



COVID-19: Supporting children and families during the restoration process

Practice tips for Out-of-Home Care Service Providers

The COVID-19 pandemic is rapidly changing the daily lives of families. Your work with them is adjusting as we work through how to keep children, carers and families safe alongside the safety of your staff.

Our shared commitment to providing quality practice to children and families remains intact. We understand your job to keep kids safe and connected may have new challenges because of the pandemic.

Below are some considerations specific to worries and concerns when progressing a restoration during the COVID-19 pandemic. This information is not exhaustive and is intended to highlight just some key areas which may be impacting on children and families.

General practice tips:

- Give information to children and families about COVID-19.
- Provide soap and check that parents caring for children (either full-time or overnight) have access to clean, running warm water in their home. Show them how to wash their hands properly.
- Ask parents if they have basic goods like medicines, thermometer, nappies, toilet paper, non-perishable foods and phone credit. If they do not, arrange for them to receive these.
- Consider how to respond safely to Aboriginal communities during the pandemic.
- Proactively organise family members to reduce isolation and plan non-professional supports.

Case planning and assessment during COVID-19

Supporting children and families during a restoration is critical during the pandemic. Case planning and assessment will need to occur regularly. Be flexible and to take into account the changing environment, and the need to support parents and meet the safety needs of children.

Family time that is part of a restoration plan or court order will continue to occur face-to-face. When planning, take into consideration good hygiene, social distancing, opportunities for outdoor meetings, the health of all parties (child, parents, carers) and any current risks.

Domestic violence

Based on [emerging evidence from natural disasters](#) there is a risk that during the COVID-19 pandemic some men will use violence and control more frequently and severely against their partners and children.

This increased risk is likely due to:

- more physical isolation for women and children because of social distancing
- women having less access to resources, extended family and community
- family units staying home together and spending more time in contained spaces with men who use violence
- family stressors such as access to goods, services and financial impacts due to job insecurity



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- use of coercive control tactics by men related directly to the pandemic
- monitoring of the woman's phone and devices by the man.

What to do

- Review existing plans. Any safety or case plans developed before the pandemic will need to be reviewed to respond to this new situation.
- Listen to his experiences, value him as a parent and a partner. Acknowledge his motivation to be a protective father and be curious about how he thinks his children experience his controlling behaviours.
- Ask what his care can look like in providing access to items, information and medical services and how others would know if he is doing these things.
- Share with him some of his children's fears and worries about COVID-19 and invite him in to help respond to this.
- Assess patterns of behavior. Understand how he is using different forms of control and violence in a variety of ways. Be curious about what these are in this new situation.
- Listen to who they can identify and draw on their own support networks, while keeping everyone well. Ask how we can support this to happen.
- Ask if she has phone credit and make sure she has enough for the weeks ahead.
- Explore what it is she needs and how you can assist.
- Search for services and supports that are available locally and negotiate how the family can access them.
- Partner with the woman about how to use her phone and internet safely.
- Discuss the usual actions and strategies that she and the children use to keep themselves safe may be affected by isolation and other pressures from the pandemic.
- Listen to what she has already been doing, build on their existing capabilities to create safety.
- If she is isolated to the home with the man, or you are limited to phone contact, identify a safe word she can use to alert you if she and the kids are not safe. Identify if there are safe family members or networks who can be quarantined with the family.
- Give her the number to the Domestic Violence line: 1800656463

Listen to [Podcast episodes by the Safe and Together Institute](#) about responding to domestic violence during COVID-19.

Helpful links

[Women's Safety NSW](#) has outlined some key government changes in responding to domestic violence during the pandemic.

Follow all [DCJ Coronavirus advice and guidelines](#) during this time.

Mental health

Parents are likely to experience increased stress, anxiety and isolation with the restrictions of the pandemic. They may have difficulty in accessing informal and formal supports and practical services and have less time away from children and caregiving responsibilities.



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What to do

- Check they have enough prescribed medications. If they access a larger supply, plan with them how they can safely store medications.
- Ask what will assist them to manage any additional stress or worry and help put this into action.
- Arrange family members to commit to specific and time-framed responsibilities to check in with each parent or carer and every child in the household to provide assistance and support.
- Contact mental health and family service providers including prescribing doctors and counsellors to develop a plan if the family are quarantined or services are providing reduced supports. Do this in partnership with the family.

Problematic use of alcohol and other substances

Parents who experience problematic use of alcohol or other substances may experience increased difficulty accessing supports, medications and services. Additional pressures such as financial and employment issues, increased isolation and child care responsibilities may increase the possibility for a lapse.

Being out in the community to access substances, as well as risks in the environments that substances are used, may place parents at greater risk of contracting COVID-19.

