



Key Messages and Guidance to Prevent and Respond to COVID- 19 for:

CHILDREN

PARENTS/CAREGIVERS

COMMUNITIES

RESIDENTIAL CARE FACILITIES

INTRODUCTION

The following are key messages including critical information about keeping children safe and healthy during the pandemic. Furthermore, the content addresses the psychosocial concerns and increased child protection risks that can occur as a result of measures put in place to prevent the spread and negative impact of COVID-19. The messages are designed for use by country child protection actors, such as public child protection officers, directors of residential care facilities¹ and government and civil society actors that work with vulnerable children and families. The information included herein should guide targeting of activities and services for vulnerable children and families. These messages have been informed by existing guidance provided by the World Health Organization, UNICEF, and others, and were originally drafted by an inter-agency Technical Working Group convened by the National Council for Children's Services and UNICEF in Kenya. The content is framed by applicable international standards, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children and the 2019 Child Protection Minimum Standards.

- The guidance is designed to inform child protection actors and includes information targeting the following groups:
- Children: Key messages about COVID-19
- Parents and other caregivers: Key messages about COVID-19 and preventing violence in the home and promoting online safety
- Special Audiences: Key messages about COVID-19 for those working or caring for:
 - Children with disabilities
 - Children in residential care facilities; and
 - Children who have exited care facilities, including care leavers
- Child protection and care organizations: Programming considerations related to child protection and care during the pandemic.
- Case management practitioners: guidance on virtual monitoring of children and families.

This guidance should be considered a **living document** and will be updated as new information is made available. Please note that for all health-related information, refer to the World Health Organization or your local Ministry of Health.

¹ Such as: children's protection homes, "orphanages," residential institutions, and charitable children's institutions.

QUICK REFERENCE

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Related guidance

- [Virtual Monitoring of Children, Their Families, and Residential Care Facilities During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)
- [Preventive and Responsive Support to Children, Families and Alternative Care Providers During COVID-19](#)
- [Gatekeeping considerations during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)

MESSAGES ABOUT COVID-19 FOR CHILDREN

Parents, family members, other caregivers, school teachers and other trusted adults can help children to make sense of information about COVID-19 with accurate and honest information, presented in age-appropriate ways to minimize anxiety and fear. The following messages are generally suggested for school-aged children or older. The additional resources suggested at the bottom of the page provide language for younger children. **General principles include:**

- Be calm and reassuring – children pick up both spoken and non-spoken or body language.
- Be available for questions and to listen to children's ideas, questions and concerns.
- Be cautious to avoid language that blames others – viruses can make anyone sick.

What is COVID-19?

- COVID-19 is the short name for coronavirus disease. It is an illness caused by a new virus that makes people sick in different ways, like with fever, cough or having a hard time breathing. Most people who have gotten COVID-19 get better but some people have more serious problems.
- Doctors and health experts are working hard to help people stay healthy.
- It is spread from person to person by coughing, sneezing without covering your mouth, and/or touching the skin or other surfaces where the virus is.
- If you feel sick, stay home and tell an adult. They will find where to get health advice.

What can I do to keep myself from healthy and prevent the spread of COVID-19?

There are some important things you **should know and practice** to keep yourself and others healthy.

- Clean your hands with soap and water or alcohol-based sanitizer as often as possible. Wash for at least 20 seconds. Follow these five steps—wet, lather (make bubbles), scrub (rub together), rinse and dry. Sing the “Happy Birthday” song twice to know how long you should wash.
- Stay inside your home as much as possible. You can open the windows for fresh air but avoid contact with anyone outside of those you live with.
- Show good practices to younger family members, such as washing your hands and sneezing or coughing into your elbow.
- Talk about your feelings. Being worried or feeling afraid is normal. Find someone you trust and talk about it. There is no right or wrong way to feel but talking about it can help you feel better.
- It is safe to play with your siblings, read books, sing, dance, pray, talk to your friends from a distance and play indoor games with your family. Be creative. Do not fight with or be violent with others in your family.
- Avoid getting close to any person who is coughing or has a fever. Let a trusted adult know if you think someone around you is sick.
- There is a lot of information about COVID-19 but not all of it is true. Discuss information you hear or read with a parent or caregiver.



