



advocate
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prevent

Helping children during the Corona Virus may look different

Every household across America has been impacted in some way by the Corona Virus. This may be due to stay-at-home orders, school cancellations, social distancing, a positive COVID-19 test, or an exposure to a person with a positive COVID-19 test. Youth who would normally be in the classroom could now be in a situation where they are exposed to parental or caregiver substance use, possession, distribution, manufacturing, or cultivation of both legal and illegal drugs. Many states have allowed liquor stores and marijuana dispensaries to remain open as essential businesses, increasing access and availability at a time when many individuals are facing uncertainties.

During this difficult time, professionals have had to quickly adapt and are trying to connect with children virtually and can identify children who may be at risk in a time when no one may have eyes on them.

What can professionals do to help children at risk:

- Connect with the child and siblings via Zoom or other webinar-based calls if possible so a visual can be made
- Ask to talk to and/or see child(ren) if you are at their residence or they are in your office (law enforcement, doctors, service providers, etc.)
- Talk with parents on Zoom or webinar-based calls
- Connect with children via email as necessary or available
- Connect with children you feel are at risk more frequently
- If you see signs of children (sidewalk chalk, toys, bottles, etc.), ask to see or talk to the children

What to look or listen for when on a phone call or Zoom or other webinar-based call:

- Is what you can see in the background dangerous?
- Are there hazards in the background such as drug paraphernalia, disarray or broken items?
- Is the child acting out or acting different than they normally act?
- Does the child appear to be afraid?
 - Are they shifting in their seat?
 - Are they making eye contact?
- Can you hear yelling in the background?
- Can you hear any other inappropriate conversations in the background?
- When a parent or caregiver walks within view, is the child's behavior the same or does the child act differently?

Be aware that these issues can make a difference for endangered children.

If you are a professional and suspect that a child may be at risk of harm in a household due to substance abuse or drug activity, you have a mandatory duty to contact your child welfare hotline and report. In the event that you do suspect child abuse or neglect, contact 911 if you believe the child(ren) is in immediate danger. Otherwise, contact your local child welfare or law enforcement office to make a report. For a list of child abuse and neglect reporting toll-free numbers by state, visit: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/organizations>.

Resources

Whether you are looking for assistance on how to speak to children about this pandemic or need tips on how to engage them, check out these resources:

- Guidance on communicating with children about COVID-19
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/talking-with-children.html>
- A local perspective on “How to Talk to Children about the COVID-19 Crisis”
https://actmissouri-my.sharepoint.com/:v:/g/personal/dclosso_actmissouri_org/EXEkgMov6nlCr5PWp0HuPVwBVK87IhIyos2s2mWj6Qu3JQ?e=tvu6GF
- Tips on helping kids adjust to online learning during COVID-19
<https://www.unicefusa.org/stories/helping-kids-adjust-online-learning-during-coronavirus-pandemic/37106>

Additional Resources

Here are some additional resources to assist professionals:

- Ways to connect with National DEC:
<https://nationaldec.org/contact-us/> or www.nationaldec.org
- Ways to connect with Drug Free America Foundation: <https://www.dfaf.org/>
- Ways to connect with ACT Missouri: <https://actmissouri.org/>
- Children at Risk: Evidence Sheet
<https://nationaldec.org/wp-content/uploads/Children-At-Risk-Evidence-Sheet-FINAL-DRAFT.pdf>
- Drug Endangered Children Online Training Modules
<https://www.nationaldec.org/training>