Tip-sheet to identify and make use of online and digital resources to offer mental health and psychosocial support to children and adolescents in the context of COVID-19

The current COVID-19 epidemic, like other infectious disease outbreak previously, imposes to Child Protection actors to work and **deliver services with great creativity and flexibility**, especially in those areas of interventions traditionally relying on group-gathering (i.e. Child Friendly Spaces) and face-to-face interactions.

With the closure of schools as a preventive measure endorsed by many governments, more and more children and adolescents are confined at home with their routine severely disrupted for weeks and sometimes months. Many of them may feel isolated and experience unsettling and destabilizing feelings, not just related to the fear and worry triggered by the disease, but also due to the imposed restriction of movement and confinement, which in the long term is likely to lead to frustration, increased anxiety, boredom, loneliness and sadness, among others.

These significant repercussion on the psychosocial wellbeing of children and adolescents are known as **secondary impact** of the epidemic and requires as much a timely and dedicated intervention, as the health concerns require.

UNICEF, as a global lead-agency for the response to the secondary impact has a key role to play, especially in Child Protection, in order to ensure that adequate support is timely and efficiently offered to children and adolescents, who see their wellbeing seriously compromised, as a direct and indirect result of the emergency.

This tip-sheet was created with the objective to offer an overview of possible alternative resources that Child Protection actors could make use of, in order to deliver **Mental Health and Psychosocial Support** services, within the broader Child Protection response to the epidemic, or while preparing a response and already observing the impact of strict mitigation measures (i.e. curfew, school closure, quarantine, isolation in health facilities, etc.) on the psychosocial wellbeing of children and families.

- Have you already engaged with active **Youth Networks/Associations and fora** in your Country?
  - ➡ Consider mapping and partnering with the most widely known youth associations, networks, social platforms active in your country. Identify those who are already offering online services – via social networking platforms, websites, e-learning courses and explore how to disseminate this among age-appropriate groups.

- Together with the youth networks identified, explore:
  - ➡ Online learning, recreational, fitness activities and games and social platforms in consideration of language, gender, vulnerabilities, such as diverse types of disabilities, and in consideration of the specific needs of each age-group:
    School-aged children (6-9)
    Young adolescents (10-14)
    Older adolescents (15-19)

- Compile a list of relevant websites, social platforms, chats, applications, etc. Make sure to assess:
  - ➡ The selected platforms have considerable value in positively supporting the psychosocial wellbeing of school-aged children, teenagers and adolescents in one of more of the following ways:
    - **Offering an opportunity to positively interact with peers** and share feelings and thoughts. The platform contributes to maintaining social connections and peer exchange and support while in physical isolation.
    - **Receiving useful tips and inspiring inputs**. The platform contributes to a healthy lifestyle and routine and the broader mental health of kids in prolonged confinement. This could include applications that produce daily positive tasks, quotes, stories, questions, notifications on tasks to be completed, etc. to encourage a positive attitude and positive coping strategies, while in a difficult situation. It could also include apps with playful and fun tips on how to maintain healthy eating and sleeping habits.
    - **Supporting cognitive stimulation and learning skills,** through learning programs, courses, quizzes, games, competitions, lessons, documentaries, etc. on topics of interest for target groups.
    - **Encouraging physical exercise, meditation, breathing techniques and relaxation practices** appropriate for a young audience and different age groups (including for young children in a playful way). It could include applications, channels, videos, cartoons, tv programs, you-tube channels, dedicated webpages, etc.

- **Promoting positive expression of feelings, including disturbing and upsetting emotions, in a creative way**, through art competitions, artistic activities and games, short videos with tips on how to express the own creativity (e.g. fun guidance on story-writing, compiling a private diary or a journal, creating videos on a fun activity to be done at home, etc.) practical tutorials (on drawing, coloring, painting, singing, building handcraft with simple material, etc.), etc. A series of videos could also explain the reason for feeling upset, worried, scared, etc.

- **Reinforcing positive role models and concrete examples on how to deal with the everyday confinement situation.** This could be done through goodwill ambassador and engaging popular characters that could be interviewed or just speak about themselves and a difficult situation they experienced and overcame.

- **Offering qualified dedicated/non-dedicated support to children and youth in need**. This could be done through online individual and group chat, phone free helpline and other platforms where adolescents can feel safe, supported and free to express their inner emotions and worries and receive positive guidance.

- The platforms/channels/webpages/online must guarantee:
  - Their use and the contents published on them are safe and can be monitored
  - There are mechanisms to report inappropriate behaviors of users/contents, safety concerns.

- In collaboration with the youth networks and resources identified, use **platforms cleared to be useful and safe** to organize campaigns, online competitions, group-games, video tutorials, support messages, support chats, etc. in order to meet the following (and above-listed in more detail) **results**:
  - *Children, teenagers and adolescents are supported in maintaining **social connections***
  - *Children, teenagers and adolescents can easily access age-appropriate useful practical tips to maintain a **healthy routine***
  - *Children, teenagers and adolescents can easily access age-appropriate online resources/activities supporting their **cognitive skills and learning needs**, including enhancing artistic skills.*
  - *Children, teenagers and adolescents are encouraged to use online age-sensitive resources/activities supporting their **psychosocial wellbeing and mental health**, including practical and guided*

techniques to relax, think clearly, manage upsetting emotions, encourage creative expressions, and promote a positive attitude and coping skills .

➡️ *Children, teenagers and adolescents can easily access age-adequate online resources/activities supporting their **physical wellbeing**, including guided physical exercise responding to the needs of movement, stretch, maintain good posture, release muscle tension and emotions, etc.*

➡️ *Children, teenagers and adolescents can refer to positive and inspiring role models reinforcing **resilient skills and coping strategies.***

➡️ *Children, teenagers and adolescents can easily access **dedicated and non-dedicated help** if needed.*

Once existing resources and networks are identified, consider leveraging local-level influencers (i.e. youth advocates, celebrities, etc.) to help disseminate the resources widely.

Consider options for engaging young people in the identification of resources, sharing their ideas and opinions and giving them a platform to participate in the process. This could be done through online campaigns to identify good online resources from adolescents themselves, using platforms for expression such as Voices of Youth to encourage discussions on a certain topic, or running an online art competition for adolescents and children to provide a creative outlet, and others.

Consider engaging Disability Networks and other Disabled People Organizations, DPOs, and work together to make products available in multiple formats (audio, videos, subtitles for people with hearing impairment, etc.) in order to be accessible by people with different disabilities and promote inclusiveness and accessibility of every fora, discussion, platform, channel, competition, etc.