

Protecting children during COVID-19

Tips for social workers and social welfare practitioners

#3 – Providing psychosocial support

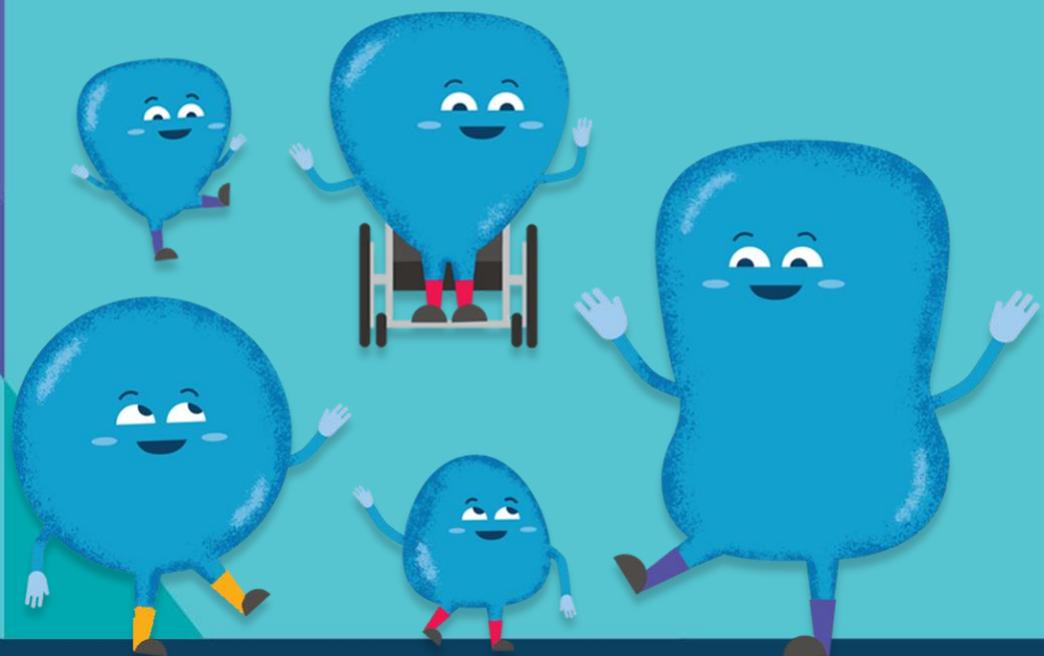
Uncertainty around COVID-19 and its impacts can be scary for us as professionals just as for the children and families we have responsibility for.

Consider the following messages for 'virtual' psychosocial support to both the children and the caregiver(s).

Provide 'virtual' psychosocial support by maintaining regular communication through phone, social media or other virtual contact such as skype or zoom

- In general, keep children close to their parents and family
- Talk about feelings and children's concerns
- Talk about feelings and encourage the caregiver
- Encourage the caregiver to take care of the children and themselves
- Maintain familiar routines
- Get facts, don't let rumours affect you
- Recognise your strengths

Next: messages for each of the above areas of psychosocial support



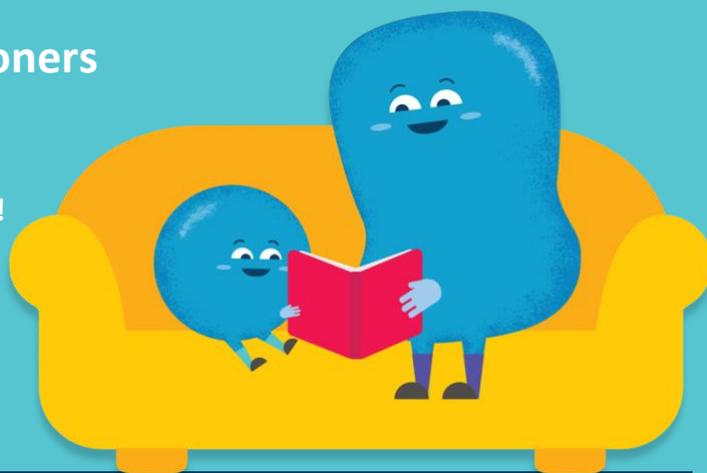
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Thank you for continuing to support children and families in need, even in these difficult times. You are heroes.



In general, keep children close to their parents and family

Consider appropriate family-based care if a child needs to be separated from his or her primary carer for safety reasons, either because the single caregiver is ill with COVID-19 and temporary alternative care must be sought for the child(ren), or because the child(ren) should be removed because of risks to their protection or safety. Institutional care should always be a last resort. A social worker or community partner must continue to regularly follow up on the child.

If the child is separated from their parents, explain – to the extent possible - the reason for the separation and the time frame of what will happen next, and ensure regular contact with parents and carers is maintained, such as twice-daily scheduled telephone or video calls or other age-appropriate communication (e.g. social media).

Talk about feelings and children's concerns

Allow children to freely express their feelings without interruption. For children struggling to express themselves, help them find positive ways to express feelings such as fear and sadness. Sometimes engaging in a creative activity, such as storytelling, can facilitate this process. Children feel relieved if they can express and communicate their feelings in a safe and supportive environment.

