since October so it has been really nice to slow down and get excited about the seasons coming up but for our school team we have done google meets of just coming together, doing workouts and getting back in shape to get ready for the upcoming season.

May: Hello, my name is May. I am a former guest on the Robertson and Easterling Podcast, and they asked me to give an update about how I am dealing with the covid-19 pandemic right now. So, since I last presented, or was interviewed on the podcast, the world has literally turned upside down it feels like. Id say my update downside to that is that I am a health care worker and I have been mandated to close my practice and only treat emergency patients as needed which has been a very difficult experience for me. More so because if I can't work, I can't provide a salary to my employees. The ladies that work with me and for me, some of them have been with me for over 12 years and its like a work family. The fact that I can't afford to pay them because we are closed is heart breaking because basically, we had to lay off all of my employees. So, that has been very difficult during this time. I worry about their livelihood and how they are going to take care of their families during this time. Id say an upside to this pandemic is that I have two teenage boys that still live at home. I've had so much quality time that I have gotten to spend with them and my husband. It has allowed us to have family dinner time, game night, movie night, working outside together, riding bikes, just the kind of quality family time that we all crave and want but usually our schedules are too busy to allow. This is forcing us to slow down and really interact. Teenage boys typically aren't super communicative and don't want to hang with family but they are craving socialization from the social distancing and not being able to hang with their friends and they just want to engage and interact that has allowed a lot of quality time with my kids that I don't think we would have had so that has been an upside in this time. What I know haven't changed since I was interviewed on the podcast is that God hasn't changed. He is still faithful. He has a purpose in all of this. He is not surprised by any of this and what He is teaching me in this time is that I am to rest. I am a doer. I like to be doing and helping, working, love to be busy, and God is forcing me to take a season of rest and I am trying to use that the best I can to enjoy the blessings He has given me. Even though I can't work right now, I have the blessing of family and my health. I have so many things to be thankful for and God is really slowing me down to open my eyes to the journey He has carried me

through in my life and all that He has brought to me and ultimately just showing me His faithfulness over and over. So, we are going to come out on the other side of this. I don't know when or how long it is going to take but I think we are going to be better for it, maybe not our economy but as people, as followers of Jesus, and I hope I can glean everything He is trying to teach me through this time and have a season of rest so that I can remember that I rest in Him and grew closer to Him and enjoyed my family at the same time. I guess that is my update and I wish everyone health and safety and to press on and don't give hope. There is a God who will get us through this. Thanks, Bye Bye.

Craig: We want everyone to stay safe and free from harms way. I can think of a number of situations where a child could be in danger. I think what I am hearing is children are low risk with regard to terminal consequences with the virus, but you know, different families have different situations and maybe there is a recent situation. It is not uncommon for parents to be living with their child's grandparent or for other members of the aging community. We need to protect the more vulnerable citizens. For our listeners who is having a family law situation that is toughing their life in MS, these matters are handled in and for my experience, people that are selfless, who are honest, tend to have better results in chancery court. This is a time where we want our clients and general public to use a high level of common sense. Matt, what are some practical things that parents can do during this season of time?

Matt: Well practically speaking, I think this applies always but even more in our current climate, you truly just have to put your children's best interest first. Out of the scenario of the decision-making process, if you are able to do that during the situations we are in now, that is going to show in the court later on. The judge is going to notice and on the flipside of that, if you try to use this pandemic solely to your advantage, that is going to shine through too. It is going to hurt you and your case. It is also going to hurt your children.

Craig: Right, we operate under the presumption that kids deserved to be loved and cherished by their mom and their dad. In this season of time that we are living in, it might be where a mom or dad has, for really good reasons, less access to their child and so there are lots of small things that we can do to help keep those social connections and those family connections alive and well because a child needs the input and the mentoring and the coaching and relationship with both of their parents to be healthy and happy adults and that is really what we as parents want. We want our children to be healthy, happy, successful. Max, as a former educator, what do you think children are experiencing right now during this uncertain time? We have heard a lot about seniors, sports, and a high school senior is not going to get another opportunity to have a graduation experience and celebration so, Max, as a former educator, talk from the perspective of your former students.

