fostering CONNECTIONS

Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare

STAYING AT HOME TOOLKIT FOR FOSTER CARERS

DEALING WITH THE DISTANCE

Suggestions, hints and resources for Victorian families providing foster care during COVID-19.

MacKillop Family Services

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The Stay at Home Toolkit

This toolkit has been put together as a resource to help carers of children and young people in foster care when children in your care are home for long periods of time, such as during times of restricted movement and physical distancing.

Please note: social or physical distancing, by this we mean actions to help reduce the risk of infection and slow the spread of coronavirus. Throughout this toolkit we'll use the term 'physical distancing', to clarify that while we are physically creating space, our social connections are more important than ever.

How to use this resource

This kit provides suggestions, tips, and resources for foster care households.

Each section includes:

- Key points
- Why this is important
- Some practical ideas
- Tips and suggestions
- Further resources

As COVID-19 is a developing situation we urge you to regularly check for updates to advice and restrictions at: https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus-covid-19-daily-update

For information on COVID-19 including:

- Key terms
- Accessing relief packages
- Self-quarantine and isolation
- Mass gatherings
- Aged-care facilities

Please visit: https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus

Disclaimer

Fostering Connections, part of the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, has prepared this resource with support from the Department of Health and Human Services and the Foster Care Association of Victoria to assist foster carers during COVID-19. This resource provides general information only; your foster care agency is the best place to seek information specific to the young person in your care.

Cultural information generously provided by Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency and Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation.

Many of the resources provided are accessible online – always ensure that supervision of children and young people follows the eCommissioner's best-practice recommendations. See page 21 for more details.

With thanks to carers

We are all doing our best to get by in a changing, difficult time. Thank you for your incredible commitment to Victorian children and young people.

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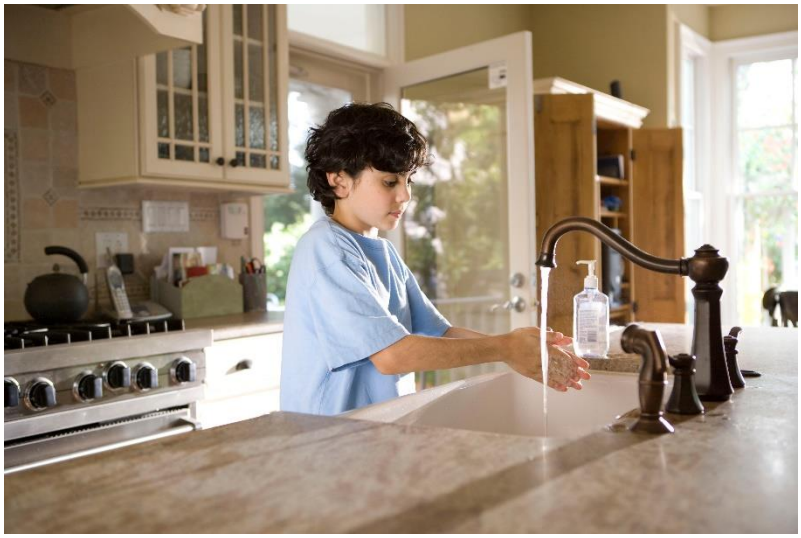
1. Be prepared



Key points

- Being on the same page helps keep households together
- Make a commitment to work together as a household

Overview

Your household should be starting on the same page as much as possible. This means to understand and agree with what is being done or suggested. Try to create a clear understanding about what is going on, what you *do* know, and what you *don't* know. Go through the COVID-19 information available at https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus with the adults in your house and take time to work through any questions and concerns that arise.

Getting your household ready

A household plan can help protect your health and the health of those you care about. Check out the **Household Isolation Plan** template on page 9.

Talk with the people who need to be included in your plan. How will you and your family manage if you needed to stay at home for 2 to 3 weeks? There are certain supplies you may need if your household is self-isolating or quarantined at home. Things like non-perishable food items, soap, toilet paper, tissues, feminine care products, nappies and pet food. Fill prescriptions of essential medicines so you have enough if you need to stay home. **There is no need to hoard or panic buy, only purchase a little extra.**

If you have a child or young person in your care and you have concerns about the impact of isolation, write these down. Identify any difficulties or barriers you anticipate in caring for a biological child or child in your care should your household become infected or if restrictions increase. Plan ways to care for those who might be at greater risk for serious complications. If you are concerned that you, or a child in your care, is in a high-risk category for COVID-19, discuss this with your agency and case manager in order to plan for how this will be managed.

Talking about COVID-19 with children and young people

Young people tend to worry more when they aren't given any information, so it's important to have a direct discussion about the outbreak to reassure them, help them understand what is happening and what they can do to help.

Set the emotional tone: if you sound panicked while talking about it, they may panic too.

Take cues from them. You can start the conversation by asking what they know about the situation. Give them the opportunity to ask any questions they have.

Provide them with the basic facts and answer any follow-up questions they have honestly. If you don't know the answer, look it up. Show your children that it is a good idea to check what they are hearing through their friends and media.

Help them feel empowered by teaching them good hygiene and physical distancing techniques.

Ensure that communication about and with the child's birth family includes discussion of how they are staying safe. Make a plan for how family contact will work if you're in isolation and consider downloading apps that allow for video calls to help maintain connections.

Age-appropriate explanations

Early primary school	Upper primary school	High school
Balance COVID-19 facts with reassurances that their schools and homes are safe and that adults are there to help keep them healthy and to take care of them if they do get sick. Discuss handwashing as a step in staying healthy. Use language such as "adults are working hard to keep you safe."	More vocal in asking questions about whether they truly are safe and what will happen if COVID-19 comes to their school or community. They may need assistance separating reality from rumour and fantasy. Discuss efforts of school and community leaders to prevent germs from spreading.	Able to discuss the issue in a more in-depth (adult-like) fashion and can be referred directly to appropriate sources of COVID-19 facts. Provide honest, accurate, and factual information about the current status of COVID-19. Having such knowledge can help them feel a sense of control.

Suggested points to emphasize when talking to children about COVID-19

- Adults at home and school are taking care of your health and safety. If you have concerns, please talk to an adult you trust.
- Be reassuring but truthful. Tell them about the measures being put in place to slow the spread, and let them know that young people and children usually experience milder symptoms.
- Not everyone will get the COVID-19. Schools and health officials are being especially careful to make sure as few people as possible get sick.
- It is important that everyone treat each other with respect and not jump to conclusions about who may or may not have COVID-19.

Be aware of how you talk about the outbreak when young people are present. Remain positive and prevention-focused within earshot.

Make a household commitment

Sit down with your household and make a commitment to:

- Use best practice hygiene to keep one another healthy (use the posters on pages 10 and 11 to help your family understand the hygiene practices that will help to prevent COVID-19)
- Acknowledge that this is a difficult and uncertain time, and that everybody is doing their best
- Given each other space where possible
- Treat one another with respect and kindness
- Recognise the signs of stress and when some quiet time may be required
- Talk about concerns and fears in an open, honest manner
- Seek out opportunities to make the most of the time spent inside together

The adjustment reaction

During times of crisis, many people will experience adjustment reactions. This is where you may feel stressed, hypervigilant, and obsessively read about a crisis.

You may spend additional time worrying. Going through an adjustment reaction is difficult to avoid, but if you can consider and plan early, you'll be more resilient and better positioned to cope and think rationally.

Be forgiving of yourself and others who go through these reactions. The spread of the virus will be genuinely disruptive, difficult, and for some people dangerous. Taking real steps to mitigate the effects it will have on you or your family isn't a silly thing to do — it's a responsible one.

Being aware of this reaction can help you avoid unnecessary panic buying or hoarding, while still letting you process the stress of the situation positively.

You can read more about this reaction here:
http://www.psandman.com/col/teachable.htm

Tips and suggestions

If in lockdown, physical distancing, or going into isolation or quarantine, write a list of what you need to do ahead of time, including:

- Confirming your plan with your agency and/or case worker
- Informing the school
- Ensuring you have any medications required
- Doing a small additional shop (2 weeks extra only)
- Consider what appointments you have coming up in your household; this may include appointments which may require to be rescheduled, such as occupational therapy or counselling.

Create an emergency contact list. Ensure your household has a current list of emergency contact for family, friends, neighbours, health care providers, teachers, employers and other community services.

Further resources

- Resources on financial relief: https://consumeraction.org.au/keeping-communities-connected/?fbclid=IwAR2dSzBGsJgnGW6JWUm5fS7yTX692y
- World Health Organisation videos on handwashing with:
    - Soap and water – https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3PmVJQUCm4E
    - Alcohol-based solution – https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZnSjFr6J9HI

Household Isolation Plan

We have:

- Spoken to our care team
- Made a plan for contact during isolation
- Informed the school
- Cancelled/moved online appointments
- Ensured medications are up to date **(if no, write what is still required below)**
- Stocked up on essentials **(if no, write what is still required below)**

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

If our household is:

- required to self-isolate due to mandatory lockdowns;
- required to self-isolate after coming into close contact with someone who has the virus;
- is diagnosed with the virus or required to self-isolate after showing symptoms
- required to care for someone else impacted by the virus, for example an elderly family member or other children if schools are closed.

