

Massachusetts Resource Guide for Parents and Other Caregivers

Caring For Children During the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond



April 2020

*The care and protection of our children is of foremost concern to all educators. Children learn best when they believe that the learning environment is safe and supportive. The Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents applauds MassKids for developing this comprehensive **Resource Guide** to provide parents, caregivers and educators with important information and strategies to support our children during this time of remote learning and upon their return to school.*

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Caring for Children During COVID-19 and Beyond: Why are children more at-risk for abuse?

The world is facing an unprecedented situation with the COVID-19 pandemic causing the closure of schools, after-school programs, day-care centers, and youth-serving organizations. As a parent, you may be trying to work from home while helping home-school your children, filing for unemployment or going without any income at all if you are not eligible. Many of you are scrambling to find childcare while risking your lives performing "essential jobs" in your community. With the added emotional and financial stress and lack of access to the usual outside support networks of educators, social workers, childcare workers, after-school program staff, and counselors at youth-serving organizations, parents and caregivers are being challenged to cope with the even greater demands the pandemic is placing on everyone.

This **Resource Guide** can help raise awareness about the increased risk to children of abuse and neglect during this time, and provide support to you and other caregivers to help keep your children safe. The best thing you can do is to stay connected virtually with outside support systems, reach out if you need help, and, if possible, connect with and offer support to someone if you believe they may be experiencing violence in their home.

The increased risk of child abuse during stay-at-home orders

For the first time ever, rape crisis hotlines across the country are reporting a significant increase in calls from minor children and youth. The vast majority of these callers report they are currently living with the person who is hurting them.

An estimated 90% of children who are sexually abused are abused by someone they know, trust and even love. Parents, stepparents, siblings, cousins and other adults in the child's life can be among those who are sexually violating them. For these children, lack of access to their teachers, school nurses, social workers, youth counselors and coaches, means they may not have anyone outside their home they can confide in.

As a result of this, reports of child abuse and neglect to the Department for Children and Families (DCF) have fallen sharply since stay-at-home orders were issued. Clearly, child-serving professionals are not able to provide direct monitoring of these children and they are not being protected from physical and sexual abuse or receiving the outside help they require.



Preventing Child Sexual Abuse: Enough Abuse Campaign Resources

As a parent, you can be your child's best protection against sexual abuse - a problem affecting an estimated 1 in 10 children under 18. It is so widespread that each of us probably knows someone who has been victimized or who has abused. The average age for reported sexual abuse today is nine years of age; 20 percent of its victims are even younger. Child sexual abuse happens in rural, urban and suburban areas, and in all economic, educational, racial, and cultural groups.

Straight Talk About Child Sexual Abuse: A Prevention Guide for Parents



Every parent wants to do all they can to keep their children safe from those who might sexually abuse or exploit them. This **Straight Talk Guide** will give you the information and skills you need to strengthen safety within your family and community to reduce the risks of sexual abuse. If you've been putting off talking to your child or teen because you feel you don't know enough, don't know what to say, or how to approach the subject, we're here to help. Armed with this booklet, you can help your child learn about privacy and body boundaries and help keep them safe from the devastating consequences on sexual abuse. Remember. *It's easy, if you start early and talk often.* [Click here](#) to download the guide for free.

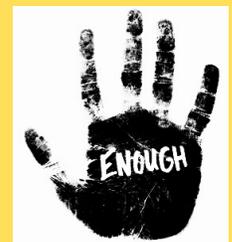
Children with physical or developmental disabilities are several times more likely to experience sexual abuse. Download [**Straight Talk: A Prevention Guide for Parents of Children with Disabilities.**](#)

10 Conversations to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse Email Series

The first step in the fight to end child sexual abuse is to know the facts. This free, educational email series is comprised of brief but thorough lessons that you will receive bi-weekly via email. Topics include: What is Sexual Abuse? Touching and Non-Touching Behaviors, Grooming Tactics Used by Sexual Abusers, Child Behaviors and Physical Signs that Might Indicate Sexual Abuse, Sexual Behaviors of Children: What's Typical? What's Problematic? [**Sign up here.**](#)

Visit www.enoughabuse.org for other educational, prevention or treatment resources.

Visit pledgetoprevent.org to learn more and to take specific actions to prevent child sexual abuse in your home and community.



Keep Children Safe Online

Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, child sexual abuse on the Internet had reached epidemic proportions. In 2018 the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children received over 18 million reports from tech companies and the public involving 45 million images of children being sexually abused and exploited online.



**If you come across images or videos of child sexual abuse material involving children or teens, it is your legal obligation to report it immediately. Call: National Cyber Tipline
1-800-843-5678**



Keep the children you care for safe online by monitoring which sites and applications they are using. Have age-appropriate conversations with them about online safety.

