

Protecting children during COVID-19

Tips for social workers and social welfare practitioners

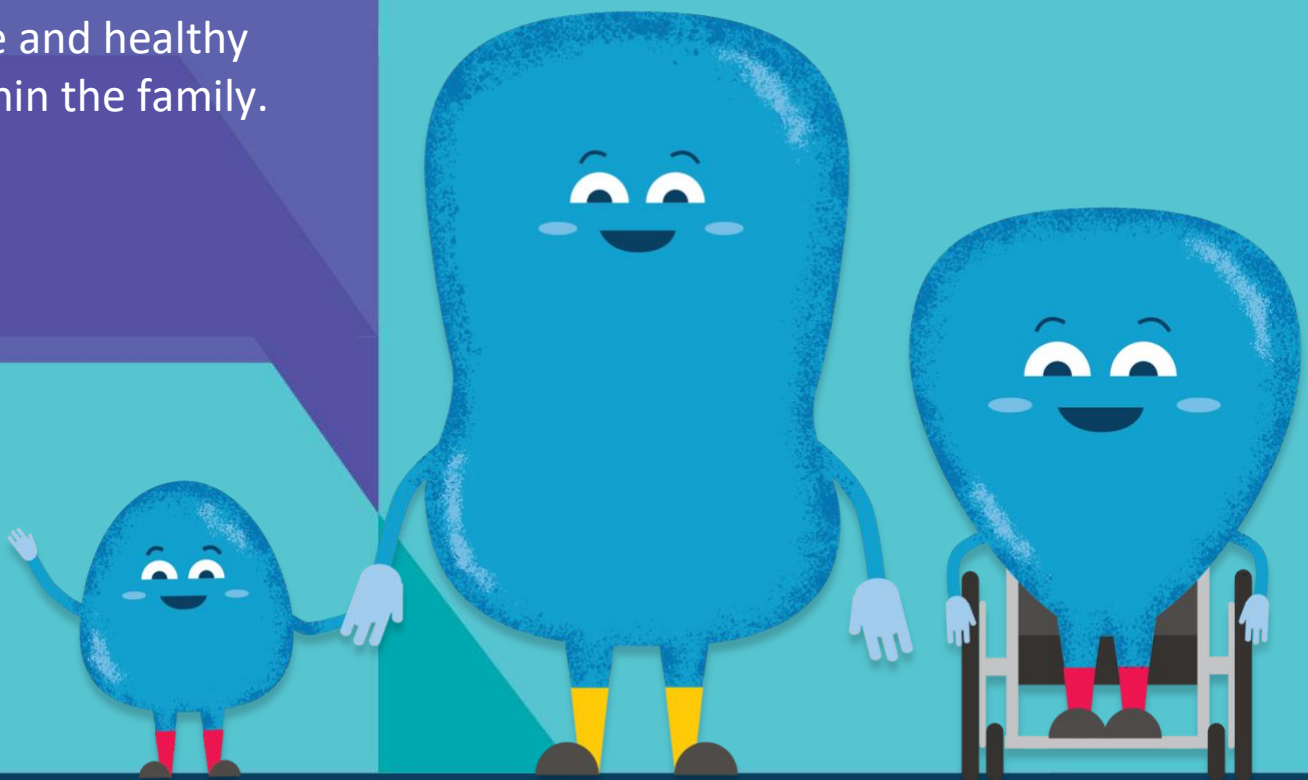
#9 – Reunifying children from residential care centres with their families

When a care centre reunifies or sends children home to their families during and after this time of COVID-19, there are several things that must be done to ensure that the child's transition is safe and that the child will remain safe and healthy within the family.

