



# COVID-19: Talking with children and families

## 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.

Some of the children and families you work with may experience barriers to receiving accessible information about COVID-19. Help them make sense of what this means for their daily life, their family and what they should plan for.

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.

Stay up to date on [official advice from NSW Health](#).

### Why you should talk about the pandemic

Talking about the pandemic will need to be a part of your conversations with children, carers and families so you can:

- support them to understand the risks and how to keep themselves safe
- talk to parents about how the pandemic may increase the existing difficulties they face that put their child at risk
- let them know about any changes in the ways you may work with them
- put plans in place to support them and maintain connections with others
- understand if they are experiencing symptoms or have been diagnosed so you can protect others and yourself.

### How to talk about it

What you talk about with children and families will vary depending on the child's case plan goal. There are specific considerations covered below in other topics. Here are some basic aspects that are relevant to any child or family we work with.

**Ask what they know about the pandemic.** Explain key areas including:

- what the virus is and what the symptoms are
- how the virus is contracted
- how to reduce risk by keeping hands clean and not touching face
- who is most at risk
- the current official advice about social distancing and other instructions
- [what to do and where to go](#) if anyone in their family gets sick.

**Use simple words and specific descriptions.** And be conscious of words that could cause fear or distrust such as isolation, control and mandates.

Use basic words and stay away from jargon. For example:

Don't say 'use basic hygiene practices'.

Instead you should describe what these are: 'you need to wash your hands with soap and warm water for 20 seconds after you go to the toilet and before eating, try not to touch your face or other people's faces; cough and sneeze into your elbow or tissue and then throw that tissue in the bin.'



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Don't say just say 'social distancing'. Instead describe the current advice simply.

Demonstrate hand washing wherever possible.

**Give them translated information** if they cannot read or understand English fluently and if they have limited English verbal skills.

### What to do

- Talk to parents before and after an interpreter is used.
- Explain confidentiality to parents and reaffirm this with the interpreter.
- Use very clear and simple language when using an interpreter to avoid misunderstandings.
- Repeat information consistently and regularly. Especially if someone has difficulties remembering information or understanding new concepts.

### Useful resource

- [Translated public health information](#)

### Use visual aids like posters, handouts and videos.

It is important that any COVID-19 information you share with families come from official sources.

[Healthdirect have a variety of visual aids and videos](#)

Let them know that the way you work with them may be a little different. This may mean checking in more often by phone for instance, but that this may not always be the case as you may visit too.

Let them know that our services to the community are still happening and reassure them that they can still contact your office. Make sure to let them know that these changes are to help make sure that they are kept safe so that they do not assume it is simply about worker protection.

### How to talk to the child

It is important to include children in conversations in ways that they can understand and so that they can learn the skills to stop the spread of germs. If they are kept in the dark this can make them worry more.

Some children who do not attend school regularly or who have parents facing problems may not have had a caring adult talk with them about COVID-19. Answer their questions and show them:

- how to wash their hands while singing a song if age appropriate
- how to cough and sneeze into their elbow or a tissue.

### Ask about their worries

All children are likely to experience worries at the moment but children we work with may have additional or unique worries. For instance if their parent is not well because of problematic use of substances or mental health issues the child might be particularly worried how they will cope. Children in care may worry about their siblings and family members who live away from them. Children might also be experiencing changes at home due to foster siblings being home from school or a change in employment for the carers.

Some children may worry about Elders in their community or migrant children may be concerned about family and friends from their country of origin.



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Be reassuring, curious, warm and ask them what you can do to help them feel less worried.

### **Understand their role in the family**

Learn about the role that siblings may have in keeping each other safe. We do not want to take this role away from them, but nor do we want them to feel the pressure of burdens. It is important to understand what additional strains and pressures they may be experiencing in the context of the pandemic.

### **Access helpful resources**

These resources can help you plan how to talk with the child but can also be provided to parents, carers and supports so that they can use them too.

Use this COVID-19 social story as a tool to have a supportive conversation.

[UNICEF](#) has practical tips about how to talk to children about the virus.

[Behind the News](#) on the ABC has some helpful videos that talk about the virus, hand washing and answers children's questions.

The [Australian Childhood Foundation](#) has set out some thoughtful advice about how parents and carers can emotionally support children during the pandemic.

### **Additional information and where to seek assistance**

Information is available for service providers about the impact of COVID-19 on service delivery in the [FAQs for PSP NGOs](#).

If you need assistance or have questions please reach out to either your Permanency Coordinator or local CFDU.