

COVID-19 Checklist

Child Welfare Leaders

As our world deals with the impact of COVID-19, child welfare agencies must continue critical operations while so many other parts of our government and economy shut down. Child welfare and child protection leaders are working tirelessly to care for staff, keep children safe, support families, and reduce trauma. Leaders are making critical decisions daily in the face of a crisis that continues to change each day.

This checklist can help to direct attention towards areas of emergency response or planning so that no critical function is overlooked.



Designate a Single Point of Responsibility. The issues regarding this pandemic are complex and touch every part of human behavior and responsibility. The coordination of a complex and integrated system like child welfare can be managed by a single person who is designated full time to coordinate decision-making.



Communicate to Staff Frequently. Executive leadership during this crisis demands decisive actions. Decisions must be made quickly and require bold imagination. Agency staff need to hear from their executive leader and their leadership team regularly and clearly. Leaders can and should be honest when they don't have all the answers and continue to communicate even when there is uncertainty.



Monitor Federal Guidelines. Leadership for the agency must have a plan and assign responsibilities for monitoring actions taken by national leadership such as the President, Congress, and HHS, as well as action taken by local government authorities. Leadership must also communicate with other state and local jurisdictions on the actions the local child welfare agency is taking to address the crisis.



Monitor Contract Changes. In times of crisis, traditional contract procurement rules and requirements can be an impediment or barrier to obtaining or managing services. To keep necessary services in place, temporary amendments—to current rules and regulations, or for processing and approving contract changes—must be put in place to override what often is a protracted contracting process.



Increase Case Supervision. Social distancing limits the in-person contact that caseworkers have among themselves and with others. At least two times per week, and more frequently than usual, supervisors should have conference calls with staff using technology to talk about cases, share information, and support each other.



Monitor Revenue Stability and Enhancement. COVID-19 is having a significant effect on the economy and will impact state revenue. Leadership must ensure that eligibility determinations and claiming of federal funds continue during crisis. The Families First Coronavirus Response Act of 2020 has increased FMAP claiming percentages; other legislation affecting revenue must constantly be evaluated as well.



Develop and Distribute Emergency Protocols for Caseworkers. The current travel and work restrictions implemented in many jurisdictions are a barrier to best practices and potentially impact safety for children. Agencies must develop creative and effective ways (such as video conferencing) to address oversight for the safety of children—whether they are in out-of-home foster care, placed with relatives, or being supervised in home. Additionally, agencies should assess caseworker access to technology and develop a written protocol to complete required case plans and case dictation.

-  **Develop Court Process Deviations.** So much of what the child welfare agency does is under the supervision and authority of the courts and hearings may be cancelled or delayed. Reunification of children with families should not be delayed due to the crisis. Arrangements should be made with the courts to provide the agency with more discretion to return a child to a parent or relative (on a trial home visit under a detailed safety plan) without a court hearing or court authority.
-  **Develop an Emergency Hiring Plan and Process.** It is unclear what impact COVID-19 will have on employment, turnover, and the process of hiring. Agencies should prepare for the possibility that their workforce experiences sickness or must care for someone who is sick. Given the enormous pressure that will continue to be placed on agencies, personnel hiring processes must be reviewed to ensure staffing needs are met if the crisis continues for a prolonged period of time.
-  **Amend Training Plan.** Training of new staff must be reviewed to ensure competency and should be considered a two-step process: initial training necessary for minimum competence to specific tasks and follow-up training for traditional or typical job-specific training. In the event that the crisis continues for an extended time period, live and recorded training should be made available so that training requirements can be met.
-  **Communicate with Partners and Providers.** A great deal of what a child welfare agency does is in partnership with other state and local agencies and service providers. Leadership should establish a process to regularly communicate with those agencies and providers so that all parties are aware of some of the process and policy modifications that may impact them (such as changes to visit and court policies).
-  **Communicate with Local Organizations.** The traditional work of charity and compassion has historically been done by local community organizations. Child welfare workers must be connected to local community responses as their standard list of community supports may quickly become outdated during the crisis. The child welfare agency should communicate with local organizations to support families in crisis and specifically those who are involved with the child welfare agency and may be experiencing added stress due to the crisis.