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**To: CEOs of Child and Family Services Authorities
Superintendents, School Divisions and Districts**

The suspension of classes at school and the closure of other child-friendly public places removes children from in-person contact with teachers, coaches, and others. As leaders in the education and child and family services sectors, you have been working hard to adapt and adjust services to this reality.

This also magnifies the importance of school and child and family services staff continuing to work together in the best interests of children and youth. Providing child and family services remains an essential service during the COVID-19 response, and agencies continue to provide necessary and critical supports and interventions to families.

We know that the total number of referrals to CFS has decreased during the COVID-19 response. The numbers have started to increase again in recent weeks. While this does not necessarily mean that child protection concerns are not being reported, it does indicate that we need to continue to work together to identify any potential concerns.

The following builds on existing good practices and provides some guidelines for working together across the education and CFS sectors.

How educators can help

- Check in on children, youth, and families who may be struggling.
- Provide supports through the school system, and link families with available resources such as food hampers, educational supports and outreach workers (Community Connectors, Morningstar Program workers, etc).
- Reach out to families to identify any needs they may be experiencing.
- Share available resources with families. A link to current resources is available at <https://www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/infomanitobans/index.html>.

- Continue to communicate and share information between the school and the CFS system.
 - You can connect directly with the CFS Agency staff for families and children where you are already connected or aware of CFS-involvement.
 - The Protecting Children (Information Sharing) Act allows service providers to share personal information about supported children to better provide services and benefits.

How child and family services can help

- Connect with educators and schools for involved families.
- Work with schools to support the educational needs of children in care and CFS-involved families.
- Continue to support CFS-involved families through existing case plans. Implement adjustments or supports as needed.
- Continue to communicate and share information between the school and the CFS system.
 - You can connect directly with educators about families and children where you are already connected.
 - The Protecting Children (Information Sharing) Act allows service providers to share personal information about supported children in order to better provide services and benefits.

If you have reason to believe that a child is being harmed or neglected, follow your organization’s policy and guidelines for responding to and/or reporting suspected child protection concerns. They apply during the COVID-19 response as they would at any other time.

As part of the duty to report, you can contact CFS at 1-866-345-9241. If it is an emergency, contact your local police emergency number. To contact a local CFS designated intake agency, see https://gov.mb.ca/fs/childfam/dia_intake.html.

If you need to review existing protocols, please refer to *Reporting of Child Protection and Child Abuse: Handbook and Protocols for Manitoba Service Providers* at: <https://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/childfam/pacca.html>. Reporting protocols for school staff can be found beginning on page 99. Section 12 provides an overview of “Increased Risk of Abuse and Important Considerations for Children with Disabilities”.

Thank you for your continued work and collaboration to ensure continued services and the safety of children, youth, and families.

Other Important Resources and Information

- Protecting Children from Abuse and Neglect, Frequently Asked Questions:
https://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/childfam/child_protection_faq.html
- CFS provides many services to families to ensure they stay together. For information about supports and how to access them:
<https://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/childfam/index.html>
- For additional up-to-date information on COVID-19 and Manitoba's response:
<https://www.gov.mb.ca/covid19>
- Parent/Caregiver Guide to Helping Families Cope With the Coronavirus Disease (from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network):
https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/factsheet/outbreak_factsheet_1.pdf

“It takes a village to raise a child” is never more true than when we talk about protecting children, supporting families, and keeping the most vulnerable members of our community safe. Thank you for your continued caring and support for Manitoba children and youth.

Sincerely,

Original signed by

Dana Rudy
Assistant Deputy Minister
K–12 Education Division

Original signed by

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