

## CARING FOR CHILDREN DURING COVID-19

### FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs) FOR CARERS

*This information is current as at 30 March 2020.*

*Please continue to check the [Life Without Barriers website](#) where we will continue to have information updated for you.*

#### COVID-19 Information and Support

- Life Without Barriers is here for you during this time. Please keep your Life Without Barriers Key Worker informed and ask for support if you need it.
- If you, or the people you support, have any questions about Life Without Barriers' response to COVID-19, please call the **Life Without Barriers National COVID-19 Response Call Centre 1800 313 117** (8am - 8pm AEST, Monday - Friday).
- If you are unwell call the 24/7 nurse-led Coronavirus Health Information Line Hotline on **1800 983 006**.
- As a Life Without Barriers carer you have access to free mental health support through our Employee Assistance Program (EAP) by calling **1300 135 600**.

This information is to help answer questions you may have caring for children during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Please make sure you are aware of, and follow, the relevant instructions from Australian Government, and follow the advice of the Department of Health: [www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au).

Also look at your state/territory government website and follow state/territory government decisions:

- New South Wales: [NSW Department of Health](#)
- Queensland: [QLD Department of Health](#)
- Victoria: [Victoria Department of Health and Human Services](#)
- South Australia: [South Australia Health](#)
- Northern Territory: [NT Department of Health](#)
- Western Australia: [WA Department of Health](#)
- Australian Capital Territory: [ACT Department of Health](#)
- Tasmania: [Tasmania Department of Health and Human Services](#)

## Quick reference

How do I keep myself and my family safe during the COVID-19 pandemic? ..... 3

Will there be any changes to the services Life Without Barriers provides? ..... 3

What does social distancing mean and should I and the children in my care do it? ..... 3

What does self-isolation mean and should I and the children in my care do it? ..... 4

I have a casual job and my hours have been affected by COVID-19. This means our family has less money. Is there anything Life Without Barriers can do to help? ..... 4

Is it OK to take children in care to playgrounds and public places? ..... 4

Can children still see their birth families? ..... 5

If children have regular short break care / respite care can this continue? ..... 5

Can children have sleepovers with friends or go to birthday parties? ..... 5

I am limiting visits to my house as a way to reduce the risk of infection. Can I choose not to have visits from Life Without Barriers? ..... 5

I'm worried that I or someone in my household might have COVID-19. What do I do? . 6

I'm worried a child in my care might have COVID-19. What do I do? ..... 6

We are in self-isolation at our house. What do I have to think about? ..... 6

What if someone in my home (including a child in care) actually gets COVID-19? ..... 6

The child/children in my care are feeling anxious about what is happening, how do I best respond? ..... 7

We have developed a simple children's booklet to help you explain Coronavirus to the children in your care: ..... 7

What do I do if children's school or day care is closed? ..... 7

There is a planned face to face meeting about children coming up. Should this go ahead? Should the children attend? ..... 8

We are planning overseas travel. Can we still go? ..... 8

We are planning interstate travel. Can we still go? ..... 8

We have a holiday planned at a destination within our state. Can we still go? ..... 8

The child in my care has complex medical needs. What do I need to think about? ..... 9

The child in my care has a support worker who spends time with them. Can this continue? ..... 9



## Information for carers in Children, Youth and Families about COVID-19 (coronavirus)

### **How do I keep myself and my family safe during the COVID-19 pandemic?**

Please make sure you are aware of, and follow, the relevant instructions from Australian Government, and follow the advice of the Department of Health: [www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au). Also look at your state/territory government website and follow state/territory government decisions.

Some children in care have vulnerabilities to COVID-19. It's important that you get specific advice from their doctor or other health professional to keep them safe. Make sure you let your Life Without Barriers Key Worker know about any concerns, so they can support you.

### **Will there be any changes to the services Life Without Barriers provides?**

Many children, carers and families are likely to need more support from Life Without Barriers during this time. Changes you notice may vary depending on the circumstances. Overall you will notice:

- Life Without Barriers staff will observe "social distancing". This means we won't shake hands or unnecessarily touch children or you. We will maintain a 1.5 metre distance from others, and we will wash our hands regularly.
- Our staff will stay home if they are feeling unwell. Another Life Without Barriers staff member will be in touch with you if your usual contact person is unwell.