We foresee the following concerns (issues working from home, school closures, medical issues, essential supplies, behavioural concerns, birth family contact)

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
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_____

We will be dealing with these issues by (discuss with your agency what supports and ideas are available for dealing with these concerns)

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Department of Health and Human Services – cover cough and sneeze

The Department of Health and Human Services is providing regular updates and advice at:
https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus-covid-19-daily-update

Department of Health and Human Services – wash hands regularly

The Department of Health and Human Services has key coronavirus information at:
https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus

2. Looking after yourself

Key points

- To provide the best care, you must look after yourself first
- Never be afraid to ask for help
- Identify networks of support and work as a team
- If working from home, manage your time carefully and remember to take breaks

Why this is important

You can't pour from an empty cup! By taking time to look after yourself, you will be able to support those around you. Practicing regular self-care, especially in times of stress, reduces the negative impact of stress and how it affects your mind and body.

Practicing self-care also allows you to function at full capacity. Self-care is individual, and what works for someone else may not work for you. Consider what makes you feel better and explore how this may be implemented into your regular routine.

Self-care and your daily routine

Consider how you can add self-care into your daily routine. Even if it's a few minutes a day to yourself, it can make a significant impact on your well-being.

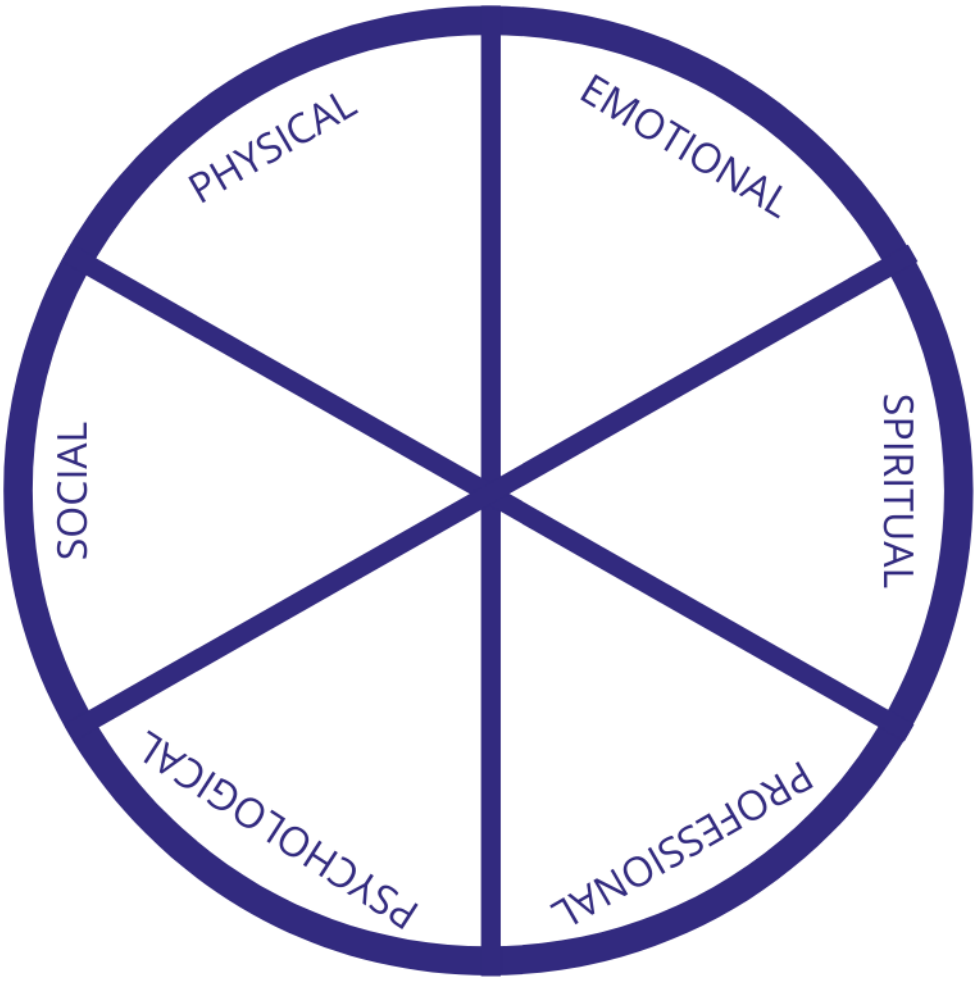
If you want a refresher on self-care, the Foster Carer Association of Victoria also has a webinar you can access via Facebook:
https://www.facebook.com/fostercarevictoria/videos/1924338570910930/

Activity: Self-care wheel

Consider the Foster Care Association of Victoria's (FCAV) Self-Care Wheel on the next page – think about how you can make self-care work for you across the various dimensions.

This self-care exercise asks you to consider what you are doing to look after yourself. Have a look at the suggestions below and see how many of them you can write in the wheel. If an area is lacking, please consder focusing some time on addressing those needs.

FCAV self-care wheel



Physical (e.g. eat regular and healthy meals, good sleep habits, regular exercise, medical check-ups, etc.)

Emotional (e.g. engage in positive activities, acknowledge my own accomplishments, express emotions in a healthy way, etc.)

Spiritual (e.g. read inspirational literature, self-reflection, spend time in nature, meditate, explore spiritual connections)

Professional (e.g. pursue meaningful work, maintain work-life balance, positive relationships with co-workers, time management skills)

Psychological (e.g. take time for yourself, disconnect from electronic devices, journal, pursue new interests, learn new skills, access counselling support)

Social (e.g. healthy relationships, make time for family/friends, schedule dates with partner/spouse, ask for support from family and friends)

On the next page are some ideas for ways you can make sure that you are looking after yourself, and carer specific supports to help. Remember, the FCAV provide assistance both related to concerns re COVID-19, as well as providing care in general.

They're there to help YOU!

Self-care for carers

Looking after yourself during this time is critical. Carers often give to others without nourishing themselves.

REMEMBER: YOU MATTER TOO!

Take care of your body

- Look for opportunities to exercise and stretch as often as possible, such as while watching TV.
- Build physical play into the day to get your heart rate up
- If you are having trouble sleeping, use sleep story podcasts or meditation apps, or read a book before bed.

Take care of your mind

- Meditate when possible, and practice mindfulness. It can be as simple as taking a moment to breathe deeply and savour the taste of something you enjoy.
- Listen to a podcast to make yourself laugh.
- Forgive yourself – stress is normal and you are doing your best!

Engage your brain

- Read up on a topic that interest you.
- Explore podcasts about something you'd like to know more about.
- Consider learning a hobby via YouTube videos, or practice drawing and other creative activities.
- Try crosswords, sudoku, or other puzzles.
- Find online dance instructions and learn a routine (or enjoy trying!)

Connect with others

- Set up video coffee dates and movie nights with your friends.
- Call a family member or another foster carer.
- Join online groups on topics that interest you.
- Connect with your community and ask for help when required – we are all in this together!

USE THE SUPPORTS IN PLACE FOR CARERS

CARER SUPPORT SERVICES

- Call FCAV Carer Support Service 9416 4292
- Connect with other carers and develop a remote support group
- Ask your agency if they have a Carer Assistance Program (EAP)
- Attend e-training www.carerkafe.org.au
- Reach out to your casework for support

Working from home

Working from home can be a new experience. Ensuring that you are prepared and supported will go a long way.

Talk to your manager.

Learn about your employer's emergency operations plan. If you can work from home, great! But make sure your manager understands that you are a primary carer for children.

Have an honest and open discussion about what this means for your household, understanding that you and your manager are both facing difficult, unexpected, and unchartered choices. Work through different scenarios (for example, if schools close but work does not), and document expectations in writing or a follow up email.

If you are partnered, make sure you're on the same page.

One, or both, of you may need to adjust your work schedules to accommodate school or work closures and childcare disruptions, so start the conversation proactively. Who has the most flexibility? Who may be more at risk? Talk through different scenarios and come up with a game plan — or two.

Whether it's working in shifts or creating different zones (spaces) in the house, seek out creative solutions now. And, in case those don't work out the way you expected, consider back-up ideas. Be calm, supportive, and encouraging of one another.

Lean on your village.

It takes a village to raise a child, and foster carers know that better than most! Work out who can help in what way, be it delivering groceries, setting up online video-link play dates, or just providing an ear to listen when things feel a bit overwhelming.

If you are working from home while looking after children it is critical to take time to plan your routine and communicate with your workplace. However, it will also help if you start remote work with some clear intentions in mind:

1. **Communicate** with your household about your work plans – make sure they know your hours, when you may have teleconferences scheduled, and when they can expect you to take a break for play or relaxation.

2. **Create a morning routine** – start the day with light exercise if possible before getting showered and dressed as you would if going to work.

3. **If possible**, have a dedicated workspace to return to and leave each day. Set this up with the same care for your health and safety you would in an office.

4. **Maintain regular hours** and stick to them – try to avoid working late into the night.

