

**Massachusetts Department of Children & Families**

**A Tip Sheet for Educators**

**Issued: June 1, 2020**

**COMMUNICATING WITH STUDENTS DURING REMOTE LEARNING**

Communicating with students, their families, and caregivers looks very different during this time of remote learning. As educators many of you have new ways to access and interact with your students. We know not all children are safe at home and that teachers, when they have reasonable cause to believe that abuse/neglect is occurring, are mandated by law to report these concerns to the Department of Children and Families (DCF). This tip sheet gives you some guidance in the form of questions/talking points that may assist you with checking on the well-being of your students, their families and caregivers.

**ROUTINE CHECK IN:**

- How are you feeling today?
- How was your night?
- How can I help you today?
- Who is home today to help you with learning?
- How are you doing with our new way of learning?
- What has been working well?
- What has not been working well?
- What fun things do you have planned today?
- What else would you like to share with me today?

**REASSURANCE & VALIDATION:**

- Acknowledge this new way of learning feels different, and that you will work together with the child to get through this time.
- Send positive notes through remote learning sites or mail.
- Compliment your students on work they have completed.
- Cite specific pieces of work to help motivate your students in their continued effort of remote learning.
- Share that you miss teaching them in person and that you are thinking about the students and their families.
- Share some things that have helped you during this time.

**WELLNESS:**

- What did you have for breakfast? For lunch? For dinner?
- What have you been doing inside/outside during the day?

- What was the best part about your day?
- What was the hardest part about your day?
- What do you like about being home from school?
- What do you miss about not going to school?
- What have you been doing for exercise? How is your family? Is there anything that you or your family need during this time?
- I know you and \_\_\_\_\_ are friends, have you been able to keep in touch with each other?
- Have you been able to talk to other family members or friends during this time?
- How are they doing?
- Now that you do not have to wake up early for school, how are you sleeping? Are you getting enough sleep?

#### OBSERVATIONS & RESPONSES:

- I know you like to \_\_\_\_\_, have you been able to keep up with it?
- I've noticed that you have been struggling to focus/participate during class/video time, how can I help you with that?
- I'm having a hard time hearing you due to background noise/I'm hearing some other noises in the background, what else is happening at your house today?
- I saw a younger/older person walk by your screen, who is home with you today?

#### REMINDERS:

- This is a stressful time for everyone, and children may present drastically different from how they have in the past (i.e., significant weight loss, change in hygiene, behaviorally aggressive, depressed, despondent). Please make parents aware of resources available to them, such as [calling 2-1-1](#) or your community's [Family Resource Center](#) to help them manage during remote learning.
- Students who have IEPs and who have an open case with DCF may have Special Education Surrogate Parents (SESPs) or court appointed Educational Surrogates. In order to provide additional support, every effort should be made to keep all collaterals updated on the status of DCF-involved students.
- Social workers remain committed to working collaboratively with educators and the schools. If you have any concerns, questions or want to discuss a situation regarding a child(ren) with a social worker, please call and if the worker is not available leave a message with a return telephone number on voicemail.

## WHEN TO REPORT TO DCF

### CALL DCF WHEN

- You have made multiple, documented attempts to reach a student/family/caregiver and they have gone unanswered/ignored and all opportunities to make contact (i.e., phone calls, email, reaching out to emergency contacts, etc.) have been exhausted.
- The student is repeatedly truant/missing from their school programming (i.e., not participating in remote learning, attending/participating in their academic programming, after multiple, documented attempts to engage the student/family/caregiver) and attempts to provide resources (i.e., internet access, computer support, paper materials, etc.) have been ignored or refused.
- You have noticed unexplained bruising, welts, cuts, or other injuries on a child, adult, or caregiver
- You believe the child, adult, or caregiver is under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- If you saw, or it was reported to you, that there are illicit drugs/paraphernalia or other hazards that create safety concerns in the home (e.g., weapons within reach).
- There is an outcry of abuse, neglect or domestic violence.
- Or any other time that you have reasonable cause to believe that a child(ren) is being abused or neglected.

All reports of suspected child abuse or neglect **must be phoned in** to DCF. Please **call immediately** if you know of, or suspect, an incident of child abuse or neglect.

During regular business hours (8:45 a.m.-5 p.m. M-F) [call the DCF area office that serves the city or town where the child lives.](#)

Nights, weekends, and holidays dial the Child-at-Risk Hotline at **(800) 792-5200**.