# CORONAVIRUS (covid-19): learning from home in early childhood EDUCATION

*Factsheet for Victorian early childhood education and care service providers*

In line with the most recent advice from the [Australian Health Protection Principal Committee](https://www.health.gov.au/committees-and-groups/australian-health-protection-principal-committee-ahppc) (AHPPC), early childhood education and care services may continue to operate, with risk-mitigation measures in place. The latest advice can be accessed at: [www.health.gov.au/news](file:///C%3A/Users/10047200/Desktop/Direct%20Send/12%20April/www.health.gov.au/news).

We understand that some families are making the decision to keep their children at home during this time.

In line with your service’s individual circumstances, you should continue to make reasonable efforts to keep engaging with families and supporting learning in the home for enrolled children not attending your service in a way that best meets the needs of each family.

**What does a learning from home model look like for my service?**

***“Our children have really enjoyed our weekly music incursion program throughout Term 1 so we are working with the provider to continue to access these in Term 2 online, through a series of short videos.”***

***Sessional kindergarten provider***

Learning from home will look different across the state, reflecting each service’s unique identity, philosophy and community characteristics.

It will be important to have a shared understanding between you and the families at your service about what learning from home means. This will depend on a number of factors, including the time and resources that both you and the families have available. The Department of Education and Training (the Department) recognises that educators who are delivering the program on-site will have reduced capacity to engage with other families.

The most important thing is staying connected with the families of the children enrolled at your service. As well as supporting children’s learning continuity, this will enable a smooth transition back to on-site program delivery once this is possible.

**Where do I start?**

There are many simple actions you can take to provide continuity of learning for children at your service.

As skilled professionals, you will know how to do this in a way that best meets the needs of each family. This is new for everyone, so you might have to try a few options before you work out what best suits your community.

Consider the following aspects related to delivering a learning from home program

1. **Connect with families**

Reach out to families. Find out what their plans for home learning are for the coming weeks and agree on the best way to communicate together – this might be over the phone, via email or text, or through an app.

Build on the ways you already communicate with families or modify these approaches to establish regular ways to stay in touch throughout this period.

Remember to consider families may have limited access to technology. It may be that a quick phone call is the best way to remain connected. Work out a schedule that will work for you and talk to families about when they can get in contact with you if they have questions, are seeking guidance, or looking for reassurance.

1. **Supporting children’s learning continuity**

You will have already been planning a program and/or focus areas for Term 2 in line with the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework. Consider ways this work can be adapted for use by families with their children at home. You will be drawing from your existing skills and expertise and applying these in new ways.

This provides a great opportunity for you to work collaboratively with families.

In planning, it is important to consider that some parents and carers may need more support in providing learning from home. For example, parents/carers with English as a second language, low levels of literacy or a learning disability.

Please also consider the role of screen-based activities for children, and the expert advice of limiting this to one hour a day. Wherever possible, support active rather than passive screen-based activities.

1. **Supporting positive parenting and the home learning environment**

Within your learning from home model, you may want to include information and activities to help families respond to behaviours they may find challenging, and support children to regulate their emotions.

Different things can affect a child’s ability to self-regulate. For example, tiredness, illness and changes to their routine can all have an impact their ability to regulate their reactions and behaviour. Given the current circumstances, parents and carers may welcome support in this area.

1. **Keeping children socially connected**

We know that children’s participation in social settings strengthens their sense of identity, wellbeing and belonging. There are lots of ways to keep children connected with others during this time.

You may want to invite families to set up a pen friend exchange.

Technology can also support children to stay connected. For example, families can share photos or video messages showing what children are doing at home.

***“We are working across our kindergarten to make up packs for all children enrolled in our services and dropping them off at each child’s home.***

***“These packs contain resources such as a recipe for playdough (as well as a small handful for the child), pencils/crayons, coloured paper, pipe cleaners, icy pole sticks and other art materials that children can use at home.”***

***Early Years Manager***

**Do we need to do more for children and families experiencing vulnerability?**

For many vulnerable children and families, continuing to attend early childhood services will be the best way to support their learning and development.

It is important that your service remains in contact with, and continues to support, children and families experiencing vulnerability as a priority, including through supporting their learning from home if needed.

Understanding their home learning environment and the people who will support them will assist in developing relevant and achievable goals for their child while learning at home.

If you have particular concerns about a child who is not attending, your DET regional office contact will be able to provide further support and advice.

**What technology platforms should services be using?**

The Department does not recommend any one platform, but is aware that services are already:

* sharing information through direct emails and WhatsApp groups
* using video chat such as Skype
* using online learning support programs such as Storypark, Kidxap and Seesaw

Your early childhood service can also use social media such as Facebook to support communication with communities. Where possible, the use of educators’ personal social media platforms should be avoided.

Now is not the time to try out all the latest IT tools - keep it simple and stick to what you and your community know. Work well with fewer tools rather than crowding your online space with lots of new apps and platforms.

**I’m an educational leader, what is my role in learning from home?**

Educational leader roles remain the same, which is to support educators and their practice with a focus on learning in the home.

**How is a learning from home model delivered by a team of educators?**

The way you currently work as an educational teaching team should be your starting point.

Think about how each educator can contribute to this new approach by drawing on each other’s strengths and expertise.

As with your families, it is important that you stay connected as a team and find time to discuss and reflect on your learning from home plans.

You are also important supports for each other.

***“We are establishing an online platform for families which provides a regularly updated online collection of fun and enriching learning activities and experiences for them and their child to discover at home.***

***“Each activity is developed by our experienced early childhood education experts, so families can be sure they are getting access to the very latest evidence-informed play and learning ideas and early years advice.”***

***Not for profit provider***

**What support is the Department providing to help us deliver a learning from home model?**

The Department is making additional resources available for services to support families and children learning from home.

These supports can be accessed at <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/professionals/learning/Pages/Learning-from-home-in-an-early-childhood-setting.aspx>.

This will include:

* expanding our resource bank of high-quality play-based learning activities
* developing case studies to share best practice between professionals and highlight the range of ways services are connecting with families
* connecting teachers and educators to professional learning to support them to work in the new ways necessary during the coronavirus (COVID-19) response.

There are also a number of existing supports available through the Department.

Area-based early childhood staff at the Department will be contacting and supporting services through your regular communication channels

The Department is working to support Preschool Field Officers (PSFOs) to move to a remote delivery model. You should continue to draw on these supports as you would normally.

The Department is also working with School Readiness Funding (SRF) menu and allied health providers to move to a remote delivery model.

Services may wish to review their SRF plan for 2020 and make adjustments in the current context. We encourage services to seek advice from their Department Area-based early childhood team to support you in this process.

Further information on PSFO and SRF supports will be provided shortly.

**How can I find out more information?**

For further information, please contact the Department’s dedicated coronavirus (COVID-19) phone advice line on **1800 338 663** or email **ec.home.learning@edumail.vic.gov.au**.