It is going to be difficult sometimes, but you are not alone. The wellbeing of children and young people is all our priority.

### **What does social distancing mean and should I and the children in my care do it?**

Social distancing is a way of behaving at home and in the community to help prevent the spread of Coronavirus.

- As of 30 March 2020, the Federal Government advised that everyone is to stay home unless you are: shopping for essentials, receiving medical care, exercising or travelling to work or education.
- Public gatherings, excluding household members, have been reduced to a maximum of two people. This means you can be out as a family if you need to but only for essential outings
- Avoid unnecessary touching such as handshakes
- Keep 1.5 meters away from others when out and about and at home

The advice on social distancing is from the Australian Government and it's important to keep up to date. A range of community facilities such as cinemas, cafes, play centers and libraries face restrictions or are closed.

For more information visit the Department of Health website:

- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) – Information on social distancing](#)
- [Limits on public gatherings for coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)

### **What does self-isolation mean and should I and the children in my care do it?**

Self-isolation means staying at home and avoiding contact with other people. You and children may need to do this for 14 days if you:

1. Have recently returned from overseas
2. If you have been in contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19
3. If you or anyone in your family home are being tested for COVID-19 and are awaiting results.

Follow medical advice and for more information visit the Department of Health website:

- **Self-isolation (self-quarantine) for coronavirus (COVID-19)**

### **I have a casual job and my hours have been affected by COVID-19. This means our family has less money. Is there anything Life Without Barriers can do to help?**

Talk to your Life Without Barriers Key Worker and let us know if you are in hardship. We want to make sure children in care have everything they need during this time. We are working with governments and other stakeholders to determine the best way of ensuring this.

If children have urgent expenses, do let us know. Especially if these relate to direct care needs including medical treatment, medication, food, clothing and family/cultural connection.

### **Is it OK to take children in care to playgrounds and public places?**

No. Please avoid playgrounds and follow the guidelines issued by the government about other public spaces. Overall, the guidance is to stay home except for essential activities. We know how important it is to keep children and young people stimulated and active and we support your efforts to help children enjoy outdoor activity, play and exercise while following hygiene and social distancing practices.

Here are some questions to consider before making a decision to go out into the community:

- Is the activity necessary?
- Can the activity be conducted in line with social distancing and hygiene advice?
- Is there an alternative activity, or way to meet the objectives of this activity, without exposure to the community?
- Have I been directed to self-isolate following exposure to/or positive test result for COVID-19?
- Does the proposed outing present an undue risk to the young person in my care? e.g. Do they have High Medical Needs?

Also remember to exercise preventative measures when you are out and about such as regular handwashing and cleaning/disinfecting surfaces. For more information visit the Department of Health website:

- **Good hygiene for coronavirus (COVID-19)**

### **Can children still see their birth families?**

This does depend on the circumstances. Talk to your Life Without Barriers Key Worker about each child's circumstances as they will vary. We will support family time continuing if it is safe, and we may need to seek advice from the relevant Department.

If children can't safely see their families face to face, we can still facilitate phone calls, FaceTime or use other technology to enable family members to see each other.

If time with families is disrupted children may find this difficult and distressing, as may their families. It's important to be empathic and supportive of this. Children need to experience continuity of relationships. For example, if they normally see their older sister once a month and this can't happen, consider how to make sure they can talk on the phone or connect in other ways more often until they can see each other again.

We are preparing written information for birth families about COVID-19 and children. Ask us for a copy of this information if you feel you are well placed to share it with the families of children in your care.

### **If children have regular short break care / respite care can this continue?**

If children and their short break carers are well and have not been exposed to COVID-19, then this can often go ahead and will be in children's interests to do so by ensuring routines and rituals are continued. Circumstances may vary so check with your Life Without Barriers Key Worker and communicate with the short break carer so you are consistent about social distancing and infection prevention. We may need to seek advice from the relevant Department in some states and territories.