5. **Schedule your breaks** and stick to them – make sure you are having lunch, stepping away from your desk regularly, and stretching hourly.

6. **Socialise with colleagues** – use video platforms to having coffees and meetings so you can still see and interact with people.

7. **If safe to do so**, and following advice from government, get outside – go for an early morning walk or take your lunch to the backyard for a stretch and some fresh air.

8. **Keep records** – make sure you are keeping track of your work, including set tasks, and reflect on these at the end of the day. You may be surprised with how much you get through, or find you need to adjust your work patterns to better suit your needs.

9. **End your day with a routine** – sign out of your work's internal messaging apps, close down your computer, and make sure you turn off your work phone.

10. **Go easy on** yourself – COVID-19 is requiring many people to adjust their working and parenting styles to suit new arrangements, rapidly. It is a learning process between you, children and young people in your care, and your employer. Keep talking and keep learning.

Treating yourself

Looking after yourself while isolating can be difficult, so give yourself time to explore the world to see and hear beautiful things. You can visit a host of museums and galleries online.

- The Melbourne Digital Concert Hall hosts online concerts with Australian musicians: https://www.facebook.com/Melbourne-Digital-Concert-Hall-106569250974473/?tn-str=k*F
- Louvre https://www.louvre.fr/en/visites-en-ligne#tabs
- Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History https://naturalhistory.si.edu/visit/virtual-tour
- Space Centre Houston: https://spacecenter.org/news-center/news-releases/space-center-houstons-new-app-offers-an-enhanced-visitor-experience/
- National Women's History Museum: https://www.womenshistory.org/womens-history/online-exhibits
- The Vatican: http://www.museivaticani.va/content/museivaticani/en/collezioni/musei/tour-virtuali-elenco.html
- Google has partnered with galleries and museums all over the world to produce virtual tours and online resources. You can:
    - Explore monuments and museums using Street View
    - Explore the collections of hundreds of art galleries across the globe
    - Use Art Zoom to explore individual art works in-depth
    - Explore the history of sports all over the world using Sports Spotlight
    - Read all about Natural History and how scientists learn about the world around us

  For the full collection visit https://artsandculture.google.com/

Staying occupied

For you and children and young people in your care, this is a great time to catch up on reading and viewing that you are looking forward to exploring!

Visit the Open Library for a completely free resource for all sorts of books online: www.openlibrary.org

Head to your local library website and download their eBook and audiobook app so you can read and listen through your phone or computer.

If you're looking for something to view, check out the range of shows, documentaries, and movies on:

- ABC iView: https://iview.abc.net.au/
- SBS on demand: https://www.sbs.com.au/ondemand/

Looking after your mental health

COVID-19 is a global emergency, which will almost certainly bring additional stress and may add to other mental health issues. Rapidly changing daily routines can cause distress in children and young people, so it is important to quickly establish a new routine if you are isolating or physical distancing.

Maintain honest communication with young people about why things are changing and take cues from them to ease their distress.

Headspace has created a guide about how to cope with stress related to the outbreak: https://headspace.org.au/young-people/how-to-cope-with-stress-related-to-covid-19/

BeyondBlue has also created a similar resource for looking after your mental health during the outbreak: https://www.beyondblue.org.au/the-facts/looking-after-your-mental-health-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak

Public concern, social isolation and an increased focus on hygiene can be triggering for people with anxiety disorders and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). If you notice signs of increased anxiety or obsessive behaviour, take time to check-in with your child or young person and do a soothing activity together.

The Washington Post has this article about anxiety and COVID-19: https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2020/03/11/what-coronavirus-fears-are-doing-people-with-anxiety-disorders/

If you or your child/young person experiences an eating disorder, the Butterfly Foundation have put together some tips and advice for how to navigate the outbreak, and media responses: https://thebutterflyfoundation.org.au/covid-19/

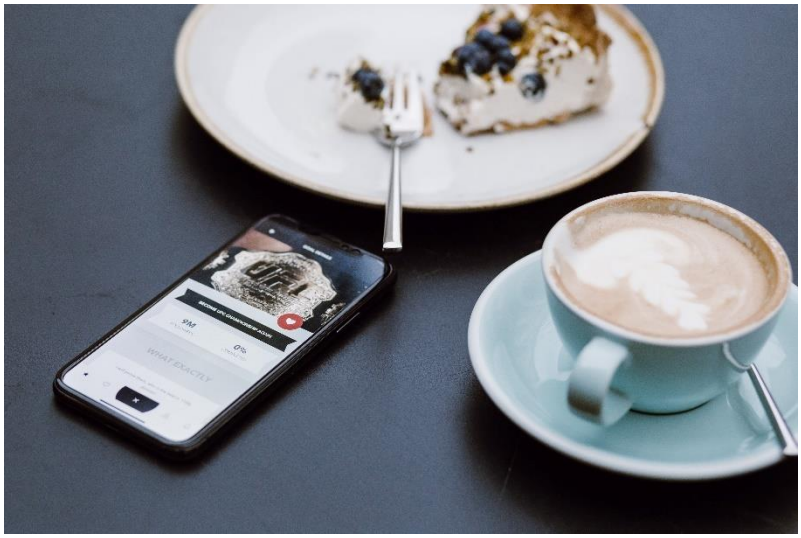
Tips and suggestions

- Ask for help – we are all human!
- Be gentle with yourself – more screen time is to be expected while stuck indoors!
- Practice a daily check in to recognise if you need to recharge
- Link in with your case manager or care team
- Schedule in 'me' time to do things you enjoy or to relax
- Connect with your 'village' or network of support
- Contact Foster Care Association of Victoria (FCAV) for additional foster carer support resources
- Link in with other foster carers who may relate to your experience

Further resources

- Foster Care Association of Victoria – Carer Information & Support Service https://www.fcav.org.au/carer-support-service
- Foster Care Association of Victoria – self-care webinar https://www.facebook.com/fostercarevictoria/videos/1924338570910930/
- This link explains how to facilitate a household meeting to allow you allow to get on the same page and check in with one another: https://www.psychologytoday.com/au/blog/emotional-fitness/201209/10-tips-holding-family-meeting

3. Staying connected



Key Points

- It is important to reach out and stay connected with others, especially during stress, isolation, or if practicing physical distancing.
- Ensuring that children and young people can still connect to their families and friends will help to ease the strain of this time period and reassure them that this will pass. Continuing relationships with birth families, where possible, will help support reunification down the line.
- Technology can offer some great opportunities for staying connected, but it's important to supervise children and young people online.

Why this is important

If you need to social distance or self-isolate it is important to look after your mental health and well-being, as well as that of your households. Experiencing so much uncertainty and change will naturally bring anxieties with it. Emotions may run high for yourself, your loved ones, and your community.

We know that loneliness is bad for well-being. While we can't replace the value of face-to face interactions we need to be flexible and think creatively in these circumstances.

Staying connected can help reduce loneliness.

Maintaining a regular routine, making time for yourself, and socialising safely with others provides comfort and supports our overall health.

Using technology to stay connected

There are many free apps and websites to stay connected online – see what may work best for you.

You can connect to your local community through Facebook groups or apps that connect neighbours such as NextDoor, which requires neighbours to verify their location to connect with their community - https://au.nextdoor.com/

If you feel you need support outside of your network – consider accessing professional support via telephone or online counselling. Many foster agencies and many employers provide the Employee Assistance Program, over the phone counselling, as a free service. Consider speaking to your case manager about how to access this.

If you are looking for long-term professional support – contact your General Practitioner (GP) to seek a referral to see a specialist and to acquire a mental health plan.

For foster care specific support – contact the Foster Care Association of Victoria.

If you want to support others during this period – consider volunteering with a service that may be provide telephone peer support to individuals in need.

Apps to get you started

There are a host of messaging and social media apps available for free that can be used to stay in touch. Most of these allow users to send messages and exchange photos, do video calls, send videos, audio, and files.

They include:

- WhatsApp – a messaging and calling app
  - https://www.whatsapp.com/download/
- Facebook messenger – a messaging app and platform
  - https://www.messenger.com/
- Skype – provides video chat and voice calls and instant messaging services.
  - https://www.skype.com/en/get-skype/
- Zoom – a remote conferencing service that combines video conferencing, online meetings, chat, and mobile collaboration.
  - https://zoom.us/download
- Gmail – a free email account
  - https://www.google.com/gmail/about/

Helping others get online

If you are trying to get a family member or friend online, consider becoming a digital mentor to support people through their first steps to using computers and the internet, and improve their digital skills.

You'll learn about the language and techniques needed to support someone, and the possible barriers that people who are new to the internet can experience.

Visit Be Connected to learn more: https://beconnected.esafety.gov.au/digital-mentor

If you don't use technology regularly

Many people now use the internet for work, social engagement, and communication on a daily basis. If you don't use it regularly, this can seem daunting.

Here are 5 things to consider if you're not sure where to start:

1. Visit **Be Connected**, a government initiative to increase the confidence, skills and online safety for Australians https://beconnected.esafety.gov.au/

2. Don't be embarrassed – many people are not comfortable with technology and have not had a need to develop this.

3. Reach out – ask a family member or friend whether they can assist you by walking you through accessing the internet through a computer or smart phone.