- **Set ground rules** for when and how often children can be online, including from computers, smartphones, tablets such as iPads, and other devices; **enforce consequences**.
- **Talk to your children** about what sites and apps they are using and ask them to show you what their **privacy settings** are. They should not allow people who they don't know in real life to view their content or send them messages via Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok.
- Tell your children that they should **never add as a friend**, follow or connect with **anyone they do not know in real life**. Just because someone's profile picture makes it appear they are your child's age, doesn't mean they are. Predators often pose as children to meet children or teens online.
- Explain to them that they should **never post photos of themselves not fully clothed**. Explain there are bad people who will use those pictures in bad ways, and that once a picture is posted on the Internet, it can never be deleted.
- Explain to your teenagers that they should **never take nude pictures of themselves** and/or send it to anyone they know, even someone they are dating. Their partner could share these pictures online without their permission.
- Explain to your children that they should **never post information online that would allow someone they don't know to find or stalk them**: including their home address, an identifiable place where they go often, or a picture of the outside of your house.

Here are some helpful resources from the **Family Online Safety Institute**, including 7 Steps to Good Digital Parenting, Family Online Safety Agreement, Device Online Safety Cards and more: <https://www.fosi.org/good-digital-parenting/resources/>.

For more internet safety tips and resources, visit: <http://www.enoughabuse.org/gtf/keep-your-kids-safe-online.html>

Infant Crying and Soothing: What You Need To Know To Keep Your Baby Safe



This is an especially stressful time for expecting parents as they anticipate birthing their babies in hospitals which are coping with the demands of serving COVID-19 patients. There are concerns about whether they or their babies will be safe from the virus when in the hospital. Knowing that husbands, partners and other family members will not be present during labor and delivery increases stresses new parents face.

Also, parents may not be able to depend on their own parents and other relatives and friends who would normally surround them with physical support during the weeks and months after giving birth. These new stresses can deprive them of critical support just when they need it most and can place infants at higher risk of abuse or neglect.

Abusive Head Trauma (AHT) is the most frequent cause of non-accidental deaths in children under two and shaking or impact injuries are the most frequent forms of this trauma. A third of infants who are shaken or thrown against a hard surface, e.g. crib mattress, pillow, couch, etc., die from these injuries. A third of survivors suffer from significant neurological handicaps including brain damage, motor deficits, paralysis, seizures, visual impairment or blindness, and hearing loss. Mental, cognitive and developmental delays can range from mild to severe.

Why Does Shaking Occur? Little experience caring for infants, lack of knowledge about infant development, a difficult pregnancy or birth, social isolation, postpartum depression, fatigue, and sleep deprivation are some of the stresses that can make parents and their babies vulnerable to child abuse.



Infants that are difficult to comfort or that have true colic can lead parents or caregivers to feel helpless and frustrated. Infant crying can actually trigger physiological responses in adults that are also associated with extreme anger. Infants that cry long and often require more attention and parents may feel less rewarded for their caregiving efforts. This may place these babies at increased risk. While these factors explain why some infants are at greater risk, it must be stressed that infants are never to blame for these adult responses.



About Crying: Crying can be the most difficult part of taking care of a baby, especially when infants are difficult to soothe. Crying can happen for no obvious reason and be unpredictable. But remember - crying is a baby's way of communicating his or her needs. Babies don't cry to make their parents angry or

frustrated. Crying, even a lot of crying (bouts of 35-40 minutes totaling 2 to 3 hours a day) is normal for some babies. Crying begins to increase at 2 weeks of age, peaks around 2 months, and starts to decrease after that.

When Your Baby Cries: Here are questions to consider when your baby is crying and needs to be comforted:

Does the baby's diaper needs changing? You should know that a fussy baby might cry even more during the changing but, don't be alarmed, usually he or she will calm down once they are dry and more comfortable.

Does your baby seem too warm or cold? If too warm, remove some blankets or loosen clothing. If cold, adding socks and a blanket will help.

Does your baby need to be fed or burped? Babies who are fed on demand cry less, especially during the day, than babies who are fed on a 4-hour schedule. While it's good not to overfeed your baby, sometimes babies may need just a little extra milk or formula to make them settle down. Try burping your baby, too.

Do you think your baby might be ill? Call your pediatrician/health clinic and get advice.

Here are some ways to respond:

- Carry your baby in your arms frequently or try wearing your baby in a cloth sling or baby-holder. Babies respond well to the constant closeness and movement.
- Feeding on demand will lessen your baby's crying too, especially during the day.
- Hold your baby's bare skin against your own. You might find your baby is comforted by the warm contact.
- Respond promptly when your baby cries or fusses and when he's alert and happy. Babies benefit from lots of attention. It won't spoil them and may reduce the crying.

The 5 "Ss" Soothing Tips:

Swaddling: Try wrapping your fussy baby snugly in a light blanket. (42" square blanket is best.) Don't overheat your baby or put him to sleep with loose blankets that can wrap around the face.



Side or Stomach position: When she is fussy you might find that she calms faster if you hold her in your arms on her stomach or in a side position. If you are putting her to sleep in her crib, remember to put your baby down to sleep **on her back only**.

