



COVID-19: Helping children in care stay connected

Practice tips for Out-of-Home Care Service Providers

Throughout the pandemic children are likely to experience much more physical isolation than usual. It is essential however, that physical distancing does not mean social disconnection.

Children will need emotional connections more than ever. Proactive and creative strategies can be used to support their connections over coming months.

Any changes to the way family time occurs as outlined below should be integrated into the child's OOHC case plan to make sure their various needs are being considered holistically.

What this means for your practice

Practice considerations	What to do
<p>Children will need continued connection with family members and community (including their peer groups) to support their sense of belonging and security and to reduce feelings of worry and loneliness.</p>	<p>Creative methods can be used to support these connections. Many digital formats can be used but it will be important to make sure family members, including siblings, have data and phone credit in order to use these methods. Ideas include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Video services such as Skype, WhatsApp, FaceTime, Google Met, Google Duo or Google Hangouts - Verbal options such as phone in addition to the apps above - Photo sharing apps - Family music playlists to share songs with each other - Gaming apps that could support siblings to play computer games together - Letter-writing: build this into the child's routine and send letters and craft in the post.
<p>Children and families will need to understand why there are changes, what this means and ask questions about this.</p>	<p>Ask the carer what conversations they have had with the child about COVID-19 and changes to family time.</p> <p>Make sure that you also have a direct conversation with the child about COVID-19 and changes to family time. Read more tips about talking to children and families about the pandemic</p> <p>Be reassuring and calm. Give them space to ask questions. Use social stories and visual aids to support this conversation.</p> <p>Let them know that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They will be able to still be in contact with their family - You will help them and their carer to create a plan that suits them - You will listen to their ideas about how they would like this to happen. <p>Contact the child's family members and explain that their health, and that of the child, is a priority, which is why different forms of family time will be arranged. Give them the opportunity to ask questions. Show empathy if they are upset, angry or scared.</p>
<p>Because routines are likely to be very different and to make</p>	<p>Listen to what methods will work best from the perspective of the child, parents and other family members and carers.</p>



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<p>sure family time does continue, it will be important that a clear, written plan is created.</p>	<p>Allow for creativity – help people to brainstorm what could work.</p> <p>There may be practical barriers like data to assist with online connection or a carer having limited experience with digital options. If this is the case, provide practical assistance or find a member of the network who can give this assistance.</p> <p>Wherever possible, if family groups usually get together at the same time, arrange for this group connection to occur via options outlined above.</p> <p>Develop a clear schedule with times and people involved. Family members may need more support to remember these arrangements if they are not occurring face-to-face.</p> <p>If the child is young, try to arrange methods where the child can see their family’s faces and hear their voices at the same time.</p> <p>Consider how siblings can connect in fun and developmentally interesting ways</p>
<p>Children and parents are likely to feel very worried for each other as a result of the pandemic. They may be scared that the other will get sick and not be able to help.</p>	<p>Ask the child if they feel worried about any family members, what these worries are and if they have any ideas about how you and their carer can help them feel less worried.</p> <p>Develop a plan to support the child with these worries and check in with them regularly to update them about how their family members are doing and see how they are feeling.</p> <p>Aboriginal children may feel worried about Elders in their community. Be sure to ask their family and their mob so you can update the child.</p> <p>Develop a plan with the parents about how you will update them about their child’s health and how often. Let them know you would like to keep updated with them so you can let their child know too.</p>
<p>Children will have less opportunities to connect with culture through cultural activities, access to community and group activities.</p>	<p>Carry out a cultural consultation and connect with the child’s family to talk about opportunities for the child to access their culture during the pandemic.</p> <p>Talk with the child about how they would feel most connected to culture during the pandemic. Ask the carer about their ideas.</p> <p>Develop a clear plan to support the child’s daily connection to culture. This may be through language, music, books and access to Elders or cultural or religious leaders via phone for storytelling.</p>