4. Work with what you have – you don't need expensive new equipment to get online. If you have a smartphone or a computer, you're well on your way.

5. Use what works for you – technology can be a wonderful way to stay connected, but there's nothing wrong with a phone call!

Keeping young people safe online

The internet is an incredible tool, but children and young people require support and monitoring as they engage with the online world.

The best place to source this is from the eSafety Commission, who help to safeguard Australians at risk from online harms and to promote safer, more positive online experiences. They provide information specially designed for kids, young people, and seniors to improve their skills and learn more.
For carers, we recommend visiting the parents and carers page, which has a host of tips to help keep children and young people safe online. You can find them here: https://www.esafety.gov.au/parents

The eSafety Commission also provides guidance on specific online safety issues including:

- cyberbullying
- adult cyber abuse
- image-based abuse
- technology-related concerns for people at risk of family or domestic violence

Visit the eSafety Commission website to learn more: https://www.esafety.gov.au/

Tips and suggestions

- If you are working remotely to social distance or isolate, make a plan and stick to it. It is easy to let a routine escape you due to all the changes around you. Set boundaries and follow through with them around your commitments. This is great modelling for the children/young people in your care.
- Aim for quality face-to-face time with your loved ones who are with you – whether that is a morning check in for the day, or a dinner as a household.
- Schedule in calls with friends and loved ones who you cannot see whether it be over the phone or online via video calls. Have a coffee over the phone together and create a safe space to support one another.

Further resources

- Foster Care Association Victoria (FCAV) - https://www.fcav.org.au/
- The eSafety Commission: https://www.esafety.gov.au/

4. Creating a routine

Key points

- Routines and boundaries create a sense of security
- A structured and consistent home routine is important when daily life is unpredictable
- By including children and young people in the routine, you create a space of empowerment and control which help them have a sense of safety.

Why this is important

We know that children, especially children in care, thrive off routine. Routine allows children to feel a sense of safety, security, and control.

Maintaining a routine during a period of uncertainty and change will support children to manage their stress and remain calm. When we implement boundaries with routines, children know what to expect and develop healthy habits.

By having a clear routine and boundaries during this period of uncertainty, you will support the household in navigating the changing climate.

How to create a routine

- Consider what changes may come up in your daily routine – speak to your case manager and/or care team to review changes in family contact arrangements and appointments. Plan how to inform the children and young people in your care of these changes.
- Hold a house meeting to allow all household members to voice their ideas and what they would need during a period of isolation or in their routine. By involving the children or young people, they will feel empowered and that they had a sense of control.
- Create a structured routine that is predictable and age appropriate based on your children/young people's interests or needs. A routine will create a sense of 'normalcy' during this period.
- An example is depicted on the next page, but you can use the template on page 26 to create your own:

AT…	I AM…	I WILL REMEMBER…
Before 9AM	Waking up	Wash face, eat breakfast, make beds
9AM-10AM	Walking	Walk outside, do yoga inside
10AM-11AM	Learning	No screens: journal, flash cards, research a topic
11AM-12PM	Creating	Craft, drawing, music, dancing
12PM	Eating lunch	Help make lunch
1.30PM	Doing my chores	Laundry, wash lunch dishes
1PM-2.30PM	Taking quiet time	Reading, puzzles, nap, tv show
2.30PM-4PM	Learning	Screens welcome: iPad games, online learning, educational shows
4PM-5PM	Playing outside	Bike, walk the dog, play outside if possible
5PM-6PM	Eating dinner	Help make dinner
6PM-8PM	Watching and getting ready	Shower, PJs, teeth
8PM	Sleeping	All kids

Tips and suggestions

- Include healthy hygiene practices in your daily routine
- Consider what changes you will need to make from your current routine and what supports need to be in place
- Consult the care team and/or case manager on additional resources to build a routine that meets your household needs
- Be aware that if in isolation, children and young people may need support engaging in physical activity and managing close physical proximity in the home with other household members
- Maintain boundaries around the routine so that all household members know what to expect, but if you're all having a rough day and need to spend it watching movies, do that instead

Further resources

- Raising Children offers many resources on household routines depending on the activity and age group - https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/family-life/routines-rituals-relationships/family-routines

Template for creating a routine for a child or young person

AT…	I AM…	I WILL REMEMBER…
Before 9AM		
9AM-10AM		
10AM-11AM		
11AM-12PM		
12PM		
1.30PM		
1PM-2.30PM		
2.30PM-4PM		
4PM-5PM		
5PM-6PM		
6PM-8PM		
8PM		
9PM		

Remember – routines can be helpful as a touchpoint, but they shouldn't create stress or pressure for your household. They can help provide structure, but should be approached with common sense, flexibility, and a bit of humour.

Some children need routines to feel safe and secure, others will have more flexibility.

Adjust routines to suit the needs of your household, and don't be afraid to throw it out the window on days that call for popcorn and puzzles, or extra movie time!

4. Learning and education

Key points

- Maintaining educational engagement will support children and young people to have a sense of predictability and stability and will prevent disruptions to their learning.

Why this is important

We know that children and young people in care thrive on the routine that education provides them. Education is a critical pathway to support children and young people in having positive outcomes such as higher self-esteem, friendships, and opportunities for employment and higher education.

Disruptions from formal education may lead children to engage in unhealthy habits such as poor sleep, diet, and extensive screen time, impacts on their mental health, and possibly motivation.

If a child is still attending school

- **Discuss new rules or practices at school -** Many schools already enforce illness prevention habits, including frequent hand washing or use of alcohol-based hand cleansers. Your school nurse or principal will send information home about any new rules or practices. Be sure to discuss this with your child. Contact your school nurse with any specific questions.
- **Communicate with your school -** Let your school know if your child is sick and keep them home. Your school may ask if your child has a fever or not. This information will help the school to know why your child was kept home. If your child is diagnosed with COVID-19, let the school know so they can communicate with and get guidance from local health authorities.
- **Ask for help** - Talk to your school nurse, school psychologist, school counsellor or school social worker if your child is having difficulties as a result of anxiety or stress related to COVID-19. They can give guidance and support to your child at school. *Make sure to follow all instructions from your school.*

Learning resources

Educational activities occur in a variety of forums – consider virtual learning via the below links or hands-on educational activities such as crafts and games.

Australian

- ABC Kids has a range of games, activities, podcasts, videos and education programs https://www.abc.net.au/abckids/
- ABC Education hosts thousands of free, curriculum-linked resources for Primary and Secondary students and teachers https://education.abc.net.au/home#!/home
- Crackerjack Education offers Indigenous teaching resources: https://www.crackerjackeducation.com.au/
- Deadly Story is a cultural information website to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the Victorian out-of-home care system to connect with their Country, their Communities, and their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and identity. They have a range of online resources: https://www.deadlystory.com/

International

- Sesame Street has a collection of educational games, videos and art for children https://www.sesamestreet.org/
- E-learning for kids is an international organisation that offers lessons in English, Spanish, French, and Portuguese https://www.e-learningforkids.org/
- Khan Academy has a range of lesson plans and resources: https://www.khanacademy.org/
- Scholastic Learn at Home has lesson plans and resources for years K - 6 https://classroommagazines.scholastic.com/support/learnathome.html?caching
- TED Ed has hundreds of educational talks in short, animated form https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCsooa4yRKGN_zEE8iknghZA

You can also identify specific areas that children in your care may be interested in and tap into those.

Maths

- ABC mathseeds teaches children ages 3-9 core maths and problem-solving skills: https://mathseeds.com.au/

History/Geography

- BBC history for kids http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/forkids/
- National Geographic for Kids https://www.natgeokids.com/au/
- TIME for kids: https://www.timeforkids.com/

Languages

- Duolingo is a free online platform for learning languages https://www.duolingo.com/

