



COVID-19 Guidance: Family School Engagement Resources, Best Practices, and Considerations

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide educators with ideas and resources¹ for positively and proactively engaging students and their families/caregivers during times of prolonged school closure due to a large-scale emergency, such as the current coronavirus pandemic. These situations can put additional pressure on already-vulnerable children, youth, and families, making meaningful connections with others all the more important.

Ideas for Educators to Engage with Students, Families, and Caregivers

If permitted by their school district policy, educators are strongly encouraged to maintain contact with their students by:

- Calling students to let them know you are there for them and ask if they need help. The following list of broad, open-ended questions may be useful:
 - How are you feeling? Do you feel safe?
 - How has your caretaker (mom/dad/grandma/grandpa/etc.) been feeling?
 - What have you been doing while you're not in school? Are you finding enough to do?
 - When did you last eat and what have you been eating?
 - Do you miss school? Why/why not?
- Sharing aspects of your life to allow them to see you working through some of their same challenges.
- Maintaining a consistent pattern of communication (e.g., an email every day at 9 am) even if to just say hello or share a picture.
- Sharing hopeful messages. Discussing the topic of COVID-19 when appropriate. Don't ignore the topic; it's okay to talk about worries and fears.²

Considerations When Reaching Out

- **Self** - Be mindful of your health and how your response impacts your students: [ChildCare Education Institute \(CCEI\): March 2020 Newsletter - Self-Care: How Can I Practice More Self-Care?](#)
- **Student** - Consider culturally unique differences, developmental ages and stages, and abilities: [Iowa Department of Public Health Special Considerations for High Risk Groups](#).
- **Barriers** - Consider language barriers/interpretation services: [Translated COVID-19 Health Education Materials](#).

¹ The resources in this document have not been approved or endorsed by the Iowa Department of Education. They are provided as a courtesy to the reader, and in an expedited manner, to address that national emergency associated with COVID-19.

² Adapted from the Institute of Education Sciences: How Can Educators and Families Support Students' Mental Health and Social Emotional Needs During The COVID-19 Outbreak?

- **Practice Active Listening** - Listen to student needs, and how the situation impacts your students.
- **Response** - Be prepared and know what to do with the information received from parents or students. Have a list of community resource providers to address topics that may crop up in the conversation and reflect on resiliency: [CCEI: March 2020 Newsletter - Self-Care: How Can I Help My Students Practice Self-Care?](#)
- **Referral** - If families have an identified need for assistance with obtaining food, childcare, or other forms of social assistance, be prepared to refer them to resources like 211 to help meet this need.
- **Safety** - Report suspicions of abuse or neglect to the Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-362-2178 and be prepared to provide identifying information and the whereabouts of the child. If you believe a child is in imminent danger, call 911 immediately. Remember, a caregiver's lack of access to resources like food and childcare does not mean the child is being neglected.

Tips for Educators to Share with Families and Caregivers

- **Remain calm and positive.** Reassure children that they are going to be safe and that you as their caretaker are taking steps to ensure that you will stay safe as well.
- **Maintain a schedule.** Keep activities as consistent and normal as possible even if your normal routine changes.
- **Create an environment that allows children to ask questions that matter to them.** Let them know it is okay to be afraid or mad. Ask questions so you can help them identify and cope with their feelings.
- **Monitor and consider limiting exposure to media** and adult conversations about COVID-19. Too much information on one topic can lead to anxiety. If your children are watching television, try to watch with them or make sure you are available to answer questions about what they have heard.
- **Encourage healthy behaviors:** eating well, sleeping well, and playing outside (while still practicing social distancing). More than ever, schedule time for interaction, play, and fun.
- **Use their questions as an opportunity** to let them know what they can do to avoid getting COVID-19. Give children information that is truthful and appropriate for the age and developmental level of the child.
- **Provide opportunities for children to help**, whether it is washing their hands or showing kindness to others (drawing a picture for someone, writing a letter), children benefit from being able to contribute and make a positive difference.

Additional Resources

- National Association of School Nurses and National Association of School Psychologists: [Talking to Children about COVID-19: A Parent Resource](#). Also available in [Spanish](#).
- Child Trends: [Resources for Supporting Children's Emotional Well-being during the COVID-19 Pandemic](#).
- Early Learning Nation: [A Parent's Guide to Surviving COVID-19: 8 Strategies to Keep Children Healthy and Happy](#).
- Harvard Graduate School of Education: [Helping Children Cope with Coronavirus and Uncertainty](#).
- National Association of School Psychologists: [Talking to Children About COVID-19 \(Coronavirus\): A Parent Resource](#).

Iowa Emergency Resources

- State of Iowa [Coronavirus Information website](#).
- [Food Banks and Shelters](#). *Please do not go to a Food Bank without first calling for an appointment.*
- [Local Public Health Agency Community Contact List](#).
- Iowa Department of Human Services [Community Contact List of Mental Health Providers](#).
- [Your Life Iowa](#) - Crisis support for anyone facing problems with alcohol, drugs, gambling mental health, or suicidal thoughts. For crisis support, call 855-581-8111, chat live, or text 855-895-8398.
- [Please Pass the Love Teen COVID-19 Support](#) - Safe, on-line support *for teens only*.