Reassure children that it is normal to feel sad, stressed, confused, scared or angry during a crisis, and that many other children and adults feel the same – we're in this together.

Encourage the child to talk to people they trust, their friends and family.

Note that we all go through times where we feel anxious, and point out that the situations that cause our anxiety are usually temporary, and we get through it. This situation will be the same.

Remember that children often take their emotional cues from the important adults in their lives, so how adults respond to the crisis is very important. It's important that adults manage their own emotions well and remain calm, listen to children's concerns and speak kindly to them and reassure them. If appropriate and depending on the age, encourage parents/caregivers to hug their children and repeat that they love them and are proud of them. This will make them feel better and safer.



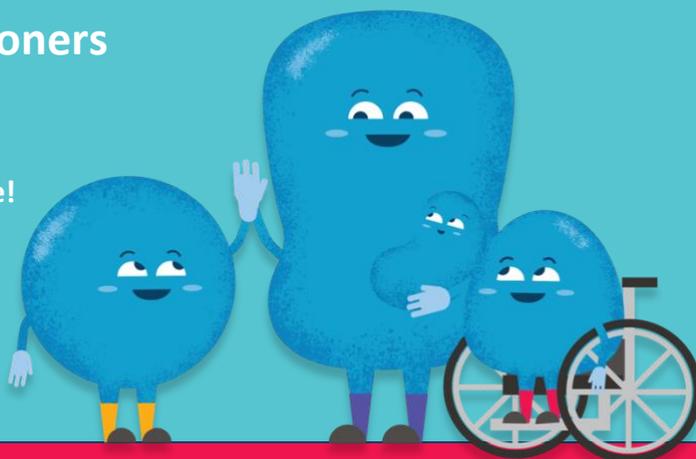
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Talk about feelings and encourage the caregiver

Recognise that it is normal to feel overwhelmed and panic at times because of not having the know-how to deal with additional roles that they would have to play

Emphasise the importance of maintaining social connections and encourage the caregiver to talk to other adults whom they trust

Encourage the care giver to share their feelings with the children so that they too can understand that she/he does not have all the answers

Encourage the caregiver to see the children as being able to "help" and therefore treat them as active participants in whatever issue is being discussed

Encourage the caregiver to talk to a social worker if they feel overwhelmed. Help create a plan for where to go to and how to seek help for physical and mental health needs if required

Encourage the caregiver to take care of the children AND themselves

Maintain a healthy lifestyle:

- eat sufficient and nutritious food
- keep regular sleep routines and sleep at least eight hours every night
- exercise at home or outside while maintaining social distancing
- stay in contact with family and friends at home and by email and phone

Avoid using unhelpful coping strategies such as smoking, alcohol or other drugs to deal with your emotions

If the caregiver has an underlying health condition, encourage them to make sure to have access to any medications that they are currently using and to activate their social contacts to provide them with assistance, if needed



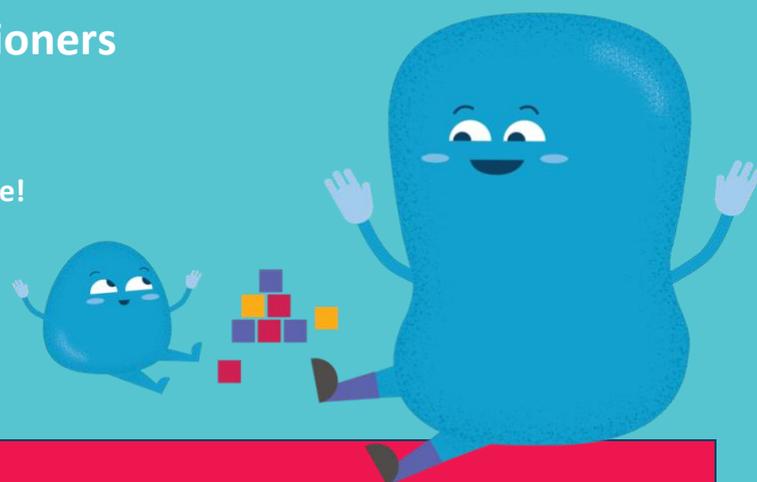
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Maintain familiar routines

Maintain regular routines and schedules as much as possible, including meal times, time to wake up, bedtimes, exercise, start of the school/work day

Get dressed even when everyone stays within the home

Encourage children to continue to play and socialize with others, even if only within the family at times of confinement

Get facts, don't let rumours affect you

Get the facts. Gather information that will help you accurately determine your risk so that you can take reasonable precautions. Find a credible source you can trust such as the UNICEF, Malaysian Ministry of Health or WHO websites

- <https://www.unicef.org/malaysia/coronavirus-covid-19>
- [UNICEF's global Covid information hub](#)
- [Malaysian Ministry of Health](#)
- [World Health Organisation's Covid 19 page](#)

Limit worry and agitation by reducing the time you and your family spend watching or listening to media coverage that is upsetting to you or your family members

Recognise your strengths

Draw on skills you have used in the past that have helped you to manage previous life's adversities and use those skills to help you manage your emotions during the challenging time of this outbreak