Coding

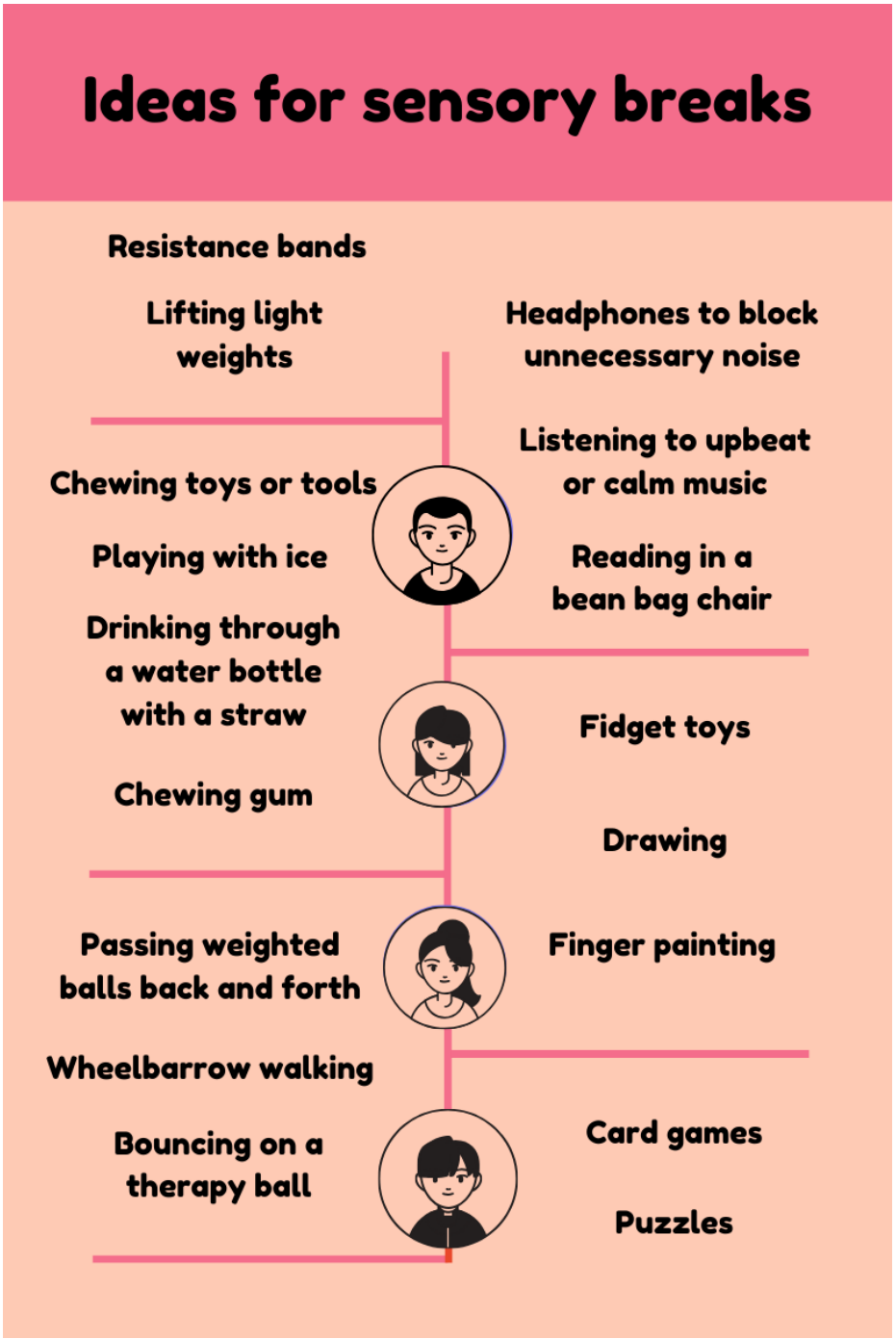
- Code.org lets children and young people can learn to code for free, try their hour of coding: https://code.org/
- Scratch from MIT let's children program their own interactive stories, games, and animations and share their creations with others in the online community: https://scratch.mit.edu

Music

- The New Victory Theatre hosts a series of online music classes for children and young people: https://newvictory.org/new-victory-arts-break-percussion-week/
- The Kennedy Centre has videos of all major concerts and a children's series called Lunch Doodles with Mo Willems: https://www.youtube.com/user/TheKennedyCenter/videos

Creating sensory breaks

Sensory breaks, where a child or young person engages with something that stimulates their brain and senses in a different way, can be a way to help children self-regulate, calm, and focus. Consider some of the suggestions here for sensory breaks:



Plenty of children will also benefit from hands on learning that is age appropriate. This can include measurements while baking, playing with alphabet blocks to create words, reading with their carers or to younger children in the house, and discussing the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of characters in television shows.

Tips and suggestions

- Remember, education can be a fun and helpful addition, but your focus should be on the wellbeing of your household. **Things may slip during this time, and that is OK.**
- If required to isolate, your child or young person's school will advise the best way to continue their education. **Speak to the educators first.**
- Ask your children and young people how they would like their learning routine to look. **Get them invested and involved.**
- Communicate with the care team about the best way to modify learning into the home environment if required.
- Consider parental controls if your child or young person is accessing more screen time due to isolation.
- Create an appropriate space in the home for studies to be completed to set the atmosphere and routine.

Further resources

- Check the Department of Education website for further updates and recommendations on COVID-19 https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/department/Pages/coronavirus.aspx

5. Exploring our world

Key points

- Spending time in nature is proven to improve mental health and well-being
- Encouraging children and young people outdoors will provide opportunities of play, mindfulness, and release energy.

Why this is important

During a time of uncertainty, it is important to take a moment to get a breath of fresh air and get outside. Spending time in nature is known to alleviate anxiety and stress, boosts creativity, and gets us moving. Nature can also be used to practice mindfulness and take us away from overusing screen time.

Ways to include nature

Consider creative ideas on how you may use nature as a way to cope with isolation/physical distancing, as a way to be active, spend time together or alone, for play, or learning.

Try some of these suggestions for assisting children to connect with nature during physical distancing:

Bird watching

- See what birds you can hear and see outside.
- Have children try to identify the birds, using the resources on Birding Victoria.
- Have children and young people draw and write about the birds they see, and make up stories about what they're thinking.

Go on a walk or bike ride

- This is a great way to get fresh air and exercise while physical distancing (avoid parks and playgrounds if possible).
- Stop when you come across nature strips and reserves. This is a great opportunity to practice mindfulness, yoga, or physical activity (you could race each other).
- Children can draw the bike ride, young people may wish to journal their experience.

Bring nature into the home

- Pick up interesting leaves during walks and create lead rubbings with paper and chalk.
- Have children cut out pictures of nature, or have them take pictures on walks.
- If possible, buy or set up some indoor plants. Children and young people can be put in charge of watering and tending to them.

Gardening

- If you have a backyard, try some simple gardening such as starting a compost heap.
- If you are in a small space, fill a glass with water and try to sprout an avocado pit.
- With supervision, have young people help tend to a balcony herb box.

Water play

- Use food dye to create colour combinations in glasses of water; children can paint with these watercolours afterwards.

Learning about our world through science

- Dr Karl offers science videos, articles and podcasts for adults and young people. https://drkarl.com/
- Fizzics Education offers dozens of free resources, including videos of science experiments, trivia and lesson plans. https://www.fizzicseducation.com.au/free-resources/
- Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden is live streaming the 'Home Safari' via their Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/cincinnatizoo/posts/10158043843010479
- You can check out more wildlife webcams here: https://www.audubon.org/news/top-10-wildlife-web-cams

Tips and suggestions

- Consider safety first depending on your household needs – safety plan how to engage your child or young person in nature if there are concerns about absconding.
- If possible, practice mindfulness outside – ask your children/young people to go barefoot in grass and focus on how it feels or ask them to name five things they notice outside based on the five senses (sight, smell, touch, hearing, and taste).
- Provide opportunities for children and young people to release physical energy outside, especially if isolated or practicing physical distancing in the home.
- Consult household members on what activities they would like to do outside to encourage participation in decision-making.

Further resources

- Suggestions from the Child Mind Institute on engaging children in nature: https://childmind.org/article/ideas-for-getting-your-kids-into-nature/

6. Staying active indoors

Key points

- Staying active indoors will support children to release energy and cope with physical distancing/isolation.
- Physical activity supports emotional regulation in children, young people, and adults.

Why this is important

It will be a challenge keeping the household on track during physical distancing or isolation due to household members being in close proximity, changes to routine, and feeling stressed or bored.

By scheduling in physical activities, any tension or pent up energy will be released. This will promote self-care through releasing endorphins. Children and young people can have fun and be creative getting active indoors.

Keeping kids moving during physical distancing

Schedule in times for regular movement. You may wish to add something like PE with Joe, a free daily fitness class aimed at children and young people, into your daily routine:

https://www.thebodycoach.com/blog/pe-with-joe-1254.html

Encourage young people to join you in your fitness routine or to find one that they enjoy through YouTube.

You can access hundreds of free, full-length workout videos here: https://www.fitnessblender.com/

Many video games now offer interactive features to play virtual sports –if you have a console available, find out whether this is suitable for your household.

Involve the children and young people in ideas to get them moving inside in a safe way – do they want to have a dance party, come up with an exercise routine if they are older? Have children look at the ideas below and try different ones each day.

Tips and suggestions

- Include indoor and physical activity as part of the daily routine to allow children and young people to know what to expect and to release energy.
- Set boundaries around screen time to allow for hands-on activities.
- Model health physical activity for the children and young people in your home as part of your self-care routine.
- Schedule a virtual playdate with other carers in your network.

Let them be a bit bored

You are under no obligation to fill every moment of the day with education, structured fitness, or additional music lessons. This is not the time to pressure yourself and create additional stress.

Some children and young people benefit from being bored; if it is safe and appropriate for your household, let them be bored!

You may suggest they play in the back yard or, if you're inside, leave them with some cushions and blankets to see what adventures they will create.

Making sure your home has a few easy to access activities for children and young people will help save you from trying to fill every moment of the day. Have a look at the list below and see what you can have set up ahead of time. When children complain of boredom, it's good to have something to refer them to, and gives you a moment for a cup of tea! As always, maintain supervision as appropriate for their age and development.

