

COVID19, CHILD PROTECTION & THE FAITH COMMUNITY

Houses of worship have a real opportunity to take the lead in reducing the impact of the pandemic on vulnerable children. Our response to the crisis has the potential to significantly impact outcomes. What we do now is not just for now but also for the future. Churches can make a lasting impact by mobilizing practical steps to help safeguard children and families.

A CRISIS of child protection concerns:

Child protection encompasses issues of poverty, health, education, child abuse, and the care of children. COVID19 has brought urgent challenges including:

- Lack of food due to loss of income and transportation restrictions.
- Challenges and stress of educating children at home.
- Strain on family relationships in lockdown and isolation.
- Increase in domestic violence and sexual abuse as adults and children are now trapped in isolation with perpetrators.

IMPACTED BY reduced or closed support services:

- Mental health and addiction services not operating or reduced.
- Schools and youth groups are not gathering.
- Social workers unable to visit children and vulnerable families.
- Courts that deal with child issues are closed.

THE CHURCH can respond to these challenges because it has:

- Extensive and well-established networks.
- Vast and caring membership.
- Experience in responding to crises.
- Credibility and influence at national and local levels.

FAITH LEADERS can:

- Collaborate with leaders in government, health and faith to respond.
- Share accurate information and guidelines.
- Offer practical and prayer support through church networks and resources.
- Raise awareness and provide information at the individual church level.

LOCAL CONGREGATIONS can:

- Raise awareness, teach and deliver information through online services.
- Mobilize and train food, health, education, parenting, relationship volunteers.
- Set up phone numbers for reporting of crisis needs and abuse situations.

RESPONSES:

The Need	Online Services	Staff	Volunteers	Members
Food & care packages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek food donations either to be given directly to those in need or dropped in food bank. Seek volunteers to distribute food using safe practices. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appoint volunteer coordinator (such as a deacon). • Train, and advise and equip coordinator. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distribute food safely to families in need using congregation hospitality volunteers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Express needs of themselves or neighbors to food coordinator.
Information for keeping safe and healthy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach ways to stay safe and healthy. • Provide details of church coordinator and explain role. • Seek donations of health products. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appoint health coordinator (such as a retired nurse from the congregation) • Collaborate with health services. • Train, and advise and equip coordinator. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respond to health queries and refer to higher levels as needed. • Prepare flyers and online resources. • Include health products such as masks and information in care packages. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Express needs of themselves or neighbors to health coordinator.
Educating & Parenting at home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share ideas and online resources. • Provide details of education and parenting coordinator. • Seek donations of education tools and games. • Set up mid-week on line activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appoint education & parenting coordinator (such as an educator from the congregation) • Coordinate with national/local education services. • Train, and advise and equip coordinator. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advise on education & parenting inquiries. • Prepare pictorial and written advice as online resources. • Include education tools and information in care package. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Express needs of themselves or neighbors to health coordinator.

The Need	Online Services	Staff	Volunteers	Members
Strain on the Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise awareness that this is a natural and normal response to crisis. • Encourage and reduce pressure through prayer support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appoint relationship coordinator. • Train, and advise and equip coordinator. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within safety guidelines, talk to families while delivering care packages, asking questions and encouraging. • Refer to relationship coordinator where appropriate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Express needs of themselves or neighbors to relationship advisor.
Domestic Violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise awareness that this is unacceptable and has impact on the whole family. • Provide information about hot line to report abuse or suspected abuse. • Seek offers of safe places to stay. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up hotline to receive abuse calls. • Train, advise and equip volunteers. • Coordinate with police and social care agencies. • Identify potential alternative accommodation. • Prepare information to include in care packages. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within safety guidelines, talk to families while delivering care packages, looking for signs of abuse. • Refer to advisor where appropriate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Express needs of themselves or neighbors.
Sexual Abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise awareness that this is likely to rise during the pandemic. • Educate on the signs of abuse. • Provide information hot line to report abuse or suspected abuse. • Seek offers of safe places to shelter. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up hotline to report abuse or seek advice. • Train, advise and equip volunteers • Share reports with police and social care agencies. • Identify potential alternative accommodations. • Prepare information to include in care packages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within safety guidelines, talk to families while delivering care packages, looking for signs of abuse. • Refer to advisor where appropriate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Express needs of themselves or neighbors.