What to do

- Check how they will safely access methadone or other substance use medications. If there are changes to protocols because of the pandemic, find out what these are. Help them plan how they will manage these changes and plan for safe storage of methadone or other medicines.
- Find out if local support groups such as AA and NA are still taking place. Plan together how they can access alternative addiction supports if these groups, or other services, stop for a period.
- Talk through the specific stressors changes to daily life may create and what supports could help them manage these to prevent a lapse. And if they do lapse, what they can do.
- Actively organise family members and support services to plan caregiving responsibilities and supports (where the child has been restored).

Neglect

Children who are experiencing neglect, most particularly environmental, physical or medical neglect, may be vulnerable to contracting COVID-19. They may develop more serious symptoms if they do contract it, and not receive timely and appropriate medical attention.

What to do

- Find out about any existing health conditions each child may have. Pay particular attention to conditions that may increase their vulnerability to COVID-19 such as asthma, respiratory



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illness, heart abnormalities or malnutrition. Seek medical advice about any health conditions.

- Find out about any disabilities children may have that reduce their ability to wash their hands.
- Make sure families have access to soap, clean water and wherever possible, hand sanitiser.
- Ask if they are having extra difficulties access food, toilet paper or other goods. Arrange for them to receive these where available. Make sure they have phone credit.
- Make sure that the family home has heating for colder evenings and family members have warm clothes as colder weather comes.
- Create a plan together about what to do if one of the family members becomes sick, including who to contact, how to get there, what symptoms to watch for and any changes to sleeping arrangements.
- Develop a plan for who might care for the children if a parent becomes sick and how this will happen.
- Find out if there are any changes to their usual support network as a result of the pandemic. This may include Elders or grandparents who have helped with children who may now not be able to assist, or services that may not be limited. Activate family networks, especially during periods when the children are in less contact with community.

Culturally safe practice with Aboriginal families and communities

Many Aboriginal families may be more vulnerable to getting sick and being sicker during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Aboriginal people most at risk are those who are:

- Elders
- experiencing pre-existing conditions like diabetes, heart problems, lung illness and smoking
- living in remote communities with less access to health services and resources.

Seeking Aboriginal consultation is more important now than ever. Seek advice from your local [Aboriginal Medical Service](#) before going out to small and remote communities.

What this means for your practice

Consideration	What to do
Aboriginal communities have a strong connection to family and social ways of life, so keeping a distance from people to stop the spread of COVID-19 can be hard.	Listen , respect and acknowledge what families believe works best to keep these connections strong, while keeping everyone well and safe (especially the most vulnerable). Ask how you can support them.



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<p>These strong family and community networks are the key to keeping Aboriginal children safe and cared for during the pandemic.</p>	<p>Listen and observe the ways families will draw on their own support network, while keeping everyone well.</p> <p>Ask how you can support safe connections so children are not isolated from their usual supports.</p>
<p>Community leaders and families are already taking measures to protect their communities.</p>	<p>Consult with the ‘go- to’ people locally in families, community and DCJ.</p> <p>Listen to what is working well and how you can increase access and give practical assistance to what families need to keep safe and well – without introducing more risk or fear.</p>
<p>Remote communities may have less access to health services and necessary resources. Some families will be reluctant to seek medical or social support due to fear of what it will mean for their children</p>	<p>Listen to what families need.</p> <p>Ask for ways we can support access to culturally safe medical care and resources for families - without bringing more risk into their community.</p> <p>Follow through on finding ways to support families or get them access to support services and resources so that they can get through the pandemic.</p>
<p>Particular language or words could cause fear or distrust amongst Aboriginal people.</p>	<p>Share information using straight-forward words – think about the impact of words like infection <i>control</i>, social <i>isolation</i>, and <i>government mandates</i> on families.</p> <p>Wherever possible, share information developed for Aboriginal communities. Helpful links are provided below.</p> <p>Listen to families and community for the best way to talk about keeping well and safe.</p>
<p>Children in care may have limited or postponed family time during the pandemic and less access to cultural activities, community members and events.</p>	<p>Connect with the child’s cultural network.</p> <p>Listen to their suggestions about how the child can continue to maintain cultural connections in ways that are safe. This may include phone or video calls and non-group cultural activities, cultural books and resources.</p>

Helpful links

For health information and resources about COVID-19 specifically about and for Aboriginal communities:

[National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation](#)

[Australian Indigenous Health/InfoNet](#)

[Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council NSW](#)



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Find your local [Aboriginal Medical Service](#).

Additional information and where to seek assistance

Additional information on home visiting, family time and case planning is available in the [COVID-19 FAQs for PSP NGOs](#).

If you need assistance with your restoration assessment, planning or casework please reach out to either your Permanency Coordinator or local CFDU.