WHAT TO DO
if you're bored

Call a friend

Listen to music

Read a book or a blog

Plant a garden

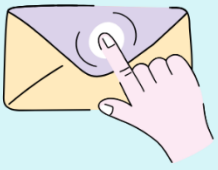
Draw or doodle

Bake cookies

Make a movie

Play with your pet

Organise your closet


Write a letter or an email to a loved one

Join an online sports league

Sort items to donate to charity

Further resources

- Find more suggestions for active children's play here: https://health.act.gov.au/about-our-health-system/healthy-living/kids-play-active-play/active-play/active-play-kids
- Duolingo is a free online platform for learning languages: https://www.duolingo.com/
- The New Victory Theatre hosts a series of online music classes for children and young people: https://newvictory.org/new-victory-arts-break-percussion-week/

7. Meditation, mindfulness, and wellbeing

Key points

- Meditation and mindfulness have proven positive effects on physical and mental wellbeing
- While movements are restricted, they can help children, young people, and adults to process their feelings and ground themselves

Why this is important

Mindfulness used actively in a household will reduce the impact of stressful situations. Mindfulness is a way to 'still your mind' by giving complete attention to the present moment or paying attention in a specific way such as meditation.

Mindfulness also increases concentration and focus which can support alternative education engagement. Mindfulness also boosts emotional intelligence, self-confidence, connection, and decision-making. Mindfulness can be practiced in a variety of ways to fit your household's needs.

Mindfulness activities

Mindfulness can be practiced in many ways such as colouring, walking through nature, looking at the details, listening to music, or as a meditation. This helpful reading provides two mindfulness exercises:
https://www.monash.edu/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/694192/The-health-benefits-of-meditation-and-being-mindful.pdf

A simple way to incorporate mindfulness into your day is observing your breathing. Take five deep, mindful breaths first thing in the morning, throughout the day, and last thing at night. Consider the feeling of the air travelling in and out of your lungs and notice any tension you observe in your body. Try to release the tension on each outward breath.

On the next page are 4 simple mindfulness activities to try with young people in your care.

4 MINDFULNESS ACTIVITIES

FOR CONNECTION, RELAXATION AND REGULATION.

DEEP BREATHS

1. Find a relaxing place, sit comfortably, set a one minute timer.
2. Breathe deeply in and out, and focus on sounds and sensations around you.
3. Take another deep breath and imagine the air moving up and down in your lungs.
4. Take one more deep breath, hold for a moment, then release.

MAKE A GLITTER JAR

1. Find an empty jar or plastic bottle.
2. Fill the container ¾ with water, then add clear glue, food colouring, and glitter.
3. Seal the lid and you are ready to go!
4. If a child is heightened have them turn the jar and watch the glitter settle while breathing slowly.

HEART EXERCISE

1. Ask the child to either jump around or do star jumps for one minute.
2. At the end of that minute, ask them to place their hand on their heart and pay attention to how their heartbeat feels.
3. Talk about their body pumping extra blood and why this happens.
4. When a child becomes heightened, consider asking them to feel their heartbeat, and talk about what their body is telling them.

EXPLORE NATURE

1. Go on a small adventure – try picking up a flower, or a rock.
2. Notice the bugs or the birds. Take a moment to listen to them.
3. Take a moment to kneel down and touch the earth.
4. Walk in silence to notice the little details.

Build these into your daily routine and consider how they can help when a child or young person is feeling disregulated. You may wish to ask them to practice these while feeling good, so that they can use them as a tool while feeling heightened.

Yoga for moving meditation

Yoga is a great tool to use as a moving meditation – you can find a variety of yoga class examples online on YouTube for all ages. Cosmic Kids Yoga offers fun, free, age-appropriate 'yoga journeys' that young people can follow along with:
https://www.youtube.com/user/CosmicKidsYoga

Many providers are cancelling subscription fees to activity apps during the COVID-19 state of emergency – consider downloading an app to practice yoga for fitness and mindfulness:
https://www.downdogapp.com/

Practicing gratitude

Although things can seem difficult, especially if your movements are restricted, practicing gratitude can provide a range of positive effects and emotions. People who regularly practice gratitude by taking time to notice and reflect upon the things they're thankful for experience more positive emotions, feel more alive, sleep better, express more compassion and kindness, and even have stronger immune systems!

There are a host of online resources for practicing gratitude. The tips for young people below have been adapted from here:
https://blissfulkids.com/mindfulness-exercises-for-children-gratitude-happiness-and-health/

Tips for helping children and young people practice gratitude

1. Gratitude Journal
   Help them keep a gratitude journal. It can be filled with text or pictures, whatever is most appropriate. It can be written in any type of book, on a notepad, or on an electronic device. Have them add one or two things a day for which they feel grateful.

2. The ABCs of Gratitude
   In a seated position, with eyes closed, make your way through the alphabet, beginning with the letter "A." Think of something you are grateful for that begins with each letter of the alphabet. "I am grateful for Auntie Sue, for bananas, for our cats." See if you can make it all the way to "z" with a light and grateful heart.

3. Bedtime Thank Yous
   Before you fall asleep each night, think of all the happy things that happened to you that day. Say them out loud, write them in a journal, draw a picture of them, whisper them to your heart, and make this a routine that helps you fall asleep with love and gratitude.

For adults, a gratitude practice may look more like this:

1. Make the first correspondence you send (text/email etc) be a thank you to someone.
2. Write down three things that happened the day before that you felt grateful for, and why.
3. Write down one thing you are looking forward to, and why.
4. Optional: write down one thing you admire about another person, and why.

Tips and suggestions

- Try adding mindfulness in a variety of ways – a one-minute exercise of belly breathing before doing educational activities, or as a yoga activity to start or finish the school day.
- Remember that everyone is different, what may benefit one child may not work for the other. Be flexible and try new ideas!
- Mindfulness is something you can do together with your child/young person or individually.
- Assess the right time and place for mindfulness – consider where the child/young person feels comfortable and safe, and where they are at in their day.
- Given them options on how to participate that meet their needs and preferences.
- If you are ever unsure about a strategy to use – speak to your case manager.

Further resources

- If you are interested in learning more about mindfulness you can take this free course put together by Monash University: https://www.monash.edu/health/mental-health/mindfulness/resources
- The Smiling Mind offers an app and website specifically for children and young people who have experienced trauma: https://www.smilingmind.com.au/
- Headspace is a mental health resources for children and young people and also comes with an app and website: https://www.headspace.com/meditation/kids

8. Practical skills for little hands

Key points

- Active participation in the household can create a sense of unity and control.
- Supporting children and young people to engage in practical skills will support the household in running more smoothly and set them up for future success.
- Learning useful skills such as cooking, cleaning, sewing, and other repair work can provide much needed activities that will interest kids while building their practical knowledge.

Why this is important

A large part of your role as a carer is supporting children and young people in your care to develop independent living skills to ensure their success in the future. Now more than ever helping children and young people take agency over themselves and well-being will support them from day to day through to the long-term.

By getting children and young people involved in self-care skills you help them feel proactive in a period of uncertainty, build their confidence, and help them value the importance of running a household.

Household maintenance

- Consider how you can engage children and young people in the home to be more engaged in household maintenance and duties – if you are in the home more than it can be discussed in the household meeting about how every member can play their part.
- You may like to try this with a visual household help chart if that suits your family, or you can create your own on white board or paper. Display it somewhere that everyone can see.
- The Raising Children website provides information on age appropriate chores for children and young people: https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/family-life/chores/chores-for-children

- Reflect on the child or young person's needs and development – their chronological age may not match their developmental age. Practical jobs need to be tailored to the child or young person's developmental stage to set them up for success.
- Let them choose and participate in how they can make an impact. By giving them a voice and a task, you are showing that you trust them which builds on their confidence. Prepare to manage this as a team; together.

Understanding resilience

Building the resilience of children helps them bounce back. As carers, you hope to strengthen the social and emotional skills and positive beliefs of children so that they develop the resilience to persevere and adapt positively in the face of challenges with the help of a safe adult.

Carers can help to do this in many ways! Here are some suggestions to put into action.

Move towards goals
Help children set realistic and meaningful goals one step at a time. Provide positive feedback on their efforts. For example: set a goal that is achievable that day. i.e. an agreement to do a minute of mindfulness, or an agreement to complete one academic activity outside of their schoolwork depending on their abilities and needs.

Overcome challenges or obstacles
Facilitate problem solving by having trust in their ability to find alternative solutions. This builds confidence. For example: Ask them what a solution may be and help them workshop how it will work – this may take a few minutes longer but it is building a valuable skillset.

Make connections
Build positive connections to help them make friends and build relationships. Provide opportunities to connect with peers in a safe manner. For example: "Let's set up a video play date with your friend Kaylee; you can show them the Lego you've been building today."

Emotional Self-Care
Support children in acknowledging their good and bad feelings. Remember that you name it to tame it! Example: You can say "I'm curious if you are feeling angry. It's okay to feel angry. When I feel angry it makes me…"

Focus on strengths
Help children recognise their strengths and encourage them to use them in their daily routine. For example: "Wow, you were a great help with dinner. You are getting good at measuring ingredients."