### **Can children have sleepovers with friends or go to birthday parties?**

Not - it is not likely to be safe to do this for a while. For young children in particular, it is not safe to go ahead. Click [here](#) for more information on social distancing. If you have concerns, it is safer for everyone to avoid situations where infection is more likely to occur. This can be really tough for kids who are looking forward to parties, sleepovers and events! Reassurance and support will be needed.

### **I am limiting visits to my house as a way to reduce the risk of infection. Can I choose not to have visits from Life Without Barriers?**

We may still need to visit depending on the circumstances, but we will be as flexible as possible. We will practice social distancing and hygiene measures. Our support to carers and young people is considered an essential service so we will continue to maintain contact with you during the pandemic, however this may change from in person to video or phone contact as the pandemic continues.

If you are self-isolating as a result of exposure to COVID-19, we will use other ways to connect with you and the children in your care such as emails, phone calls and FaceTime until you are well.



## Information for carers in Children, Youth and Families about COVID-19 (coronavirus)

### **I'm worried that I or someone in my household might have COVID-19. What do I do?**

The first thing to do is seek medical advice. If you are eligible for testing (determined by government policy) then this should happen quickly so you or others can get the medical help you need. Contact your GP (by phone) in the first instance.

For immediate advice about COVID-19, call the 24/7 nurse-led Coronavirus Health Information Line Hotline on 1800 983 006.

If you are worried someone might have COVID-19 but cannot get access to testing, then all of you in the household may still need to self-isolate. Your GP and/or the 24/7 nurse-led Coronavirus Health Information Line can give you advice to follow.

### **I'm worried a child in my care might have COVID-19. What do I do?**

The first thing to do is seek medical advice. If the child or anyone they have been in contact with is eligible for testing (determined by government policy) then this should happen quickly so everyone can get the medical help you need. Contact your GP (by phone) in the first instance. Make sure you and everyone in your household self isolates while you are waiting for test results or if you need to for other reasons. For example, if you are worried you might have COVID-19 but cannot get access to testing then all of you may still need to self-isolate. In circumstances where you cannot see your GP immediately you can call the 24/7 nurse-led Coronavirus Health Information Line Hotline on 1800 983 006

Please let your Life Without Barriers Key Worker know as soon as you have contacted medical professionals or the Coronavirus Health Information Line so that we can support you during this time. Don't wait for the test result. We have developed plans for how to respond in these situations and we will need to know early so we can ensure that you and the children and well supported. We may be able to do some practical things to help you and the children stay safe and well and it is likely we will need to notify and liaise with other people.

### **We are in self-isolation at our house. What do I have to think about?**

Your main priority, as always, is the wellbeing of the child or children in your care and yourself. If you are in self-isolation, then it is likely you are worried you have been exposed to COVID-19. If this is the case, then contact your GP to determine if testing is needed.

Please let your Life Without Barriers Key Worker know you are in self-isolation as soon as you can. While you are self-isolating we will stop home visits and see you and the children another way such as using FaceTime. We may be able to do some practical things to help you and the children stay safe and well and its likely we will need to notify and liaise with other people.

### **What if someone in my home (including a child in are) actually gets COVID-19?**

The first thing to do is ensure children and others have the medical care they need. Make sure others in the household also get tested and ask for help from Life Without Barriers as needed.

Please let us know *immediately* that this is going on. We have developed plans for how to respond in these situations and we will need to know early so we can ensure that you and the children and well

supported. We may be able to do some practical things to help you and the children stay safe and well and we will also need to notify and liaise with other people.

### **The child/children in my care are feeling anxious about what is happening, how do I best respond?**

Some children are likely to find this time worrying and upsetting, and children easily pick up cues from the environment and adults around them. Adults are likely to be feeling distracted and may be busy making plans.

Demonstrating that you are available for children and validating their feelings is critical. Help them to process their feelings and provide reassurance. It is likely that continuing your usual routines and rituals will help and maintaining contact with the people who are important to them. This will need to happen in other ways such as by phone or FaceTime.

