

GUIDANCE FOR COVID-19 PREVENTION AND CONTROL IN SCHOOLS

Supplemental Content

E: Protection of Children in and out of school in the context of COVID-19 pandemic

Education and Child Protection are complementary sectors, each contributing significantly to healthy development of children and their short- and long-term well-being. In the context of the Coronavirus pandemic (COVID-2019) Education and Child Protection actors should collaborate to ensure the well-being of children and their families – in schools, communities, and homes.

Supporting Children's Emotional Wellbeing

- Children often take their emotional cues from the important adults in their lives, so how teachers and caregivers respond to the crisis is very important.
- It is important that caregivers manage their own emotions well and remain calm, listen to children's concerns, speak kindly to them and reassure them, and establish a sensitive and caring environment around the child.
- Whether at school or at home, caregivers can help engage children in a creative activity, such as playing and drawing, to facilitate their ability to express and communicate negative feelings they may be experiencing in a safe and supportive environment, and thus help children find positive ways to express disturbing feelings such as anger, fear, and sadness.

In Schools (when and where open):

- Provide a safe space to support children dealing with the impacts of COVID-19 on their lives and address emerging issues such as social stigma and discrimination.
- Put mechanisms in place for students who require more specialized support as a result of the pandemic or due to pre-existing conditions.
- Create a sense of normalcy and routine in the classroom to help children deal with the uncertainties surrounding them.
- Train teachers and other school staff on signs of distress to enable them to identify and refer children and young people who may have specific child protection needs.
- Ensure teachers and volunteers have necessary knowledge and skills related to GBV risk mitigation, Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA), child safeguarding, and safe referral practices.
- Develop and roll-out child-friendly complaints and feedback mechanisms.
- Develop, disseminate or display messages about child protection and GBV issues as well as available services including family tracing and reunification and case management.

In case of school closure:

- Support communities and families in fostering an environment that encourages continued education and growth for children and youth of different ages. This is particularly important in contexts with pre-existing conflict or high levels of violence.
- Make sure remote learning mechanisms do not expose children to violence such as cyber bullying. Consider when adult supervision may be needed (i.e. in cases where teachers have one-on-one sessions with learners).
- If possible, caregivers should maintain schoolwork, study or other routine activities that do not endanger children or go against health authorities. They can also help create new routines at home, including through learning, playing and relaxing.
- Advocate with government and private employers for flexible working arrangements for parents and caregivers to enable them to continue responsive care and education of their children.

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- Teachers can play an important role in supporting children at home, for example by maintaining social contact with students through phone calls, text messages, or other virtual platforms.
- Ensure that protection and safety messages are delivered to parents and children in a way that limits panic and distress, is reassuring and encourages adherence to health messaging.

Protection from sexual violence: harassment and exploitation

Violence against children and adults can exacerbate during emergencies including disease outbreaks. For example, in previous public health emergencies, women and adolescent girls have become more vulnerable to coercion, exploitation, and sexual abuse.

The following actions should be implemented when ***schools/learning centres are open*** to mitigate increased risk of sexual violence and to respond to sexual violence during the COVID-19 response:

- Raise awareness and train teachers and volunteers working with children on protection from sexual violence: harassment and exploitation
- Ensure that teachers and volunteers read and sign code of conduct
- Ensure learning spaces have functioning confidential and safe reporting and referral mechanisms available to help children and adults (including female teachers/volunteers) who may experience sexual violence to seek support
- Raise awareness among teachers, volunteers and learners about the existing reporting channels, referral pathways and how to access support services
- Immediately link or refer children reporting cases of sexual violence to appropriate specialists: Child Protection, Gender Based Violence (GBV) and Health actors available. Ensure this is done as soon as possible or within 72 hours
- Ensure reported incidents of sexual abuse against children are swiftly addressed in a safe and confidential manner. Learn about the [GBV Pocket Guide](#) to support survivors in locations where there are no services.
- Work closely in collaboration with Child Protection actors to identify and address any potential risks of sexual violence against children
- Work closely with WASH actors to ensure gender-segregated facilities including toilets exist.

During ***school closures***, it is important to utilize alternative mechanisms as the support schools offer and the line of communication or reporting may be broken. Being confined at home could have additional safety risks especially for those who are already vulnerable and/or those who live in households where intimate partner violence and/or child abuse are occurring.

- Use remote learning modalities to also promote and provide support services and to disseminate protocols and referral pathways, working with protection and health specialists
- Also consult with Child Protection and Health specialists to integrate relevant content into core subjects, MHPSS, risk communication and life skills materials.

Key Resources

- Technical Note: Protection of Children during the Coronavirus Pandemic (<https://alliancecpha.org/en/COVID19>)
- How to support survivors of gender-based violence when a GBV actor is not available in your area <https://gbvguidelines.org/en/pocketguide/>