Max: I really do feel for seniors that are coming up on what would be graduation for them. That is a special time in any young person's life that you will carry forward forever and they are not getting to experience that. I heard something on the radio the other day how Tate Reeves said that some kids are going to have to repeat this spring semester and I imagine the logistics of that are going to be quite daunting. You are talking about 10s of thousands of students across the entire state. You really can't replicate that in person classroom experience so I don't know how home schooling is going for families but I can imagine they are probably appreciating what teachers do more so on a daily basis right now.

Matt: we talked about on this podcast before that children are very perceptive. They are picking up more that's going on in your household than you realize, and kids have a lot of reasons right now to be

scare. There are a lot of scary stuff that is going on the news. They know they aren't going to school and can't see their friends. I would just urge everyone to keep in mind that this is a good opportunity to show your children that you can be united in taking care of them. Don't do anything that is going to make them more frightened than they already are. It is going to make them feel better to know that their parents can still work as a team even if they are not still married or are going through a divorce and when it comes to them, they are going to be able to put their issues aside and do what is best for them.

Craig: I am fortunate to serve on the MS commission for children's justice and one of my fellow commissioners is Dr. Scott Benton. Dr. Benton is the director of the MS Children's Safe Center which is essentially the department at UMC that deals with child abuse cases and Dr. Benton was kind enough to offer these thoughts.

Dr. Benton: Children of Safe Center is a legislative created center housed at the University of Mississippi Medical Center in Jackson. It was created by the Mississippi legislator in response to a federal lawsuit by children's rights in New York titled Olivia Y v. Barber. There were several deficiencies with the children identified as being abused or neglected and the center was created in a defense to respond to some of those deficiencies. I was recruited in 2008 as the medical director of the center to provide a forensic medical response throughout the state of Mississippi. Proud to say in addition to the center in Jackson, we have been successful in establishing clinics throughout the state of MS and cover pretty much most of MS. There are certain parts of the delta where we still have work to do. The purpose of the center is to apply scientific knowledge of scientific medicine to cases of suspected child maltreatment including both abuse and neglect. The use of science is to help assist with that fine line of identifying abused children and improving their situation as well as being sure that innocent parents are not caught in the middle of an accusation of abuse or neglect. The center has direct and indirect contact with close to 500,000 children a year through the efforts of 3 full time physicians, 2 nurse practitioners, and 8 RNs scattered throughout the state. There are outreach clinics in Tupelo, Meridian, Hattiesburg, Biloxi, McComb, and Grenada. The center, much like life these days, has been affected by the coronavirus pandemic known as Covid-19. For us, the impact really became noticeable about two weeks ago when we realized we did not have sufficient personal protective equipment when ascertaining who was essential and not and is still a problem. We have had to put some significantly new processes in place which has impacted the ability to work at an efficient pace but nevertheless we continue to respond to suspected abuse and neglect. The second impact of the pandemic is one that we see with many natural disasters and broad economic stressors to families. In particular, the stress in combination with harsh parenting practices has been known to increase physical abuse. In part of frustrated parents and trying times and stressful situations, we result to less than ideal parenting practices and in severe corporal punishment that often crosses the line. Stress itself will make a person respond in a frustrated manner to all sorts of situations. One that we see just in the past two weeks is response to infants. Infant crying, the frustration of dealing with an infant and whereas we normally see on average about one infant per week, evaluated for child abuse and found to be abused, we are averaging 1-2 children per day since the social distancing that has been recommended. The pandemic has really frustrated families and caregivers. It is well known that schools are our eyes in on families and during the summer months much abuse and neglect continues and becomes discovered with the return to school. The pandemic is not different in that it is creating a social isolation from children being able to disclose what is happening to them or outside teachers or caregivers getting a glimpse inside and the ability to intervene is closely hampered. So, we won't really know the effect of the pandemic for many months or in some cases years,