Keep things in perspective with a positive outlook
Model optimism and accepting negative situations. For example: "Things may feel a bit topsy turvy right now, but no matter what we will get through this together."

Sewing, cooking, and making things

- Use YouTube to find sewing, cooking, and gardening tutorials. Sit with your young person and explore a few, saving the ones you want to try together.
- If there is an electronic item in your house that is no longer working, consider supervising the young person to use tools to take it apart and explore what's inside. **As always, take necessary precautions to ensure everybody is safe.**
- Help them learn new things – skills such as tidying up, meal prepping, doing the laundry are all necessary and can also help them understand what responsibilities adults undertake.
- Use positive feedback and praise to encourage their efforts.

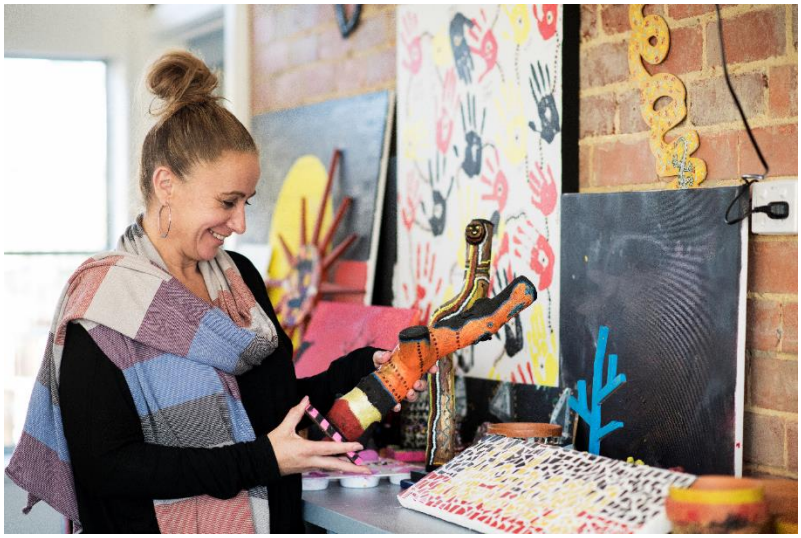
Tips and suggestions

- Regularly check-in with the household to see how everyone is feeling about doing their part.
- Remember repetition and patience – you are creating positive habits for the now and future.
- Consider goal setting if this may work for your child or young person depending on their 'age & stage' of development.
- Use visuals in the home – some children or young people respond well to a visual reminder. Write out the steps and have them illustrate each one (for example: how to do laundry). Stick these around the house as reminders.
- Do not put pressure on yourself to keep the house in perfect condition. **With so many people home, things will get messier, faster. That's OK!**

Further resources

- Information on leaving care can be found here: https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/leaving-care

9. Connecting to culture and country



Key points

- Connecting to culture can act as a source of safety and security for children and young people.
- Providing opportunities to connect with their cultural community will create a strong and unified support network
- Cultural connection builds on a child or young person's sense of identity.
- The mental and physical health of Aboriginal children and families is enhanced when they are connected to culture.

Why this is important

Cultural connection is how children and young people build on their sense of identity. For many children and young people, a connection to culture may feel familiar and comforting. By strengthening cultural connection in the home, the child or young person can feel secure and supported, building resilience, belonging and connection to community

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people

The agency that you are with is your best source for support in ways to help maintain a connection to culture and country for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

If a child or young person in your care is Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and you are *not* currently with an Aboriginal Controlled Community Agency (ACCO), you may still reach out to Aboriginal community organisations that offer out of home care to get support and advice.

There are resources online that support carers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children which will help carers connect safely and empower you in your day-to-day role of caring for children. Have a look at the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care's (SNAICC) resource available here:
https://www.supportingcarers.snaicc.org.au/

Connecting safely

Aboriginal children and young people may wish to connect with their Elders during this time for reassurance and comfort. For those Elders who are at risk, connection should be facilitated via video calling or other alternatives, to avoid placing vulnerable communities at risk of COVID-19 transmission.

Consider the various ways cultural identity impacts and supports children and young people in care. Engage children and young people in your care on how they would like to connect with culture that works for them. If you are not sure where to begin, contact either your foster care agency, or an ACCO.

Connecting to culture online

Culture can be connected to through everyday activity, including:

- Watching age appropriate online videos that include Aboriginal music, dance, comedy and drama.
- Reading stories, including Dreamtime Stories, historical texts, and histories of famous people from the young person's culture
- Downloading/printing Aboriginal colouring sheets or activity pages (there are free online ones)

There are a range of ways that the internet can be used to facilitate connection to culture.

Deadly Story is a cultural information website to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the Victorian out-of-home care system to connect with their Country, their Communities, and their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and identity. They have a range of online resources:
https://www.deadlystory.com/

National Indigenous Television (NITV) have a range of programs and program guide on their website, a wonderful opportunity to explore contemporary culture and see past NAIDOC award winners:
https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/

3KND Kool 'N' Deadly is Melbourne's first Indigenous owned and managed radio station. As well as radio they offer a range of podcasts on their website which older children and even carers may benefit from:
https://www.3knd.org.au/

Google has partnered with galleries and museums all over the world to produce virtual tours and online resources. Explore with your child/young person if they would like to virtually connect with a site of cultural significance for them. Visit:
https://artsandculture.google.com/

Tips and suggestions

- Culture is a deep and complex part of life – think about how you can support children and young people in your care to feel connected and secure in ways that work for them.
- Family contact is important for children and young people. If this is disrupted during this time, consider what you can do to help the child or young person understand this and;
- Support the child or young person to maintain family contact in alternative ways if possible – phone calls, video calls, writing letters or drawing, etc.
- You can participate in cooking a meal together, creating arts and crafts, or engaging in educational activities through books, movies, and resources online.
- Explore with the child/young person – is there something they liked to do with their birth family that you can honour in the home environment.

Further resources

- For Victorian Aboriginal Health Service details visit:
    - https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/about/health-strategies/aboriginal-health
    - https://www.vahs.org.au/
- For the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation visit: https://www.vaccho.org.au/about-us/covid19/
- Crackerjack Education offers Indigenous teaching resources: https://www.crackerjackeducation.com.au/
- SNAICCs Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Cultural Needs resource book: https://www.snaicc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/02932.pdf

10. Dealing with heightened behaviours

Key points

- A period of uncertainty such as COVID-19 and changes to their routine can trigger children or young people to have heightened behaviours or to experience a regression in behaviour.
- When children are dysregulated, they require a caregiver who is attuned to their needs to help them feel safe and calm.
- Behaviour management strategies evolve and change, however the basics remain the same.

Why this is important

Your relationship with the child or young person in your care affects how they will heal from their trauma and manage their behaviours. When children are emotionally dysregulated from trauma or experience periods of instability they may start to show heightened behaviours, or 'flip their lids'.

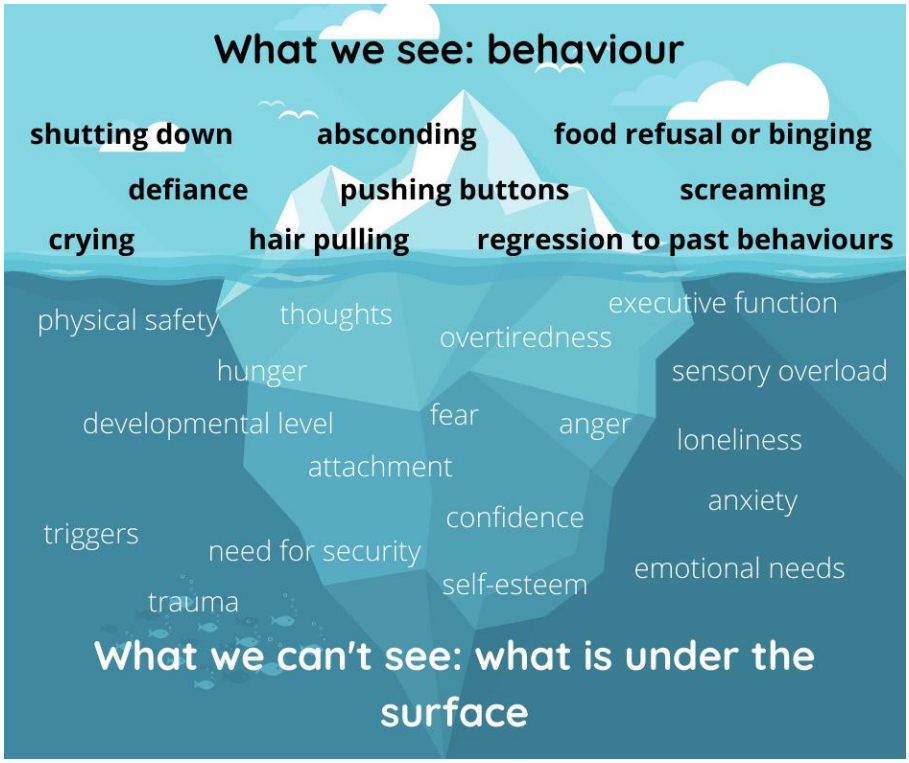
This may lead to behaviour that is challenging to deal with such as meltdowns, anger, impulsivity, fear responses, and self-soothing behaviours.