- If you have access to a phone, WhatsApp or the internet be careful about what you view. Always make sure that your parents or caregiver approve how you use the internet. Do not chat with strangers and never give out your name or address.
- Avoid crowded places like school, market, religious services or sporting events, including playing outside with other children because it is hard to know who might be sick and coronavirus can easily be spread in groups.

Additional resources

- Link to My Hero is You, a children's book on COVID-19 developed by War Child: <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-reference-group-mental-health-and-psychosocial-support-emergency-settings/my-hero-you>
- WHO Tips for talking to children: https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/healthy-parenting/english-tip-6-covid-19-parenting.pdf?sfvrsn=232558c1_8
- Talking to Children about COVID-19 by Centers for Disease Control: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/talking-with-children.html>

MESSAGES ABOUT COVID-19 FOR PARENTS/CAREGIVERS

There are some very important information that all parents or caregivers should understand and behavior they should practice to keep family members healthy and safe during the crisis caused by COVID-19.

- Coronavirus disease, also referred to as COVID-19, is an illness caused by a virus that affects people's breathing and lungs.
- Know the facts and follow instructions from your **Ministry of Health** or the [World Health Organization](#) about how to prevent the spread COVID-19. You should also know what to do if someone falls ill.
- Teach and model good hygiene practices for your children and other family members. Wash your hands with soap and running water frequently. If soap and running water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Follow UNICEF's handwashing guidance [here](#).
- Have contact information of your community leaders, health professionals and emergency services like the police and/or existing helplines. Know where to seek help if needed.
- If you have to keep children inside the house guide the children to indoor games or activities to keep them occupied. Create time to play, read, pray or sing together as a family! This is a good way to reduce stress and anxiety.
- Be aware of any changes in your child's emotional behavior. Encourage your child to ask questions and express their feelings with you. Remember that your child may have different reactions to stress; be patient and understanding.
- To help explain COVID-19 and address anxiety or other emotions that children might feel, parents can access this useful story [My Hero is You](#).
- Young children who are not yet able to speak (particularly in the 0-2 age group) also notice and are affected by the stress and anxiety that family members are feeling. Very young children are particularly vulnerable in situations of crisis. Make sure to spend time with them and reassure them of your support.
- Being inside the house with children all day can be stressful. However, be mindful of your own behavior. Step away, take a deep breath and give yourself a few moments to calm down if you get tense or feel angry. Never use violence against children.

- Model behaviors you would like to see in your children. When necessary, teach children right from wrong with calm words without resorting to harsh discipline methods. You can access free information on parenting in [English](#) and in other languages [here](#).
- Make good choices about where you get your information. If you have questions, please reach out to your local health facility. You can also visit the following website for up to date information:
- <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>
- Be aware of what your child is watching online. Discuss and set rules about use of the phone, TV and internet. Always closely monitor and supervise your child's access to internet and phone to ensure that it is safe and appropriate.
- If you have concerns about or know of a child in a violent or other call the police, [Child Helpline](#) or reach out to a community leader for help.
- Do **not** be afraid to ask for help if you feel sick. Do so immediately. Contact your health facility or a neighbor.
- If you have to leave the home for work or for an extended period of time, be sure that your child(ren) are cared for by a trusted adult. When you come home you must wash your hands and change your clothes before engaging with your family.
- Have a plan in place in case you or a family member gets sick. Make sure that you have identified a person who will take care of the child in the event that you cannot.
- Ask for help if you feel that you are unsafe, or your children are in danger, but do not place children in an orphanage. Contact a Child Protection Volunteer, Community Health Volunteer or a Child Protection Officer if you are worried about caring for your child.

Additional parent/caregiver guidance and messaging from Parenting for Lifelong Health, WHO, UNICEF, CDC and partners: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/healthy-parenting>

PARENTS/CAREGIVERS OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

- Be sure to explain, in whatever way is most appropriate for your child, how and when they should wash their hands. If they cannot do it by themselves, support them in doing it.
- Explain to your child the importance of not touching their face.
- Show your child new ways to greet others. Calmly explain to your child the importance of avoiding hugs, handshakes, and other close contact.
- Teach your child how to cover their coughs and sneeze into their elbow, if they're physically able.
- Pictures, drawings, video, games and songs can help teach your child these new protective behaviors. Ask your [community health volunteer? Case worker? Local DPOs] for resources that address your child's communication needs.
- Adhere to **all the same rules** for your child with disabilities that you would for other children. Keep them inside the home and do not allow them to attend public events or crowded locations like school, markets, religious ceremonies or sporting events, unless official health recommendations suggest otherwise. In contexts where there are curfews in place, orders to wear masks and social distancing requirements, it is advised that children with disabilities, especially intellectual disabilities not be allowed to go outside without alone as they might not understand the rules and regulations and unknowingly break them putting themselves and others at risk.
- Certain conditions make children with disabilities more vulnerable to coronavirus disease. Extra precautions should be taken to protect them.
- Do not permit your child to play outside with other children. Instead, find creative and appropriate ways to engage the child, to his or her ability, in indoor games and play

activities to keep them occupied. Create time to play, read, pray or sing together as a family. This will help put them at ease.

- Your child might be feeling anxious but not be able to express it. Be attentive to their reactions, moods or emotional behavior. Try to reassure and calm them. Be extra patient with them.
- Have a plan in place in case you or a family member gets sick. Make sure that you have identified a person who will take care of the child in the event that you cannot.
- Be aware that your child might require continued health and other services during this time. Be sure to discuss and create a plan with the health and other relevant care provider. Ask to be taught how you can continue physiotherapy sessions with your child at home, as applicable.
- Have the name and number of a Community Health Volunteer, Child Protection Worker, Police or other community leader printed and accessible in case you need to reach them.
- This can be a very emotional time for everyone but especially as a parent of a child with disabilities. Make sure that you have someone to speak to or ask for help. Ask your Community Health Worker or Child Protection Worker about available hotlines for tele-support.
- Do not hesitate to reach out to a family member, friend or community support person if you need to talk or if you need a temporary break from caregiving. However, be sure that those that do engage with your child are taking all recommended precautions to prevent the spread of coronavirus including proper handwashing before and after engaging with the child and coughing or sneezing into the elbow. To minimize the possibility of exposure to the virus it is strongly recommended that any person that is invited into the home to care for the child be known to the family and be practicing proper social distancing.
- If you are part of a network of parents of children with disabilities, keep in touch with them via phone or WhatsApp. You can provide remote emotional support to one another during this very difficult time.

Additional resources

- For practitioners working with children and families living with a disability, the following link has useful disability-specific information including sign language resources or support to children with autism. It is recommended that the material be reviewed by the practitioner and then shared as needed with the family or caregiver. The International Disability and Development Consortium repository on disability inclusion and COVID-19: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1IVP1u6yHfLuN9qNyLEct5-vtCOaqLKtKr-o-faAjves/edit#>
- Risk Communication and Community Engagement for COVID-19 – Engaging with Children and Adults with Disabilities: https://www.unicef.org/disabilities/files/COVID-19_engagement_children_and_adults_with_disabilities_final.pdf
- COVID-19 response: Considerations for Children and Adults with Disabilities: https://www.unicef.org/disabilities/files/COVID-19_response_considerations_for_people_with_disabilities_190320.pdf

KEY MESSAGES TO KEEP COMMUNITIES SAFE AND HEALTHY DURING COVID-19

- Get the facts about how to prevent the spread of coronavirus from the Ministry of Health or World Health Organization. See here for useful information from WHO: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>
- <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/myth-busters>
- Follow your Government guidelines on handwashing, social distancing and any quarantine measures.

- Anyone can catch coronavirus disease. Do not stigmatize or discriminate. To prevent and address any social stigma related to COVID-19 please see this document: <https://www.who.int/who-documents-detail/a-guide-to-preventing-and-addressing-social-stigma-associated-with-covid-19>
- It is normal and expected to feel sad, distressed, worried, confused, scared or angry during a crisis. But it is not OK to treat others poorly or use violence against anyone.
- Talk to people you trust. If you feel overwhelmed or afraid, call or text a Community Health Volunteer, Psychosocial Volunteer, Child Protection Volunteer, religious leader, friend or neighbor. Many governments have established hotlines for COVID-19 information. They are free of charge.
- Don't use tobacco, alcohol or other drugs to cope with your emotions. Instead, talk to friends, members of your religious community or community leaders. Doing exercises such as stretching in the house, walking running will also help you deal with your emotions.
- Make a plan with your family about where to go and seek help for physical and emotion health, if required. Have contact information for local health facility readily accessible for all family members.
- For additional information about how to address the mental health and psychosocial issues that COVID-19 is having on community members please see this useful resource from the WHO. Versions are available in multiple languages: <https://www.who.int/publications-detail/WHO-2019-nCoV-MentalHealth-2020.1>
- These additional resources also contain helpful information about promoting positive mental health and psychosocial wellbeing during the pandemic.
 - Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Network. [MHPSS COVID-19 Toolkit](#).
 - Centers for Disease Control. [Stress and Coping](#).

KEY MESSAGES TO ADULTS TO PREVENT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

The current situation has put additional stress on families. Loss of income, closure of schools and fear of getting sick can all lead to an extraordinary amount of fear, frustration and anger. However, during these times, it is especially important that as adults, we manage our emotions and take active steps to control our reactions.

- Violence is never ok! Even when we are facing stress and pressure, it is not appropriate to take this out in a violent manner on any adult or any child. Ever.
- If you feel you are losing your temper, remove yourself from the situation – even if it is difficult to do so in a small shared space, if you feel that you are going to get angry with someone else walk away. If possible, go outside, listen to music, pray or do something to calm yourself down.
- If you feel that you cannot calm down or fear that you will be violent to another adult or child, call someone for help. Ask a Chief, religious leader, Child Protection Volunteer or a trusted relative or friend for help.
- Learn what actions to take to control your stress and anger. See the World Health Organization positive parenting tips during coronavirus. You can access free information on parenting in [English](#) and [other languages](#).
- To try and avoid stress, anger or frustration during this difficult time, try to talk about any issues, constraints and/ or frustrations as a family. Create routines, house rules and find solutions that will enable all of you to feel safe and get through this difficult time.
- These are very difficult times, but every adult and child has the right to be protected from violence. Being required to stay home does NOT mean that you cannot seek urgent help, advice or support if you are being abused.

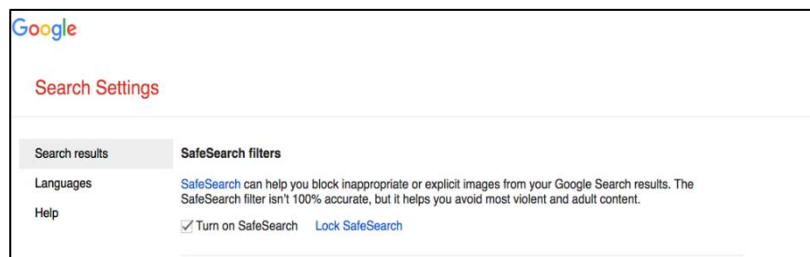
- If you are experiencing violence or abuse of any kind or are concerned about violence or abuse in a household you know, please find help. Go to a trusted neighbor, relative, Community Health Volunteer, or the police. You may also call the Child Help Line in your area. See [here](#) for a list of countries and the Child Help Line number. It is free to call.

KEY MESSAGES TO ADULTS TO KEEP CHILDREN SAFE ONLINE

As children continue to spend time at home during this pandemic, they will live more of their lives online. This makes them more vulnerable to online bullying, abuse and exploitation.

Don't let COVID increase violence!

- **Explore together:** Ask your child to show you their favorite websites and apps and what they do on them. Listen, show interest and encourage them to teach you the basics of the site or app.
- **Chat little and often about online safety:** If you're introducing them to new learning websites and apps while school is closed, take the opportunity to talk to them about how to stay safe on these services and in general. Ask if anything ever worries them while they're online. Make sure they know that if they ever feel worried, they can get help by talking to you or another adult they trust.
- **Help your child identify trusted adults who can help them if they are worried:** This includes you and other adults at home, as well as adults from wider family, school or other support services who they are able to contact at this time. Encourage them to draw a picture or write a list of their trusted adults.
- **Be non-judgmental:** Explain that you would never blame them for anything that might happen online, and you will always give them calm, loving support.
- **Supervise their online activity:** Keep the devices your child uses in communal areas of the house such as in the living room or kitchen where an adult is able to supervise. Children of this age should not access the internet unsupervised in private spaces, such as alone in a bedroom or bathroom.
- **Set limits.** Discuss and agree with your child how much time they will be allowed online. Follow through and stick to the agreement.
- **Talk about how their online actions affect others:** If your child is engaging with others online, remind them to consider how someone else might feel before they post or share something. If they are considering sharing a photo/video of somebody else, they should always ask permission first.
- **Use SafeSearch:** Most web search engines will have a "SafeSearch" function, which will allow you to limit the content your child can access whilst online. Look out for the 'Settings' button on your web browser homepage, which is often shaped like a small cog. Once you go to your "Settings" button it should look like the image at right.



KEY MESSAGES TO CHILDREN ON VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN AND ONLINE SAFETY

- If you have concerns about another child experiencing violence or abuse or you are experiencing violence and abuse, please tell someone. If you have access to a phone, call the police or Child Helpline. It is free.
- These are very difficult times, but you and every child have the right to be protected from violence. Being required to stay home does NOT mean that you and other children cannot get urgent help, advice or support if you are experiencing or at risk of experience any kind violence.
- During this time, you might also be online more than usual. It is important that you are aware of potential dangers on the internet. Do not post personal information online such as address, phone number, location or your photos. EVER.
- Be careful of and do not exchange with any person online that you do not know personally. Make sure to tell your parents or another trusted adult if someone you don't know tries to contact you online or something just doesn't feel right.

Additional resources

- Online safety activities from Childnet International:
<https://www.childnet.com/resources/online-safety-activities-you-can-do-from-home>
- UNICEF's Internet of Good Things: <https://www.unicef.org/innovation/loGT>

MESSAGES ABOUT COVID-19 FOR RESIDENTIAL CARE FACILITIES

There is important information that you should be aware of and understand to keep you, your staff and children in your care healthy and safe during the crisis. There are important actions **that you must know and practice** to prevent the spread of COVID-19, treat someone who is sick and important protocols to ensure that children who are in your institution or those that exit stay safe and healthy during the pandemic.

- Explain, in a child-friendly and age appropriate way, about COVID-19 (see messages for children, above).
- Ensure all children and staff respect required personal hygiene and provide appropriate supplies for all children and staff:
 - Wash hands with soap frequently and for at least 20 seconds or use alcohol-based sanitizers.
 - Cover your nose and mouth with tissue or cough and sneeze into your flexed elbow. Dispose of the tissue appropriately. Wash your hands with soap and running water immediately afterwards.
 - Avoid physical contact with everyone, such as handshaking, hugging and kissing.
 - Put signs up next to all basins, behind toilet doors and in other highly visible locations reminding children and staff of rigorous hand washing method.
- Develop and implement protocols for any staff re-entering the institution after having been outside, such as washing, clothing change, etc. Put a sign at the entrance highlighting these protocols, and handwashing point and/or a large alcohol-based sanitizer that must be used before entering.
- Receive all deliveries to the institution **at the gate and maintain a social distance of at least 1.5 meters with the other delivery personnel**. All items brought into the institution should be disinfected immediately before use.
- No visitors should interact with children. Do not organize any events involving those outside the institution within the institution. However, the pandemic should not impede communication between the child and his or her family members. It is the responsibility of the administration of the residential care facility to facilitate regular contact between

the child and his/her family members via telephone, text or other communication platforms.

- Avoid taking the children out of the institution. They should not attend school, religious service, go to the market or sporting events.
- Only essential staff, i.e., those responsible for the physical, emotional and safety needs of children in care, should report to work. If space permits, essential staff should be encouraged to reside in the institution to minimize exposure to the virus.
- Limit the number of people you, your staff and the children interact with. The fewer people you engage with, the less chance there is to be exposed to people who may have the virus.
- Adhere to **all the same rules** for children with disabilities that you would for other children. Keep them inside the home and do not allow them to attend public events or crowded locations like school, markets, religious ceremonies or sporting events. See messages for Parents/Caregivers of Children with Disabilities, above.
- Certain conditions make children with disabilities more vulnerable to coronavirus disease. Extra precautions should be taken to protect them.
- Be supportive and actively listen to all children under your care during this time of uncertainty. If a child exhibits signs of worry or stress, take time to listen to them. Explore their concern and reassure and comfort them and explain, in a child friendly manner, about what is happening.
- Be aware of any changes in children's emotional behavior. Encourage children to ask questions and express their feelings with you. Remember that each child may have different reactions to stress; be patient and understanding.
- To help explain COVID-19 and address anxiety or other emotions that children might feel, you can access this useful story: [My Hero is You](#).
- Young children who are not yet able to speak (particularly in the 0-2 age group) also notice and are affected by the stress and anxiety that family members are feeling. Very young children are particularly vulnerable in situations of crisis. Make sure to spend time with them and reassure them of your support.
- In case you or a child could benefit from some professional advice about a psychosocial issue, call the Child Helpline.
- Violence is never ok! Even when we are facing stress and pressure, it is not appropriate to take this out in a violent manner on any adult or any child. Ever.

If your children's institution is sending children home (reunifying) to their families at this time, there are several things that you **must do** to ensure that the child's transition is safe and that the child will remain safe and healthy within the family.

- Talk to children about what is going to happen and ensure that they understand what is happening. If children express safety/security related concerns, take notes and discuss with children officers to seek for alternative options.
- Conduct family assessments using existing documents and case files, and information collected via phone calls, etc. to ascertain the ability of parents/caregivers to ensure the child's developmental needs are being met after they are released.
- Work closely with the Children's Officer, Chief, or Child Protection Volunteer or Social Development Officer in the location where the family resides, ideally have them visit the family to check home safety and verify their readiness. These visits should be done with workers properly prepared with personal safety protection.
- Notify parents or caregivers of children **before** the child exits the institution. Work closely with the Children's Officer, Chief, or Child Protection Volunteer or Social Development Officer in the location of the institution and in the location where the family resides. This can be done via phone, email, text or WhatsApp.
- Document communication that happens with the child, parents/ caregivers and other key actors at the community or county level.

- Prior to children exiting, document all of the following information about each child:
 - Full name of child, date of birth, recent photo of the child, address where the child is going (county, village, location, landmarks, GPS), names of family members/caregiver that the child is staying with, relationship of the family members/caregiver to the child, contact information for the child, date of exit from the institution, contact information for the caregiver/parents, name and contact number of the Children's Officer and Community Health Volunteer and/or Child Protection Volunteer, Psychosocial Volunteer or Social Development Officer in the location where the child is being placed.
- Provide children and their families/caregivers child-friendly messages about COVID-19 as per your government's or WHO guidelines.
- Households should have access to running water and soap. If they do not, your institution should support or link them to other organizations that can provide.
- Ensure regular follow up with children who have returned to their families, in person if possible and in line with social distancing guidelines, using phone or other virtual means to ascertain if the child's health, safety and developmental needs are being met. The first phone call should be two days after the reunification and then on a once a week basis. Ensure families have access to food and health care. Work with County Government, Children's Officers, Social Development Officer, Psychosocial Volunteer, local organizations and community leaders to identify available support services or address any noted concerns.
- Design and adhere to a monitoring plan, either in person or virtual depending on the local situation and requirements (see example below).

If your institution is sending young people home or arranging independent living in the community, there are key actions that you **must do** to ensure that the transition is safe, and the young person is able to remain healthy.

- Ensure that the young person has a place to live before they leave the institution.
- Facilitate the young person's transition, ensuring that they have clothing, personal hygiene supplies, and can cover basic needs.
- Link the young person to social support services that target vulnerable populations within the community. This includes food and financial (cash transfer) support services. Link them to the Children's Officer, Social Development Officer, Psychosocial Volunteer, Child Protection Volunteer, Community Health Volunteer and Chief in the area where they will be living.
- Discuss and prepare a virtual monitoring plan that includes talking via phone, email or WhatsApp on a weekly basis.
- Inform the young person about the Child Helpline which offers free counselling, if needed. Look [here](#) to find your country and the number of the Child Helpline.
- Design and use a virtual monitoring plan.
- Depending on the unique circumstances of the case and the desires of the young person, consider delaying the transition until it can be done in a manner that is safe for the young person.

This brief will be regularly updated with the latest information, guidance, and tools to ensure to ensure program teams have the information they need to make informed decisions.