which is often the case with children who overall poorly disclose the bad things that happen to them, so in the mean time we are seeing the ones that have to come to medical attention. These are life threatening and severe abuse cases and as I mentioned previously there is a pretty significant uptake. As I said, the social distancing that is important in medicating this pandemic adds additional stressors to families with children particularly of the primary caregivers who are separated and questions about safety and as far as a child bouncing between two households, as well as the isolation that comes from social distancing. Recommendations for families, where possible, are to try not to have any significant travel or bouncing between households and let this virus play itself out and let the medical establishment catch up to novel treatment and medication measures. The good news is that children do not seem to be as affected as the older population but that is not a complete knowledge of safety and we are seeing some exceptions where there are young children's and teens that have life threatening implications. In general, if they can take a deep breath when challenges arrive and seek out other parents for advice for how to handle certain situations, in general positive parenting has the most successful implications for children. So, anything that can help us as adults to be calm during these very stressful times will go a long way to improving both the behavior and the outcome for children and the isolation conditions. Children split between more than one household, I would consider temporarily staying in one household or the other and using technology to bridge the gap like facetime and some of the other electronic communication methods. The reason for this is that children are known to asymptotically carry the virus and can potentially transmit it to other vulnerable people and the isolation we are doing for families generally and specifically applies to children who hygienically cant always follow the handwashing and don't touch your face type of advice recommended to the population. They will be more prone to carry the virus and transmit it to others.

Craig: I want to thank Dr. Scott Benton for providing those comments to us. I think we just need to be away at what is going on for our families, extended families, and neighbors. Matt, where can they contact Dr. Benton?

Matt: You can reach the children's safe center at 601-815-0157. Of course, if you have witnessed or experienced any type of domestic violence or the abuse of a child, you can always call the police. Call 911 is the first line of defense. Those workers are still out there and still protecting our community and once you get past there and need to be in contact with anyone else, you are more than welcome to call our office and we will do whatever we can to help you.

Craig: I fell into the category of people who were really skeptical over the seriousness of the situation they were in right now but certainly through Dr. Benton's comments, this is a very serious time that we are living in right now and we are just encouraging our listeners to follow these protocols for social distancing and just being very careful.

Matt: Hearing Dr Benton's stories, is just tragic and it makes me sad but it is also an even better reason for everybody to stay at home right now and do whatever we can to help flatten the curve because it is not just about how you are being inconvenienced. Even if you don't believe Covid-19 is a threat to you or a threat to people that you care about, know that the faster we get through this, the faster all the kids get to go back to school and they get to get out of those situations and the stress is relieved in their lives. I know a part of why some of what is going on with children now is because there is a lot more stress and anxiety in all of the homes.

Craig: There is no question about that. There is stress and anxiety. You've got kids who are home from school, parents some of whom are teachers who are having to homeschool their own kids and then try to educate the children who are in their classrooms. You have some parents who are healthcare workers who are having to work even harder. I know right now, you have accountants who are typically working towards the April 15th tax day deadline but all of the sudden they have turned their attention away from that and are looking at some of the government programs that are going to be available for small business owners. Another things parents should keep in mind in regards to older kids is, I've got a 14 year old and a 15 year old, they are way more interested in what is going on in the lives of their friends than they are with their mom and dad and we really have to be careful with teenagers and with young people about adhering to good social distancing because and 18 year old wants to be with their friends and it is important to the best of our ability to communicate the severity of this situation that we are in and for our young folks, our 14 year old, 17 year old, our 21 year old, to also adhere to these guidelines of social distancing.

Matt: Right, and again I will go back to using good judgement. Often times in our normal world, I see custodial or noncustodial parents that start to make decisions so that they can be more popular in the eyes of their children, whether they be younger or teenagers, and allowing them to do things to gain favor with them. I would very much stress to anybody listening, allowing your teenager to have friends over and violate these social distancing guidelines is not going to work well for you later down the road. That is a very clear presentation of your bad judgement and not working in your child's best interest.

Craig: That is really what this comes down to. Really it is just having sound judgement and using common sense when it comes to parenting. Kids need both parents and love both parents., in most circumstances, and parents need to be using good judgement when it comes to those decisions when it comes to the benefit of their children.

Matt: Yeah and make your decisions for the right reasons. Usually when someone is trying to make a choice, they pretty much know whether they are doing it for the right reasons or not and coming up with an excuse, there is not a good reason for it right now.

Max: Yeah I mean I think if we are still at a point where if we can really buckle down as a state for these next couple of weeks and stay indoors, and limit all travel and activity, then we can still flatten this curve and hopefully have some months of a normal summer.

