
Child Protection Update 3: Strategic Planning for Recovery

The educators in our lives are rock stars. And they are tired.

Like you, we've been fielding questions about ongoing school practices and fears for children's safety at home. We have listened to large and small child-serving organizations across the world to align our support of children's wellbeing at this time. We share the following guidance culled from international school partners and INGOs with the expectation that in the coming phase schools will be cycling into and out of in person and online education.

Q. What child protection protocols should be in place for cycles of school attendance and stay-home isolation?

Ensure staff and parents know the child protection designate and contact details for reporting concerns. Be explicit that reporting a concern isn't an 'allegation', but an opportunity to gather more information and verify the welfare and safety of a child.

Create and share a Child Protection policy COVID addendum specific to the pandemic period with staff and parents. This confirms your school is prepared to respond to child protection concerns, and that expectations around [professional boundaries](#) and codes of conduct remain in place. Provide [local and online support](#) provider contacts to students and parents.

Consider an 'extended' attendance record - In addition to a record of online engagement by students, teachers should know the child's location and any vulnerabilities and resiliencies of students in their class or advisory group. Seek to answer - is this child safe at home? This can be done using scheduled check-ins or social-emotional learning and focuses on asking questions and listening to children and parents.

- [Risk assessments](#) should be done in cases of previously known or newly identified CP concerns. A risk rating system of Red, Amber, Green (RAG) may be helpful.
- Data protection implications - a compliance orientation may make schools reluctant to record this data. In most cases, a risk assessment and documented purpose and duration make retention of child protection records compliant.

Emergency or crisis fund - Tap or create a crisis fund to support children and families who might not meet the thresholds of local child protection agency intervention which are higher at this time.

Q. What options exist if teachers or counselors need to work 1-on-1 with a child?

Colleagues and supervisors should be informed and risk assessment should take place. Some school districts are recommending asking another teacher to be present on the call (their video could be off, and where settings allow participants to not see those attending by audio only, the student should be informed who and why another adult is online). Alternatively, students could be asked to conduct the meeting with another adult visible in the room on their end. No one should be recorded without their knowledge and consent. There should not be an expectation of privacy in educational exchanges (i.e, a supervisor may 'drop in') and in person policies should be followed online as closely as possible.

Q. What options exist if teachers or counselors need to work 1-on-1 with a child?

Communication channels need to be confirmed - consider creating a dedicated email address or text enabled phone number for child protection reporting or resource requests. Those that have done this say they are being utilized. Formalize regular check-ins with parents and students and, as always, document any child protection concerns. Ensure staff are observant and trained in signs and indicators of abuse and parents and students know indicators of online grooming and exploitation. Create opportunities for staff to discuss concerns and provide tips for ongoing pastoral care. Consider extending support outside your school community. Engage faith communities, major employers and your school network and partners. Your extended community is important to case response, can help you gather information, and can amplify the message of 'children first'.

Q. How do we identify new vulnerabilities or concerns?

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Q. How do we respond when we have a serious concern or know a child is at risk or has been harmed?

Follow school protocols including the International Task Force [Allegation Protocol](#). The [ICRT external response team](#) funded by the Office of Overseas Schools reviews anonymized cases and provides confidential considerations at no cost. Additional case support resources are on the [COVID.ICMEC.org](#) page. If a student is at high risk (as assessed by the child protection team), documentation and reporting to external partners is always appropriate.

Confirm status of local external partners and remote service providers - ensure you know if protocols and thresholds have changed at this time. Providing [local and online support template](#) to parents and students lets your community know you prioritize wellness.

Q. How do we prevent abuse and build a resilient community?

Provide social-emotional and online abuse prevention education - Two thirds of all sexual abuse has an online element but only about half of parents talk to their children about online safety. Children are more accessible and susceptible at this time. Avoid common pitfalls, such as taking an adversarial or fear-based approach. Listen to children, reinforce your current safeguarding curriculum, support [positive parenting](#), and share [info sheets and lessons](#).

Trauma informed support of staff, students and parents is critical to a climate of prevention - this approach should be implemented at multiple levels, in multiple forms. Trauma is unique to each individual. Prioritize listening to children and seeking a trauma informed understanding of behavior by providing training to staff and parents. Provide opportunities to share fears and concerns in non-judgemental forums.

Resources in support of this guidance:

- [Adapting to new learning environments](#)
- [CDC Guidance for Schools and Administrators](#)
- [COVID.ICMEC.org](#) resources continue to be updated
- ICMEC resources summary [video](#)
- More detail is available on Education Portal [FAQs](#)
- More detail on [Reporting & Support](#) is available on the Education Portal.

Finally, we have selected the ICMEC designated regional trainers We will be sharing their names with you shortly. If you have a dedicated COVID resource support or webinar library, please share the link with us. To remove your name or add names to this regular mailing, please respond by return email. Note that many partners are included in Bcc.

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