# Supporting children and families experiencing vulnerability during CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

**As a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, children families and carers who were already experiencing vulnerability may be under increased pressure.**

**For some families experiencing vulnerability, having their children continue to attend early childhood services will be the best way to support their continued learning and development.**

The Department acknowledges that many service providers and local governments are already putting in place proactive and innovative arrangements to support these children and families.

It is important to prioritise reaching out to families experiencing vulnerability and work with parents and carers to agree on the best way to keep in contact. Families and carers may choose for children to attend all, or only some, sessions.

If there are health reasons that prevent or limit children’s attendance at your service, reasonable efforts should be made to support learning from home arrangements.

If children do not attend as agreed, follow up with families and carers to identify any barriers to attendance or additional support that could be provided If children have not attended for a week, consider reaching out to other support services that may be involved.

Families with existing or new circumstances that may experience additional pressures as a result of coronavirus (COVID-19) include:

* children and families who do not have access to a secure learning environment at home, including:
  + children in out-of-home care
  + children considered by Child Protection and/or Family Services to be at risk of harm or neglect
  + children identified by the service as vulnerable (including via referral from a family violence agency, homelessness, mental health, or other health service).
* children whose learning and development may be at particular risk, including those:
  + with a disability
  + from an English as an additional language background
  + from a refugee background
  + who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

If a child is in out-of-home care, your local [LOOKOUT Education Support Centre](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/Pages/lookout.aspx) can support attendance and engage families and carers with learning from home opportunities.

For children with additional needs, [Preschool Field Officers](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/professionals/needs/Pages/psfo.aspx) (PSFOs) can be contacted to support access and participation.

Additional support for engaging with children and families from a refugee background can be obtained via contacting [Foundation House](http://www.foundationhouse.org.au) to seek tailored advice.

Telephone support is available to educators and services from [*fka* Children’s Services](http://fka.org.au/) in continuing to maintain strong connections and engagement with multilingual families.

You can also use your School Readiness Funding to support your outreach engagement with children and families experiencing vulnerability.

With families consent, you can also connect with other support services involved to discuss learning arrangements and co-ordination of support.

**Learning from home**

Learning from home arrangements should be facilitated where families and carers have identified health risk concerns for children or their families.

Working with families and carers to equip them in sustaining children’s learning can be particularly challenging in a remote context. Direct contact will be helpful, both in supporting communication but also, if possible, in observing and coaching families and carers to initiate and guide learning activities. Every partnership will be unique and it will be important to identify with families what they do well and build their confidence.

**Critical practices to consider**

* **Making contact with families**. Find out the best way to maintain contact with families. The form of contact should be negotiated with families and carers, and should be secure, reliable and accessible. This may be a mix of telephone and online video such as Skype or FaceTime.
* **Forming a partnership**. It will be important to have a shared understanding between services and families about what learning from home means for their circumstances. Check in with families and carers to see if they need any additional assistance to support children’s learning.
* **Planning your approach**. Find out the range of resources families have available. Tailor the learning approaches and activities to children’s individual circumstances considering their strengths, home environment and other factors such as language barriers. Plan to make contact on the days children would usually attend the service and continue to engage and interact directly with children. Where possible, plan the focus of each contact in advance with families.
* **Adapting your existing program**. You will have already planned a program and/or focus areas for Term 2 in line with the Victorian Early Learning and Development Framework. Think about how you can adapt your existing curriculum plan into a learning from home program, rather than starting all over again.

**Tools for learning from home**

The best tools for learning from home are those that engage and connect children, families and carers with your service on an ongoing basis.

Resources and activities may be a combination of online and printed materials. Consider providing hard-copy materials to families that may have limited or minimal access to the internet.

The Department’s [Learning from Home](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/department/Pages/learningfromhome.aspx) website features resources for families and carers, with specific information for ECEC services. It provides a range of activities you can share with families to support the continuity of their child’s learning.

The [Australian Childhood Foundation](https://professionals.childhood.org.au/resources/) has a number of resources for professionals to support working with children and families experiencing vulnerability.

**Addressing safety concerns**

If you become concerned for a child’s safety or wellbeing at home, your obligations regarding reporting these issues remain. See the [PROTECT website](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/professionals/health/childprotection/Pages/ecguidance.aspx) for information and guidance on identifying and responding to child abuse.

You may also consider consulting with other services that are involved with the family, or providing a referral to [Child FIRST](https://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/child-first-and-family-services) or [The Orange Door](https://orangedoor.vic.gov.au/) in circumstances where families are experiencing stress but there is no immediate or significant risk of harm.

**Resources and contacts**

**Family Violence**

*Safe Steps*

Safe Steps is a state-wide 24-hour family violence crisis support for women and children, which can provide accommodation (refuge) options.

[www.safesteps.org.au](http://www.safesteps.org.au/)

*1800RESPECT*

People experiencing family violence can contact 1800RESPECT on 1800 737 732 or through online chat.

[www.1800respect.org.au](http://www.1800respect.org.au)

*InTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence*

A statewide service which provides services, programs and responses to issues of family violence in culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities.

1800 755 988  
[www.intouch.org.au](http://www.intouch.org.au)

**English as an Additional Language**

*Language Loop*

All early childhood education services are able to access funded telephone interpreters through VITS Language Loop.

[www.languageloop.com.au](http://www.languageloop.com.au/)

*Foundation House*

Educators and services are encouraged to contact Foundation House to seek tailored advice for children from a refugee background (via the Early Years Program).

[www.foundationhouse.org.au](http://www.foundationhouse.org.au)

*fka Children’s Services*

Telephone support and advice is available for kindergartens to support services in continuing to maintain strong connections and engagement with multilingual families.

03 9428 4471

[www.fkacs.org.au](http://www.fkacs.org.au)

[culturalinclusion@fka.org.au](mailto:culturalinclusion@fka.org.au)

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander**

*DET Koorie Education Support Officer (KESO)*

KESOs are area-based professionals who are members of the local Aboriginal community with an understanding of Aboriginal culture and the history of their community. KESOs provide advice about culturally inclusive learning environments, support engagement in education and improved outcomes for Koorie children and young people.

[www.education.vic.gov.au/about/contact/Pages/marrungregional.aspx](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/contact/Pages/marrungregional.aspx)

*VACCHO (Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation Inc.)*

The peak body for the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal people living in Victoria, with member organisations located throughout Victoria.

03 9411 9411  
[enquiries@vaccho.org.au](mailto:enquiries@vaccho.org.au)

*VAEAI (Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated)*

VAEAI supports and advises services that provide early childhood education for Koorie children.

03 9481 0800  
[vaeai@vaeai.org.au](mailto:vaeai@vaeai.org.au)