Continued Learning During School Closures

RC Primary School Makali
Photo Credit: Michael Duff, May 2014

Practical guidance for engaging in Education responses to school closures in low income, hard to reach and crisis affected contexts

This document was developed by Concern Worldwide's Strategy, Advocacy and Learning Department in collaboration with the Emergency Directorate and country programmes. It aims to provide practical guidance to Education teams in our countries of operation. The content of this guidance is specifically designed for low resource and low connectivity contexts and with minimal adult literacy requirements.

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Introduction

The role of education as a long-term mechanism for breaking the cycle of extreme poverty is globally recognised. Education is strongly related to economic growth, reduced income inequality, reduced infant and maternal deaths, reduced stunting and reduced violence and conflict at home and in society. Basic literacy, numeracy and life skills empower individuals to access markets, health information, political and social networks and to live healthier and more productive lives. A holistic education will support the development of a child's social, emotional, cognitive and communication skills, so that the child has opportunities to participate fully in society and achieve personal successes.

Education is an enabling basic human right and a key component of humanitarian action as it provides immediate physical, psychological and cognitive protection during crises, is a major contributor to individual, community and societal resilience and is prioritised by communities, parents and children themselves to build their future, even in the most challenging humanitarian contexts. Challenges to education provision and child protection are exacerbated in situations of crisis, directly affecting children's safety and wellbeing. Out of school children are at greater risk of exposure to violence, exploitation and abuse. A gap in access to education due to emergencies will cost future generations the health, income, equality and wellbeing benefits associated with education – trapping them in a vicious poverty cycle. The longer children remain out of school, the less likely it becomes that they will return.

Improving the lives of extremely poor and vulnerable children in a sustainable way by increasing access to high quality primary education and supporting wellbeing.

As was clearly seen with the varying levels of prioritization of Education during the West African Ebola outbreak, maintaining a strong connection and presence with the Education sector during a public Health crisis not only significantly impacts Education outcomes during and following the crisis, but also has a positive impact on long-term development gains. It is imperative that during a health emergency, programmatic focus expands beyond the immediately obvious health responses, and considers the wider reaching implications of disruptions to development and society.

The following guidance was developed to provide Education teams working in fragile and conflict-affected states and hard to reach low incomes contexts with practical guidance for continuing learning for the most vulnerable during extended school closures due to health emergencies. The content was developed to respond to specific country level needs and requests for technical support within a range of low income and crisis affected contexts in which Concern works. In addition, the areas of focus are in line with and support many Ministry of Education plans and requirements from these contexts. The guidance builds on the learning from Concern's Education response during the West Africa Ebola crisis as well a global guidance adapted for low resource and low connectivity contexts. Each component of this guidance is designed either to be used for standalone actions or integrated to ensure a holistic education response.

The guidance includes three components:
- A brief overview of the specific impacts prolonged school closures has on fragile education systems
- An overarching response framework based on Concern's core elements of Education programming; Access, Quality, Wellbeing
- A series of short, practical guidance notes for various approaches to continued learning during school closures that may be utilised in low income and crisis affected contexts

School closures during COVID-19 Crisis

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Impact of school closures on the extreme poor and those living in crisis and conflict

In April 2020, UNESCO estimated that the number of school going children affected by COVID-19 related school closures peaked at almost 1.6 billion equating to 91.3% of the school going children globally. This is on top of the estimated 260 million children who were out of school prior to COVID-19 due to poverty, humanitarian crisis, conflict and exclusion. Although school closures are necessary at this unprecedented time for public health and safety, the impacts on children, caregivers, teachers, communities, education systems and nations as a whole has potential to be devastating for individuals, communities and development gains, particularly in the world's poorest and most fragile countries.

Impacts on Learning

For children living in extreme poverty or those affected by crisis and conflict, prolonged closures of school will have a significant impact on their ability to access learning opportunities both in the short and longer term. In contexts where family literacy levels are low and access to resources and technology extremely limited, options for continued home learning are negligible. This will further compound the challenges already faced by the poorest countries in ensuring quality education, with Sub-Saharan Africa seeing as many as 87% of children in schools not reaching the minimum proficiency level in reading prior to the current crisis. The loss of learning time due to school closures will further disadvantage these children and have ongoing repercussions for not only their personal development, but also the development of countries as a whole.

- In order to reduce the negative impact of school closures on children's learning outcomes in the poorest and most vulnerable countries, it is imperative that contingency planning for ongoing learning begins early and is focused on achievable and realistic mechanisms. As caregiver literacy levels, connectivity, access to technology hardware and power supply is limited, options need to consider pre-existing and available resources including; radio learning, mobile phone voice messages that provide communities and caregivers with learning focused activities and guidance for developing simple play and learning materials. Although these will not provide the same quality of learning as a trained teacher and access to schooling, they will allow children to maintain a connection to their learning and potentially reduce the level of learning loss and regression during the closure period.