We know that trauma impacts children and young people's development by making them feel that the world is not a safe place. By remaining attuned to a child or young person's needs, you can help them to manage their behaviour and feelings and build a sense of safety.

You can create safe and developmentally appropriate opportunities in your direct contact with the child or young person by being respectful, empathic and non-escalating. This is an opportunity to model healthy emotional regulation while building trust.

Understanding behaviour

Behaviour is a form of communication. With children and young people especially, the outward behaviour we see displayed is an indicator of things that may not be immediately obvious to us.



Returning to Shared Lives training

Remember "Fight, Flight, Freeze" from Shared Lives training - you must connect with a child before you try to correct behaviour.

"Name it to tame it" - helping children and young people be aware of their emotions help them regulate them.

Consider the function of the behaviours – some children and young people may engage in self-soothing behaviours such as rocking, masturbation, overeating, sucking fingers, food hoarding, or self-harm when stressed or triggered.

The PACE model

Behaviour management depends on emotional awareness and attachment– use Repair parenting strategies such as the PACE model in Shared Lives to support children in your care.

This video by Sarah Naish is a refresher:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-oWUZNhEXo

The PACE model can be used throughout daily interactions to support children to emotionally regulate and redirect escalations.
Discuss the PACE model further about how it can practically suit your household and the needs of children or young people in your care.

use the PACE Model to engage with children and help them feel safe

Helping children understand their emotions

Behaviour management strategies evolve, and change based on the function of the behaviour and the needs of the child. If there are behaviours that often resurface for a child or young person in your care – discuss these with your case manager and care team to plan to manage them.

Be aware that when children are triggered, their behaviour may regress so you may experience behaviours that had not been present for a while.

You can help children/young people understand their emotions and behaviours with Dan Siegel's Hand Brain Model.

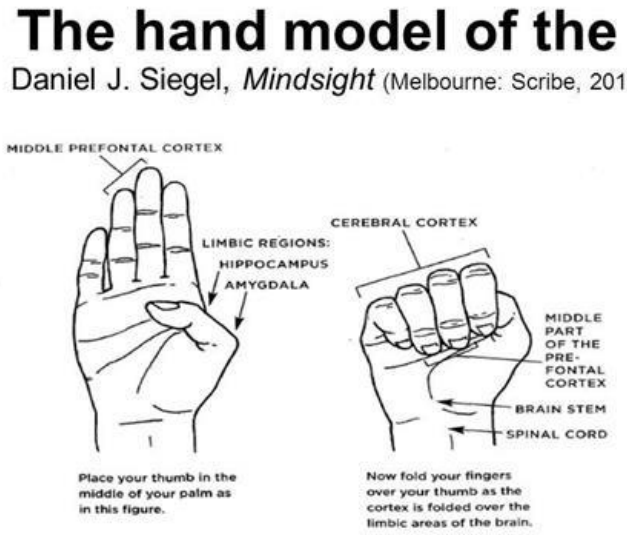
What happens when we flip our lid

You may remember learning about the Hand Model of the brain while you were doing Shared Lives training. This is a great way for carers to understand, and explain to young people, what is happening when we 'flip out lid'.

You can watch Dr Dan Seigel explaining the model here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gm9CIJ74Oxw

When our brain is working efficiently both the upper and mid brain are communicating effectively. Information comes in and is processed logically. Sometimes too much information is coming in and the upper brain discnnects. We then "Flip our lid" and cannot acess the functions provided by the upper brain.

The upper brain the the "thinking" brain. It is accessed for logic, socialising, and reasoning. The lower brain is the survival part of the brain. It is the fight or flight mode of the brain. When you "Flip your lid" – the upper and lower brain are no longer communicating. Logic no longer influcences emotions.



Everyone flips their lid from time to time. By understanding **how** and **when** it happens, we can learn to control when we feel we might **flip our lids**.

Young people with disabilities

Speak with your agency about how physical distancing, isolation, or quarantine may impact young people in your care. Consider the following resources to help support you during this time:

- The NDIS have created a COVID-19 FAQ for participants: https://www.ndis.gov.au/understanding/ndis-and-other-government-services/ndis-and-disaster-response#faq
- If you are a carer for a person with a disability, the NDIS Commission offers an Infection Prevention and Control online training module for support workers: https://covid-19training.com.au/login.php
- The NDIA (National Disability Insurance Agency) have published an easy read fact sheet about COVID-19: https://www.ndis.gov.au/understanding/ndis-and-other-government-services/ndis-and-disaster-response
- The Council for Intellectual Disability have created an easy read Info Guide about Viruses and staying healthy: https://cid.org.au/resource/viruses-and-staying-healthy/
- If your child/young person uses Aided Language Displays, you can find a COVID-19 ALD here: https://janellesampson.wordpress.com/2020/03/12/talking-to-kids-about-coronavirus/

Tips and suggestions

- Don't be afraid to ask for help – speak with your case manager about behaviours that are difficult to manage to identify the right strategy for the child or young person.
- Think of what has triggered their behaviour in the past – will disruptions in family contact or school impact their wellbeing? Speak to your case manager about the best way to support this.
- Be prepared to be creative and ask for help – strategies that used to work, may not anymore. If you would like further training, contact your agency or FCAV.
- Self-care – you will be best able to support the children/young people in your care if you can remain patient and calm to attune to their needs.
- Use the PACE model or repair parenting techniques to redirect behaviours from heightening.
- May children and young people feel powerless, give them choices and options when working through an issue together. For younger children, this may be two choices so to not overwhelm them.
- Always let the child or young person know that you accept THEM, but you might not accept the behaviour. This aligns with Dan Hugh's PACE model from Shared Lives training.

Further resources

- Find more tips and resources for behaviour management here: https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/HealthyLiving/Parenting-when-youre-a-foster-carer
- More information on the PACE model can be found here: https://ddpnetwork.org/about-ddp/meant-pace/
- Remember - FCAV are able to provide advice and support on a range of behaviours, and have resources available for carers to access. You can call them for any care related support on 9416 4292.

11. Staying safe

Key Points

- The safety of the child or young person is paramount; however, the whole household needs to feel safe, including their carers and your loved ones.
- Family violence can happen to anyone in any circumstance and every experience can be different
- As always, if you or someone in your household is in immediate danger, call the police on 000.

Why this is important

During the stress, anxiety and uncertainty that COVID-19 may bring, unsafe situations may present themselves or heighten. It is important that as a caregiver, you know where to access help and support in addition to your agency. If you or someone you know needs to self-isolate but doesn't feel safe at home – please see the below contact details for support.

Resources

Safe Steps – If you or someone you care about is living with Family Violence
- 24/7 Response Line 1 800 015 188
- www.safesteps.org.au

1 800 RESPECT - National Sexual Assault, Domestic and Family Violence Counselling
- Hotline 1 800 737 732

Lifeline – 24/7 Crisis support and suicide prevention service
- 13 11 14
- https://www.lifeline.org.au/

Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA) – Phone support, in-person counselling and case work service
- 03 9635 3610
- http://www.casahouse.com.au/

Sexual Assault Crisis Line – After Hours Support from 5PM – 9AM daily
- 03 8345 3495
- https://www.sacl.com.au/

InTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence – Specialist service for women from migrant and refugee backgrounds, their families, and communities.
- 1 800 755 988 (Monday-Friday 9-5PM
- www.intouch.org.au

With Respect – LGBTIQ+ After Hours Family Violence Service provides support, referrals.
- 1 800 LGBTIQ (1800 542 847) opening hours: Wednesday 5pm-11pm, Saturday and Sunday 3pm-10pm (can call any time after Friday 5pm and leave a message and your call will be returned between those hours).
- www.withrespect.org.au

Kids Helpline – For children living with family or domestic violence, a free, private and confidential phone and online counselling service for ages 5-25
- 1 800 551 1800

The Aboriginal and Family Domestic Violence Hotline
- 1 800 019 123

The Sikh Helpline Australia – Australia-wide confidential support service
- 0401 401 030

The National Disability Abuse and Neglect Hotline
- 1 800 880 052

The National Domestic Violence Hotline
- 1 800 799 7233
- Text – LOVEIS to 22522
- https://www.thehotline.org/

WIRE (Women's Information Referral and Exchange) - Risk assessment, support, information and referrals.
- 1300 134 130 between 9:30am-4:30pm
- Email on support@wire.org.au
- Online chat on the website www.wire.org.au

QLife – LGBTIQ+ Peer Support Service from 3pm-12am daily
- 1 800 184 527
  www.qlife.org.au

Remember to reach out. We are here to help.

fostering
CONNECTIONS

Centre for Excellence in
Child and Family Welfare

With thanks

We are all doing our best to get by in a changing, difficult time. Thank you for your incredible commitment to Victorian children and young people.

https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus