

GUIDANCE FOR COVID-19 PREVENTION AND CONTROL IN SCHOOLS

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Annex C: Mental Health and Psycho-Social Support (MHPSS)

MHPSS Key Messages (adapted largely from the IASC Briefing Note on addressing MHPSS)

Schools are integrated platforms that support cross-sectoral efforts critical to the COVID-19 response. While MHPSS interventions are carried out through general health and child protection services, schools and other community structures also provide critical support to school communities, including Child Protection actors. Additionally, schools can address social stigma and discrimination and support children and their families who may suffer negative psychological impacts due to issues such as loss of schooling, fear, anxiety, or family members being in isolation.

School leaders, including teachers, play an important role in supporting MHPSS community activities such as: sharing key factual messages with students and their families; maintaining social contact with students who may be isolated through phone calls, text messages, or other virtual platforms; and providing care and support to people who have been separated from their families and caregivers.

Key Considerations

- Ground MHPSS responses in the context. The pre-existing and ongoing issues within the school/community cannot be separated from the MHPSS response for COVID-19.
- Work with communities to identify and pro-actively reach out to children who may be marginalized from social networks such as those with disabilities, refugee and migrant children, minorities.
- Make MHPSS services accessible and adapt appropriately for the specific needs of children; those providing MHPSS should be mindful of the different risks and experiences faced by girls and boys and children with pre-existing medical conditions.
- Ensure inclusivity. Some population groups may experience barriers to accessing information, care and support if it is not provided in multiple and accessible formats and through inclusive channels.
 - Includes information in easy to read formats for low literacy audiences, Braille, large print, sign language, video with text captioning and accessible web content
 - For ethnic-socio-linguistic minority groups, information should be available in relevant languages
- Make sure remote learning mechanisms do not expose children to violence such as cyber bullying. Consider when caregiver/adult supervision may be needed (i.e. in cases where teachers have one on one sessions with learners)
- Train and support individuals providing MHPSS for children in schools and other community structures on the fundamental basis of protection from gender-based violence (GBV), protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), reporting and referrals (see note below on protection from sexual violence during Covid-19).
- Address the mental health and wellbeing of teachers and other education personnel.
 - Peer support groups for teachers can offer social support during the response while sharing staff care information.
- Map existing MHPSS expertise and structures, including public and private education services, as a mechanism to pool, mobilize and coordinate resources (School counselors and nurses, staff at local health departments, etc.)

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- Review and strengthen referral systems, particularly for severe cases.
 - Ensure providers are aware of other care services, including referral and services for GBV/PSEA.
- Share positive mental health messages and include other care messages as part of comprehensive public awareness campaigns to combat stigma, address excessive fears of contagion, and encourage the public to value and support frontline workers.
 - Work in collaboration with Child Protection, Health and C4D actors
- As part of a ‘whole of society’ approach, schools can consider promoting the following MHPSS activities:
 - promotion of self-care strategies, such as deep breathing exercises or other culturally relevant forms of relaxation
 - normalization messages about fear and anxiety and ways people can support others
 - clear, concise and accurate information about COVID-19.

Helping children deal with stress during the COVID-19 outbreak

- Teachers and care givers should engage in active listening and cultivate an understanding attitude with children.
- Collaborate with Child Protection actors to provide gender and age appropriate awareness messages to children about available care services including GBV/PSEA, and encourage them to express their needs, and seek support in a safe and ethical manner.
- Review [UNICEF's 6 ways parents can support their kids through the coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) outbreak](#), psychologist's advice on how to help your children deal with the many emotions they may be experiencing now.
- Review UNICEF's 8 tips to help comfort and protect children [How to talk to your child about coronavirus disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)

Resources

IASC Briefing note on addressing mental health and psychosocial aspects of COVID-19 Outbreak: <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-reference-group-mental-health-and-psychosocial-support-emergency-settings/briefing-note-about>

INEE Guidance Note on Psychosocial Support:
https://inee.org/system/files/resources/INEE_Guidance_Note_on_Psychosocial_Support_ENG_v2.pdf

SAMHSA Talking with Children: Tips for caregivers, parents, and teachers during infectious disease outbreaks: https://store.samhsa.gov/system/files/pep20-01-01-006_508_0.pdf

Guidance Note: Protection of Children During Infectious Disease Outbreaks:
<https://alliancecpcha.org/en/child-protection-online-library/guidance-note-protection-children-during-infectious-disease>