There are ways for you to provide reassurance, security and nurture for the children in your care. Your calm presence is the greatest source of strength for children:

Spend time listening and talking to children. Ask children open questions that help them express how they are feeling. Communicate understanding by using reflective responses such as:

- “I know you are worried about what is going on”
- “It is hard for you to be away from the people you care about”.

Provide information in a way that is age and developmentally appropriate for the children in your care.

We have developed a simple children's booklet to help you explain Coronavirus to the children in your care:

- **Children's booklet COVID-19**

UNICEF also have resources for different age groups:

- **How to talk to your child about coronavirus disease**
- **How teachers can talk to children about coronavirus disease**

Consciously make time away from social media and the news. Have a range of relationship-based activities on hand that bring joy and connection through fun, such as cooking together, playing board games. Investing time in doing things together is important. Children and young people need perspective and a secure base.

As much as possible, maintain your usual routines and important rituals that matter to the child, so that they have a predictable structure to the day

### **What do I do if children's school or day care is closed?**

If school or day care are closed, children and young people will need to stay home. Access any resources for home learning provided to you by the school/day care.

**There is a planned face to face meeting about children coming up. Should this go ahead? Should the children attend?**

This does depend on the circumstances. Talk to your Life Without Barriers Key Worker about each child's circumstances, as they will vary. Some meetings may be more critical than others, like health appointments. Before attending any face to face meetings, check first on whether the planned meeting is going ahead, and if there is an alternative approach, such as teleconference, available. If anyone is unwell, they should not attend.

If children are anxious or don't want to attend planned meetings because of Coronavirus, then we need to listen and support this if we can. If you have concerns, it is safer for everyone to avoid situations where infection is more likely to occur.

**We are planning overseas travel. Can we still go?**

It is very unlikely that it will safe to go ahead with overseas travel. In fact, the Australian Government has, at the time this is being written, have essentially closed our borders. Visit the Smarttraveller website for up to date information on travel alerts:

- [Smarttraveller](#)

If you or someone in your household has recently returned from overseas, they need to follow the advice for returned travellers on the Department of Health website:

- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) advice for travellers](#)

**We are planning interstate travel. Can we still go?**

Life Without Barriers encourages carers to limit interstate travel and only 'essential' travel should go ahead. Some states and territories in Australia have closed their borders to non-essential travel due to COVID-19, and some have introduced mandatory self-isolation for 14 days upon entry to that state. The normal rules about getting consent from state governments re: travelling with children in care also still apply.

**We have a holiday planned at a destination within our state. Can we still go?**

The Prime Minister announced on 29 March further restrictions in relation to social gatherings. Public gatherings, excluding household members, have been reduced to a maximum of two people. Everyone is advised to stay home unless you are: shopping for essentials, receiving medical care, exercising or travelling to work or education.

Life Without Barriers strongly discourages carers from undertaking non-essential travel. This includes visiting and staying with friends and family members.

Please speak with your local care team if you are uncertain about your options and decision.

Talk to your Life Without Barriers Key Worker. There will still be a need to get advice and permission from the department in most cases. The current pandemic may create further restrictions depending on your situation.



## Information for carers in Children, Youth and Families about COVID-19 (coronavirus)

### **The child in my care has complex medical needs. What do I need to think about?**

Some children in care have vulnerabilities to COVID-19. It's important that you get specific advice from their doctor or other health worker to keep them, and you, safe. Letting your Life Without Barriers Key Worker know about any concerns and keeping them up to date will help them do all they can to support you.

### **The child in my care has a support worker who spends time with them. Can this continue?**

Support workers will be able to continue support as long as the support worker, child and other household members are well, and the support worker is available. Life Without Barriers Key Workers will be following social distancing procedures, and risk management hygiene practices. If you have concerns or questions about the type of support being provided, please speak with your Life Without Barriers Key Worker.

If for some reason the support worker is unable to continue the support, speak with your Life Without Barriers Key worker on ways to maintain the relationship and connection with the child, especially if the child has a strong connection and attachment to their support worker. Your child may be worried about them, miss them, or need to be reassured they are okay. For example, the support worker may be able to write a letter, connect on FaceTime or have a phone call, to provide reassurance to the child.