Impacts on Safety and Protection

In addition to loss of progress towards learning outcomes, closures of schools interrupt access to in-school resources and protective measures. Children living in extreme poverty and fragile and conflict affect contexts are already at higher risk of child labour, early marriage, sexual exploitation, early pregnancy and recruitment into armed groups. The closure of schools removes potentially protective and life-saving support to children and increases their expose to these risks significantly. The economic impacts of the crisis mean there is an increased risk of children being forced to work, of child and forced marriage, early pregnancy, domestic and sexual violence. School closures may have a disproportionately harmful to girls, particularly the most marginalised and deprived. In addition, although their health may not be directly affected by COVID-19 to the same extend as older generations, significant loss of life within older populations will result in significant increases in children affected through being orphaned, quarantined and unaccompanied, compounding the pre-existing risks children in fragile and crisis affected contexts face. The trauma faced by children across the world including social disconnect from the school environment and the inability to adequately respond to child protection issues without the appropriate functioning of safeguarding mechanisms such as School Management Committees, is likely to be affecting the psychosocial welfare and development of children. This will in turn have negative impacts on children's psychosocial wellbeing and may result in increases of negative coping mechanisms.

The closure of schools also has a significant impact on caregivers globally, with those living in extreme poverty and crisis disproportionately affected. Women represent the largest share of caregivers, and will be impacted significantly. The economic impact of school closures is significant with disruptions to income generating opportunities that are then further exacerbated by the need to provide care to children that would normally be in school. This also has potential to negatively impact healthcare systems, where again women often represent a large share of health-care workers and often cannot attend work because of childcare obligations that result from school closures. Furthermore, the additional stress placed on caregivers and community members as a result of school closures further increases risk of violence within households with vulnerable families underprepared and under-resourced to be able to cope with the shock to finance, safety, protection and learning.

- In order to reduce the negative impact of school closures on children's safety and protection in the poorest and most vulnerable countries, it is imperative that the safety, protection and psychosocial needs of children, caregivers and teachers are embedded into response plans. Incorporating child friendly non-specialised psychosocial components into remote learning solutions as well as promotion of community safety networks during the time of the crisis may reduce the negative impacts of the loss of protective school environments. As restrictions are eased, more intensive support to children and vulnerable households affected by the crisis will be required to reduce the uptake of negative coping mechanisms that will occur as a result of the social and economic impact of the health crisis.

Impacts on Education Systems

The already weak Education systems Concern engages with in some of the world's poorest and most vulnerable countries will be severely impacted due to the current crisis. The continued deterioration of the situation, with wider school closures expected and significant negative impacts of national and global economies will be felt strongly by weak and developing systems. The interruption to schooling has, and will continue to negatively impact the significant gains made in the Education sector in the past few years. Diversion of funding and resources away from the Education sector has potential to stall ongoing policy reform and development and with the loss of learning hours and potential low levels of attendance with the reopening of schools, student learning outcomes, particularly Early Grades Reading, will be substantially lowered. Connectivity to the learning environment will be diminished resulting in reduced ongoing attendance and retention after the initial crisis and progress already made in improving the quality of teaching and learning will be reduced. Potential loss of the limited number of already trained teachers and interruptions to momentum within education reform process will set already struggling systems further behind. Long-term impacts of school closures are particularly acute for disadvantaged Education systems with less access to technology and distance learning and fewer opportunities for education outside of school. Parents with limited education are likely to be unprepared to home-school children, which will make it harder to close the achievement gap between high- and low-income students.

- To reduce the loss of momentum of the Education sector caused by school closures, immediate and sustained support at a national level is required. An early and continued, coordinated, multi-sectorial response between Governments, Education Development Partners and donors to address the implications and mitigate the risks of prolonged closure of schools is required to reduce the negative long term effects on children, communities and the economy. It is important that Education systems are supported to not only allow for the continuation of learning opportunities and protective mechanisms during the peak of the crisis, but also the effective and smooth recovery of the education sector post crisis.