Jackie: Hi, this is Jackie Williams, I am a nurse practitioner and my practice is Innovative Health. I have had the pleasure of being on the past podcast before and I am here to give you an update on what it looks like from the aspect of a medical provider. As I can tell you, when you walk into the Colonnade's Medical Office buildings, you will be met by some nurses and other employees that are in full protective garb and they are taking your temperature and they are wanting to know who you are going to see and why. If you pass, then you get to see the doctor you are going to see and if you fail you are going to get tested for Covid. It is pretty frightening just to walk through the door if you ask me. If you make it here, you will notice that my waiting room is empty, and I certainly am trying to put some safety measures. I've got the doors open and I've got lots of hand sanitizers around to try and keep people as safe as possible. Right now, my staff is gone. Honestly they have been let go due to an attempt to protect the viability of my practice or they have really had no ability to continue to work because they have lost their child care or they need to be home with their children. So, at this point it is a scary part for all of us as we go through this. One of the assets that we deal with is trying to move our practice to

some form of normalcy through the use of telehealth visits so I am actually seeing some telehealth visit every day. Low numbers, and they are growing everyday has people get use to the idea of being able to contact me and visit with me by phone vs actually having to come in here. I can tell you that they closed us because nonessential visits are not mandatory but being a functional practice, you have to ask, well what is essential and what is not essential for my patience. The ones that I am talking to, they are all very much showing extreme signs of anxiety, stressed out, they are worried about financial concerns. They are working from home and they are having to do their jobs as mom and dad and trying to do schoolwork for their kids, so now they are trying to do both. One of my employees said she really wasn't sure if she could continue to work from home because she was so anxious in trying to get it all done. On top of the Covid and the health and the finances, its like how much can I take. So, I guess that I will continue to work as best as I can. I have been here by myself everyday for the last two weeks and I can tell you that I am lonely. I faceted my husband the other day and he's like are you okay? I am just really lonely because my clinic is quiet and so that is what is happening at Innovative Health. I am helping my patients and telling them to continue to do their stress work and have faith in a Lord that will watch over us and knows exactly what he is doing. That is the bottom-line form Innovative Health.

Guest: Life at home, sheltering in place has been stressful at times and a lot of fun other times. Our kids are happy to see us. They actually want to hang out with us at night which is cool. They want to play cards or games. Right now, everybody is outside. They are having a blast. The weather is perfect, so we are doing the spring thing and just enjoying life.

Roan and Eva: Hi, we are Roane and Eva Hunter, owners and founders of Lifeworks counseling private practice counseling center in Madison, MS with offices in Starkville and Jackson. We want to thank you and Matt for having us on the podcast to talk about the pandemic that we are all experiencing. All of our therapist, 14 of us, we are all doing telehealth and what we are seeing with our couple clients is honestly its been a lot of ways very good for them. It has slowed life down, there is more time to connect with one another and their children. We also see some challenging times as trying to homeschool and work out of the house. That can create some anxiety and stress for the family. One ting that so many couples are reporting is how much they are enjoying the lack of activities and having to carry kids everywhere with sporting events and school events and now they aren't happening so they are together and what they are reporting is that the stress level has gone down. I think also what our clients are reporting is more of the anxiety about what is going on in our world and just the fear of is it going to get worse. It is really navigating that and helping our clients with that. Life works will also be offering support groups hosted by our David Hogue. The support groups are free and beginning next week. The first one will be on Mondays from 3:30-4:30, beginning April 13th, and it will go through the end of June. That one in the afternoons is called Not Alone for Teenagers. The next one will be that evening from 5:30-7 and that group is for the medical workers group, Not Alone Medical Workers. The last one will be offer is the Not Alone Adults group which will be Thursdays from 5:30-7 on April 16th. These will be meeting weekly through a zoom platform and they are free. We hope that if others need this support, that they will join the group. We would certainly hope people will take advantage of this. There is certainly a level of anxiety that is kind of permeating our entire culture. One of the things that we are seeing beyond the virus is the long-term worry and fear that is happening economically and how we are going to pull out of that as a country. People are talking about that and we got clients that have been laid off. There is certainly fear of job loss and other things as well so we would encourage everyone to take advantage of those support groups we are offering. Telehealth, all of our therapist is working remotely using

technology to counsel and work with people through this unique time in our history. We would just like to direct you to our website www.lifeworksms.com for more information. Thank you!