To keep children safe during transition and after reunification, give attention to:

- Engaging the child and family throughout the process
- Documenting all preparations as well as the transition
- Infection control

Next: guidance for each of the above points of attention



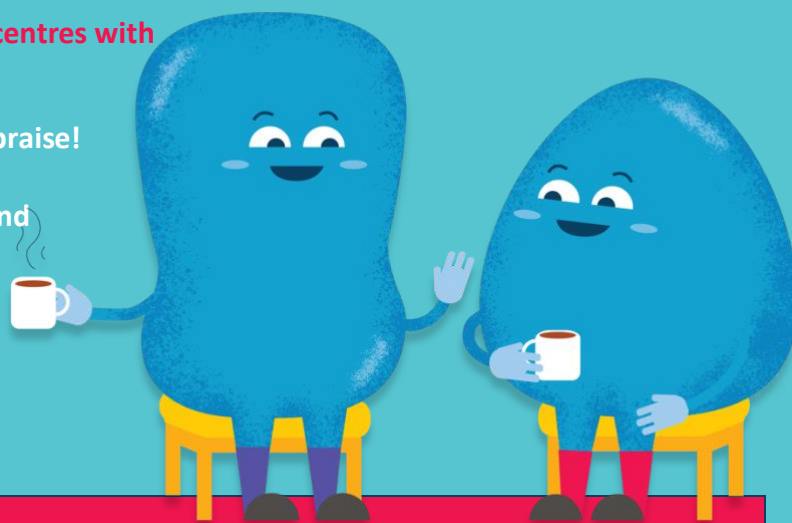
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Social workers and practitioners, you deserve praise!

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



Engage the child and family throughout the process

Conduct a family assessment

- Contact the parents/caregiver by phone or WhatsApp to ascertain the ability of parents/caregivers to
 - meet the child's immediate basic needs and
 - follow Ministry of Health guidance on COVID-19 preventative measures.
- Also assess other essential needs: education, nutrition, psychosocial needs, etc.

Talk to the child about what is going to happen and ensure that they understand what is happening.

If the child expresses safety/security related concerns, take notes and discuss with social workers or child care officers to seek for alternative options.

Refer to TIPS for providing psychosocial support (#3) for additional guidance on how to address the child's concerns.

Notify parents or caregivers of the child before the child exits the institution.

Involve the social worker and/or child care officer and local authority representative in all communications and preparations, both in the location of the residential care centre and in the location where the family resides.

This can be done **via phone, email, text or WhatsApp**.



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Document all preparations as well as the transition

Prepare the child's file and a full documentation of all preparations made and persons involved to facilitate the transition

Document all communication with key actors involved in the transition, including key actors in the locality where the family resides and key actors in the locality of the residential care centre

Before the child leaves the child care institution, **ensure all necessary administrative forms** have been complied with and **include the following information about the child:**

- full name of child,
- date of birth,
- recent photo of the child,
- address where the child is going,
- names of parents/caregiver that the child will be staying with and relationship of each parent/caregiver to the child,
- contact information for the child,
- date of exit from the residential care centre,
- contact information for the parents/caregiver,
- name and contact number of the social worker and/or child care officer and local authority representative in the location where the child is being placed

Keep a copy of the completed forms in the child's file and **share a copy with the social worker** and/or child care officer and local authority representative, in the location of the residential care centre and in the location where the family resides.

Provide the family with copies of the child's file including **names and contact information of all persons** who were **involved in the transition**: representative of the residential care centre, the social worker and/or child care officer, and local authority representative

Follow up with the child after they have returned to their family using phone, WhatsApp or other social media to ascertain if the child's health, safety and developmental needs are being met.

- The first call should be two days after the reunification and then, if the child is not considered to be at risk, once a week.
- If monitoring reveals that the child is at increased risk, the frequency of monitoring should be increased.

Work with the social worker and/or child care officer and local authority representative in the location where the family resides to identify available support services or address any noted concerns. Refer to TIPS for virtual monitoring (#7) for additional guidance on how to conduct virtual monitoring.



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Infection control

Provide the child and their family/caregivers **child-friendly messages about coronavirus** as per the Ministry of Health guidelines such as the **COVID-19 Parenting Tips**.

If children are required to isolate upon returning home – the social worker will need to ensure this is physically possible in the house they're going to, as well as provide psycho-social support