School reopening

Once the initial peak of the crisis begins to abate, the safe and timely reopening of schools will be paramount. The reopening of schools will require a large-scale needs assessment of learning environments and the implementation of significant risk mitigation strategies that must be planned well in advance of reopening. These strategies include; cleaning and disinfecting of school buildings and environments (particularly if used as quarantine/holding/treatment centres as has been common practice in previous outbreaks in developing nations but which should be strongly advocated against), ensuring adequate Water and Sanitation Hygiene (WASH) facilities, training of teachers in COVID-19, Psychosocial Support and any changes to curriculum as well as equipping schools with appropriate learning materials and furniture to maintain adequate social distancing. Due to the potentially significant impact on the school calendar, a revised and abridged curriculum may need to be developed ensuring teachers and students are able to prioritise the required learning in the reduced timeframe and mitigate the potential long-term impacts of significant delays to education. Furthermore, the process of sensitising the public on the importance of all children returning to school, specifically girls and those directly affected by the crisis (survivors, orphans, unaccompanied minors etc.), including pregnant girls, requires a mass campaign with particular emphasis on the need for community engagement in the preparation of schools for reopening and the ongoing support of communities in ensuring a safe and effective learning environment.

Holistic Education Response to COVID-19

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Guiding Principles:

- **Align with and support Ministry of Education policy, strategy and national directives**
- **Coordinate with the in-country Education Cluster or Working Groups where activated**
- **Utilise INEE & Education Cluster guidance and seek technical support as necessary**
- **Be guided by and implement responses in alignment with Concern Worldwide Global Education Policy 2016 and accompanying Global Education Strategy 2018-2022**

Access | Quality | Wellbeing

ACCESS

1) Keep open schools safe

- Ensure schools and learning centres have adequate handwashing facilities and supplies:
    - handwashing stations
    - access to clean water and soap
    - products/equipment for cleaning
    - access to gender segregated latrines
    - *provide according to results of needs assessments and capacity*
- Promote practices for everyday preventative actions (hand washing with soap and clean water, cover coughs and sneezes, staying home when sick, avoid crowds, limit close contact with others, etc.)
- Provide all teachers with training on school hygiene at school level (avoiding clustering of schools)

2) Safely reopen schools

- Advocate at national level to ensure schools are not used for any health purposes *(such as quarantine, treatment centres, etc.)* throughout the emergency
- Establish school reopening protocols as early as possible *(with MoE if possible and aligned with global guidance for cleaning and disinfecting schools)* to ensure popularisation of protocols
    - Ensure all schools have access to school reopening safety protocols and supplies required for safe reopening *(including hand-washing supplies, cleaning materials, adequate furniture to maintain protocols, teaching learning materials etc.)*
    - Train teachers and school administration on reopening safety protocols
    - Support schools to adhere to reopening safety protocols through active monitoring and compliance

3) Get children back to school

- Plan a gender analysis/ assessment to be carried out for recovery stage programme planning
- Social mobilisation for school return including popularisation of reopening timeline and sharing of accurate information regarding school reopening safety protocols.
    - Ensure active promotion of return of girls to school and those directly affected by the crisis (survivors, orphans, unaccompanied minors etc.), including pregnant girls

QUALITY
1) Continue learning during school closures

- Work with Ministry of Education to develop and implement plans for remote learning as early as possible *(If not possible to engage with Ministry, coordinate with Education Partners to maximise resources and coverage)*
  - Identify appropriate pre-existing content and develop new educational radio/television programmes aligned with national curriculum
  - Support development of early grade literacy, numeracy and age appropriate life skills content within remote learning programmes
  - Develop simple SMS/WhatsApp messaging including voice messaging to promote caregiver engagement
  - Procure and distribute radios and basic learning materials
  - Engage with radio stations and mobile networks to secure airtime *(ensure this is done in coordination with MoE and partners to avoid conflicting messages)*
- Engage caregivers as contingency for potential school closures
- Embed non-specialised PSS for children, teachers and caregivers into all remote learning programmes. Include messages and activities related to:
  - stress management with the aim to mitigate the risk of GBV (e.g. anger management)
  - Sexual Reproductive Health (e.g. contraception and the heightened risks of unwanted pregnancy).
  - Positive parenting strategies
  - Lifesaving health messages (e.g.: preventative health measures, reporting and referral pathways

2) Compensate for lost learning when schools reopen

- Support MoE in realignment of school calendar to compensate for prolonged closures *(e.g.: changes in holiday timings, minor extension of school hours, condensing of academic year)*
- Support MoE on development of accelerated curriculum or catch up planning for lost academic time *(curriculum revisions as required)*
  - Ensure core content includes a focus on foundational literacy and numeracy skill development
  - Ensure schools have access to revised catch up curriculum
  - Train teachers on revised catch up curriculum