Craig: Lets turn our attention now to the economic impact of the business closures and just the global disruption of what we are experiencing. Obviously, a big part of a divorce case is about children, and about using good judgement as it relates to custodial arrangements. Matt let's talk a little bit about what we have seen in our practice about the economic impact of the covid-19 virus.

Matt: Right, well I think we have only started to scratch the surface of the issues of family law practitioners will be facing when it comes to the economic impact of this pandemic. I was reading earlier today, right now the projections are that as of May we will reach a 16% unemployment rate which we haven't seen the likes of that since the great depression. There are going to be more Americans and Mississippians out of work than ever have been in anybody that is currently alive lifetime.

Craig: And clearly what that means, it will impact your ability to pay alimony, child support, it will impact those things that have come to be expected regard to these divorce and custodial arrangements.

Matt: That is going to not only affect the divorce that are currently in the works, but also, I think we are going to see a huge uptick in modifications. Child support modifications and alimony modifications. People who are trying to petition the court to have their payments lower because they have lost their jobs, or their wages have been cut. That is going to be a very real thing and I know the flip side of the coin is we all often need the support that we are receiving form the non-custodial parent for child support. It is going to make things difficult for everybody. I would expect there will be a lot of those petitions coming through and frankly, I would imagine a lot of them will be granted.

Craig: TO discuss that a little bit forward, max and I tried a case here in our local community several months ago, when you finish a multi-day trial, usually it take the court time to put together their decision and put that into writing and so we had gotten a decision and in that property distribution, the court had allocated a certain amount of the wage earners retirement account to be transferred over to the lower wage earner and because of the market situation, there is not no more money in that account anymore because of the market conditions. I think that is the sort of thing that we are going to see a lot more. It is just a time of economic uncertainty. Most people that I have talked to think the economy will recover, but it is certainly not what we are experiencing right now.

Matt: Right, and if you are somebody who has unfortunately lost their job or are a business owner that has been required to close, it is important to know that in MS, you have a child support obligation. If you think that your job has been affected long term, you need to file something immediately. It will still be racking up until a decision is made but don't wait. Even if you are uncertain and thing go back to normal, you can dismiss your petition.

Craig: I couldn't agree with you more. In times of these economic uncertainties, it is really important for someone to be proactive. If you are a restaurant owner or you are in another business that has been a seasonal business, I know a lot of small boutique stores are selling dressing for Easter. The moral of the story is that if this crisis is putting you in difficult economic circumstances and you are living under a court order, you don't want to wait. Act quickly so you can receive relief. You never can go wrong with being proactive in a MS Family Law situation.

Matt: I would also along with filing, start communicating more with your ex about what is going on. Keep in mind what the other side is going through. The faster we can get through this, the faster we can get back on track.

Craig: We can take a lot about what we have been talking about and start communicating, using common sense, and call your attorney. Anyone who tells you they have it all figured out are lying but most people are trying to help care for our community and it really just comes down to common sense. Before we go, I want to talk about the court situation again. MS Courts are open. Our firm and many others are other. It is really easy to work just about anywhere in the world with our technology. I had a case that we had been having ongoing negotiations in and we were able to finally reach a settlement and in that time we had made a decision to limit our access to the public and I had a client who needed to sign papers, so what did I do? I took the papers curbside and I am a notary and I had it notarized and sign his divorce papers in the parking lot. I would say that most other law firms are trying to make those accommodations as well. Matt, any other closing thoughts?

Matt: These days seem to be waking up and it all feels like a dream and there are moments where everything seems normal and then you realize its not. I would take this opportunity to stress for everyone to stay home and band together to stay home.

Craig: Make the best of the time that you have right now. Spend time with your kids and spouse and enjoy all the time you have together now. Max, man, doing great over there. Any other thoughts for our listeners?

Max: Give this situation the respect this situation deserves and really buckle down, and we will be out of this.