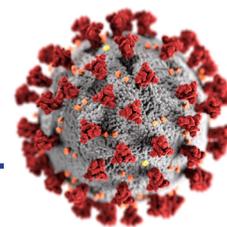


IMPACT OF COVID-19 on CHILD ABUSE

Considerations for 2020-2021 School Year



For Some Students:

- home is not a safe and supportive environment.
- may have faced neglect or abuse as a result of being in close proximity to caregivers for extended periods of time (without physical interaction with their service providers or schools.)
- the economic strain of the pandemic and mental/emotional strain can lead to an increase in violence in the home, including domestic violence and child sexual abuse
- they had different caregivers.
 - Grandmom is high risk for infection, so teen neighbor has been watching them.
 - Mom and/or Dad may be essential workers, so Uncle Bill has been coming over to the apartment.
- May lack access to food, shelter, friends, or support.



Source: Responding During the COVID19 Pandemic - State of Vermont

RETURNING TO SCHOOL

While delayed disclosures are common among children, disclosures could increase upon return to school, BUT forensic interviewers say that disclosures could be delayed by an additional 6-9 months.

Student Concerns May Be:

1. Should I be talking about this with all these new rules?
Washing hands, masks, temperature taking, social distancing
2. Need to focus on learning.
Missed so much school. Should focus only be on learning?
3. New year, new teacher?
Is new teacher a Trusted Adult?
4. With social distancing restrictions, can I get close enough to tell the teacher I need to speak to someone privately?
5. Availability of one-on-one access?
Existing Policies & Procedures/New Social Distancing guidelines
6. Who do I talk to?
New school year/new grade level/maybe new school?

Suggestions for Teachers:

Quick Refresher for teachers on mandated reporting.
Warn teachers that trauma from abuse may increase due to:

- Isolation of Staying Home
- Fear of threats not to tell
- The act of abuse
- Home discourse/stress



Related Issues

1.5 Billion Students worldwide were home from school for months...

- More children active online and on social media as a result of isolation.
- Much time online unsupervised
- Increased risk of child exploitation and violence against children

Insight from Child Advocacy Center*

Majority of child abuse reports come from schools.

- Covid-19 school closures impacted reports:
 - April, 2020 – down 75%
 - May, 2020 – down 50%
 - Summer – typically low because kids are not connected to teachers/school support
- Most forensic interviews happening right now are delayed disclosure from abuse that happened months or year(s) ago.
- Increased forensic interviews of teens sneaking out to meet older guys in their 20's and experiencing sexual assault.

*Holly's House CAC, Evansville, IN

Recommendations for Helping Students

- Announce availability of help for any student.
- Specifically mention neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, food & housing insecurity.
- Introduce the person to whom students can talk;
 - If wearing masks, may want to introduce the person (counselor, nurse) behind glass window without mask on, or have the adult hold up a photo of themselves w/o a mask on.
 - Much friendlier face without the mask on – and the child can make the connection to the “friendlier face”.



- Conversely, teens seem to take comfort in the semi-anonymity of mask wearing during disclosure/forensic interview.
- Let students know school staff is there for them – right now and at any time in the future.
- If something did happen to a student during COVID-19 Stay Home/Stay Safe, let them know:
 - they are not the only one and it was not their fault.
 - caring adults are available to help them feel safe again and begin to heal.

Created in collaboration with Molly A. Rivers, MHA, DCFI, Associate Director/Forensic Interviewer, Holly's House in Evansville, IN.

By Jennifer Mitchell and Rosemary Webb, Co-Presidents and National Personal Safety Experts

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