COVID-19: Activating family networks during the pandemic

With increasing advice around self-isolation, social distancing and quarantine we will face barriers connecting family members and networks to face to face roles to create safety and connection for children. This is more important than ever however, because children and families are likely to be more isolated from services and other professional supports during the pandemic.

Isolation from family and friends is also likely to cause increased stress and risk for children and families in our communities.

Social distancing is simply about physical distance and hygiene. This should not mean distancing children from their important connections. They need their connections more than ever, even if this happens in a different way for now.

What this means for your practice

Consideration	What to do
Families and children will start experiencing increasing levels of isolation. Day to day routines will be disrupted and children's visibility and engagement in the community will be reduced. This may include less face to face interaction with professional supports.	**Listen** to how the current context of COVID-19 has impacted on families pre-existing connections. **Ask** families about existing networks and connections using tools like the Eco-Map. **Notice** and act on opportunities to grow other available connections and relationships. **Use** systems like Assessment Consultations to talk about how connected the family are. Establish what your role and tasks are following through and communicating with network members.
People are likely to have increased worries about the safety and wellbeing of the children they know and care about in the context of Covid-19.	**Use** tools like the Family Safety Circles to understand who already knows about the worries and what is happening for children. **Create** ways to connect them either face to face or through other means of communication. **Develop** a buddy system so that various members of the network are scheduled to check in in a variety of ways.

There will be additional limitations and considerations about how to use network members in safety plans during the pandemic.	**Partner** with families and children to create the safest pathways of connection for them. **Use** network members to check in, preferably through face to face visits. **Explore** strategies to reduce risk like hand washing, staying 1.5 metres from others. Provide sanitiser to network members. Plan for video capabilities on the phone if face to face contact is not possible. **Express** a sense of urgency and importance about why network matters so much right now for the child. **Negotiate** what they are able to do for example; dropping off groceries or a meal, phoning in regularly, ways to let the kids know they are loved and being thought of. **Find out** the names and contact details of others who might be in a position to help. **Find & Connect** those who have a heart for the child using Family Finding tools. Be clear about what we need from network members before we ring them and ask them about their health and ability to help at this time.
Those who are physically closest to children and families, like neighbours will be the ones most likely to see, hear and respond to things that worry them.	**Ask** about children and families relationships with those that live in the same street or suburb. **Use** our systems like child story to identify people who already know the children or are worried about them and explore ways to connect them. **Talk** about how you can interact with others without putting your health (or theirs) at risk. *Can you speak to your neighbours from over a fence or across balconies?*
Face to face contact with network members is likely to be disrupted. Technology can help combat isolation, build safety and support families.	**Encourage** and help coordinate conections through applications like '*snap chat'*, '*skype', 'face time'*, 'WhatsApp', 'WeChat' and 'Messenger'. Seeing someone's facial expressions through the use of

	video capabilities on devices can help increase connection.
	If children or family members are not in a position to say something is wrong, visual signs, facial expressions or the presence of an agreed safety object may alert people to danger or risk for family members.
	Make sure family members and network members have enough credit to use apps.
	Connect people online with others who may have similar experiences. For instance:
	1800RESPECT Daisy app
	Carers NSW
	Parentline
	KIDS helpine Niggle app
	Ask women and children, if they are experiencing violence, how freely they have access to telephones and communication with others outside the home. This information will be vital to your safety planning.
Some network members, due to age or pre-existing illness, will be more vulnerable to the virus and even if they want to help it may not be in the interest of their health or the family we are working with. This may be the case for Aboriginal Elders and those with pre-existing medical conditions.	**Ask** questions about the network members current health status and get permission from the family to share current information about their health status.
Previous social responses families and children have received from family, friends and the community may influence their willingness to connect with others.	**Ask** about previous social responses from others that were helpful and unhelpful. e.g: *What did they (family, friends, and community) do when you told them he (used violence)?* *What did people do or say that was helpful/not so helpful?* *Who helps you feel strong and valued?*

Helpful links

[Eco Maps](#)

[Family Safety Circles](#)

[Family Finding](#)

Follow all [DCJ Coronavirus advice and guidelines](#) during this time.