Shushing: This is really magic for some babies! When your baby is crying, make shushing sounds, louder than they baby's crying or turn on a hair dryer nearby away from the baby. You can also go online and find white noise sounds that you can play for your fussy baby or to help him sleep.

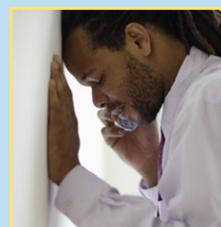
Swinging: Babies love motion like rocking chairs and going for walks. It's great to use a cloth sling or baby holder. Fussy babies love tiny, jiggly movements!

Sucking: Babies love to suck. Offer your crying baby your breast, finger, or pacifier. To learn more about these soothing tips, visit www.thehappiestbaby.com.

Take Care of Yourself:

If frustrated or angry FOR ANY REASON...

- Gently place the infant on his/her back in the crib and **Step Away, Right Away!**
- Go to another room away from the crying. Sit or lie down, close your eyes, and relax.
- Call a friend or relative for support or relief. Call the child's doctor or health clinic.
- Call the **Parental Stress Line** anytime day or night for support at **800-632-8188**



Protect Your Child:

- NEVER leave your child alone with a person who has a history of violence or problems controlling their anger or leave your child alone with someone who has been drinking or taking drugs.
- Discuss the dangers of shaking with everyone who cares for your child. Tell your child's caregivers to **NEVER shake, slam, throw, hit, or yell at your baby** if frustrated by your baby's crying.
- Tell them that they can call you if they ever feel upset with your baby and that you won't be angry if they ask you to come home or to up the child from their home.

Parents and caregivers, understand that sometimes babies will cry, no matter what you do. It doesn't mean you are a bad parent, or not good at soothing your infant. Try to relax about it and remember, it's normal and won't last forever!



Download for free:

"Infant Crying and Soothing: What You Need to Know to Keep Your Baby Safe" Available in English, Spanish and Portuguese.

<http://www.masskids.org/lindx.php/mcc-store>

Support for Parents and Caregivers

Being a parent is a challenge at the best of times, and the challenges we are experiencing right now may be causing you anxiety or stress. The best thing you can do for your children is to make sure you are taking adequate care of yourself, so that you can also take good care of them. Here are some tips you can try:

- Stick to a routine as best as possible. Get up at a reasonable hour, get dressed, eat breakfast. Maintaining a certain sense of normalcy during uncertain times helps keep you (and your family) on track.
- Be flexible about your schedule. Maybe you are working from home, suddenly unemployed, or homeschooling. Adjust your schedule to this “new normal”.
- Be gentle with yourself. What is happening now is unprecedented. You won’t have all the right answers, and that’s okay.
- Take time and find space for yourself. Exercise or meditate, go for a walk, take a relaxing bath, read a book. Do what works for you.
- Connect with others, but don’t compare yourself to them. Everyone will get through this in their own way. But the best way is together.

Tips from PCA New York

Need someone to talk to? Call the **Parental Stress Line 1-800-632-8188** for free and confidential support 24/7, or visit <https://www.parentshelpingparents.org/> to find online support groups and parenting resources.

Self-care Strategies:

<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/3262-young-children-at-home-duringthe-covid-19-outbreak-the-importance-of-self-care>

How to Protect Yourself:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/prevention.html>

How to Protect Your Family:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/protectfamily.html>

How to Protect Your Home:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/protecthome.html>

How to Manage Stress and Anxiety:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/protectfamily.html>

Ways to Help Children and Adults Living With Violence:

https://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/wp-content/uploads/Futures_Resources-1.pdf

Other Resources for Children and Families during COVID-19:

<https://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/resources+for+kids+and+families>

More Resources for Parents and Caregivers

Are you or your child in immediate danger?

If so, call **9-1-1**. The police are essential workers and they will come to your house if you are in immediate danger, for example, if someone in your house is currently being physically abusive or threatening you or your children with harm.

Do you know of a child who is being abused?

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 **Department for Children and Families Area Office (DCF)** that serves the city or town where the child lives. On nights, weekends, and holidays, call the **Child-at-Risk Hotline** at **(800)-792-5200**.

Do you need confidential support for domestic violence?

If you are currently or have in the past experienced domestic violence, and you need confidential support, call **SafeLink**, the Massachusetts statewide domestic violence hotline at **877-785-2020**. Call 877-521-2601 for hearing impaired.

Do you need confidential support for sexual violence?

If you or someone you love is currently or has in the past experienced sexual violence, you can reach out to the **Boston Area Rape Crisis Center** hotline by phone 24/7 at **800-841-8371**, or by web chat 9:00 a.m.–11:00 p.m. every day. This hotline is free and confidential, and staffed by highly trained and supervised volunteers and staff.

Do you need information about COVID-19 in Massachusetts?

Visit **<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-updates-and-information>** for the latest guidance and information on the pandemic situation in Massachusetts. This site also links to unemployment, food assistance, and other mental health support resources.

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