



March 23, 2020

Dear foster parents and relative caregivers,

First, we are so appreciative of all you do every day to take care of Minnesota's children in need of foster care. We recognize that the COVID-19 pandemic presents significant challenges and uncertainty for everyone. The Minnesota Department of Human Services (department) is committed to protecting the health of all Minnesotans during the extraordinary circumstances related to COVID-19. We know you must have many questions. The department and your local county or tribal social service agency are working to get answers as quickly as we can. The following information is intended to provide some guidance and resources that you may find helpful.

### **Protecting your health, children's health and the community's health**

It is important to take precautionary steps to protect your health, the health of the children in your care, and our community by practicing social distancing to prevent further spread of coronavirus. The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), the lead agency in Minnesota for the COVID-19 pandemic, has [the most up-to-date information about the virus](#) and steps that you can take to promote health during this time. This website also has guidance about what to do if you, someone in your household or a child in your care develops symptoms of COVID-19. Please follow these guidelines and keep your case manager updated with relevant information.

### **How to talk to children about COVID-19**

Below are resources to assist you in talking to children and youth in your care about what is happening.. It is important to help children and youth understand that this is serious, while not causing them to be afraid.

- [Talking with Children about Coronavirus Disease 2019](#) (CDC)
- [Talking about Diseases in the News](#) (Bradley Hospital)
- [How to Talk to Your Kids about Coronavirus](#) (PBS)
- [How to Talk to Kids about Coronavirus](#) (NY Times)
- [Parent/Caregiver Guide to Helping Families Cope with the Coronavirus Disease 2019](#) (National Child Traumatic Stress Network)

### **Maintaining connections with parents and siblings for children in your care**

During this challenging time, it is more important ever to maintain connections between children and their families. . If you are able to send an email or make a phone call to families to let them know how their children are doing, please do so while continuing to follow contact orders and recommendations by the court and your local social service agency (county and/or tribe). If you have questions, reach out to your case manager to discuss how visits with parents and siblings might continue to happen in a way that meets the needs of the children in your care and keeps all of you as safe as possible.

## Finding support while schools are closed

The Minnesota State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) can answer questions about business, school and child care. Their hotline number is 651-297-1304 or toll-free at 800-657-3504. Staff from the Department of Education and Department of Human Services will answer calls from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. As you already know, children do best with structure and routine. We know there is so much going on right now and everyone is doing the best they can. Try to maintain a basic routine for the children in your care while they are away from school. There are many online resources for helping entertain and support children who are away from school and friends.

## How to stay up-to-date about the case for the child(ren) in your care

Your case manager is the best resource for learning how the COVID-19 pandemic may be changing how cases are managed in the foster care system. Please reach out to them if you have questions. In addition, please sign up for updates related to children in foster care and the COVID-19 pandemic on the [department's website](#), the [Minnesota State Court website](#) and the [Be Ready MN site](#).

## Managing stress and anxiety during COVID-19 pandemic

Fear and anxiety about a disease can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions in adults and children. Coping with stress will make you, the people you care about and your community stronger. Here are a variety of resources to help you cope:

### Support yourself

- Take breaks from watching, reading or listening to news stories, including social media. Hearing about the pandemic repeatedly can be upsetting.
- Take care of your body. Take deep breaths, stretch or meditate. Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals. Exercise regularly, get plenty of sleep and avoid alcohol and drugs.
- Make time to unwind. Try to do some other activities you enjoy.
- Connect with others. Talk with people you trust about your concerns and how you are feeling.
- Call your health care provider if stress gets in the way of your daily activities for several days in a row.

Read more about how you can reduce stress in yourself and others in the article [Stress and Coping](#), from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Read more about strategies for staying calm in a crisis in the article [Managing Stress and the Threat of COVID-19 \(PDF\)](#) from the Minnesota Department of Health.

Your well-being is extremely important to us. Information and circumstances can change quickly and the department will continue to keep you informed of any new developments. If you have questions or concerns, please contact your case manager or local social service agency directly.

Sincerely,



Jamie Sorenson

Child Safety and Permanency Division director