WELLBEING
1) Keep children, school staff and communities informed

- Disseminate existing and age appropriate messages and materials to teachers, students and caregivers using appropriate channels (e.g.: visual posters, radio, jingles, age appropriate games that maintain social distancing etc.).
  - Include messages on stress management with the aim to mitigate the risk of GBV (e.g. anger management) and SRH (e.g. contraception and the heightened risks of unwanted pregnancy)
- Advise people with symptoms of COVID-19 on where and how to access services based on in country referral channels
- Share updated information on government plans and advice through communication channels (WhatsApp and Mobile Phone).
- Maintain community connection to school through social mobilisation utilising radio

2) Address the Psychosocial Wellbeing of vulnerable children & Teachers

- Train teachers on non-specialised PSS for children
- Support school administrations to provide non-specialised PSS for teachers and communities

Practical Guidance for Continued Learning

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The following sections contain practical guidance for the planning and implementation of continued learning strategies in low income and crisis affected contexts including:

- **Radio Programming**

- **Psychosocial Support (PSS)**

- **Child Friendly Messages**
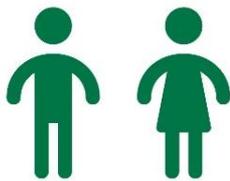
- **Caregiver Engagement**

- **Community Learning Groups**

- **Examples of Child Protection Considerations**

Each section contains brief guidance outlining the key consideration for the continued learning strategy including:

- **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

- Practical steps of **HOW** to design and implement the strategy

- Examples of **WHAT** to include to ensure quality

- Links to **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES** related to the strategy

Radio Programming

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Guiding Principles:

Distance learning through radio should:

- **Be age-appropriate, engaging and child-friendly**
- **Be gender sensitive, avoid perpetuating negative stereotypes**
- **Address the child holistically, including psychosocial, physical and cognitive development**
- **Be positive and focus on children's strengths**
- **Address the needs of all, including those who are most disadvantaged**

Emergency radio education should not be about formal learning, grades, or substituting classroom instruction. It is intended to provide an opportunity for engagement, basic learning, routine and stability, and the reinforcement of children's capacities, while planning for effective school reopening when possible.

HOW? Steps for developing a radio education programme

Radio education programmes are an effective means of delivering multi-child learning in low resource and low connectivity contexts. Depending on capacity of Ministries of Education, Concern's Education teams can work with partners to develop or support Ministries to develop radio education programmes. Key steps for the development of a quality radio programme include:

1. Identify appropriate **radio stations and available airtime**. Ensure that all national efforts allow **access to those in hard to reach areas.**

2. Identify age or **grade groups** for specific programming as it is not likely to be possible to organize radio sessions for each grade separately due to available airtime and resources *(e.g.: Grades 1&2, 3&4, 5&6).*

3. Identify and **prioritise core content areas** from the curriculum for each age/grade group, ensuring that **child wellbeing is being prioritised.**

4. Develop a **schedule based on available daily airtime** that outlines the sessions per content area and grade group each week to inform number of writers required as well as length and number of sessions to be developed for each content area *(Example schedules available on request).*

5. Identify **key roles and responsibilities for development** of radio scripts including; writers, editors, presenters and ensure process for review and approval is agreed *(Example ToRs available on request).*

6. Develop a **scope and sequence of the intended learning outcomes** for each core content area for the initial few weeks or months of the programme depending on expected school closure period, review and update this on a regular basis *(Example Radio Scope and Sequence framework available on request).*

7. **Draft, review and record** radio sessions based on agreed scope and sequence *(Example scripts available on request).*

Tips to ensure radio education reaches programme participants

- Assess **radio availability in communities** and procure or mobilise radios, batteries etc. as early as possible
- Ensure schedule of radio programmes is **widely disseminated** to maximise listenership
- Where possible and in line with in country regulations, **establish community learning groups** to complement the radio programme and maximise participation *(More information can be found in Additional Resources)*

WHAT? Prioritising content and ensuring it is child-friendly

Basic Literacy and Numeracy

It is important to stress that although it is necessary to engage children in learning, in particular basic literacy and numeracy, throughout the closure of schools, the priority for emergency radio programming should not be academic performance. Rather, it is to provide children with a routine that includes studying and to brush up on knowledge and skills to enable them to make a smoother transition to schools once these reopen. Basic Literacy and Numeracy content should focus on the core concepts at each level and reinforce foundational skills that can appropriately be explored via radio such as:

Literacy	**Numeracy**
• Identifying sounds including syllables	• Counting and number sense
• Vocabulary development and rhyming	• Basic arithmetic and number patterns
• Listening Comprehension	• Word problems

Life skills

This subject is key to respond to the critical cognitive skills that children need to acquire to protect themselves and prevent the spread of the COVID-19, and other diseases. Priority topics include:

- Hand-washing
- Personal hygiene
- Environmental hygiene
- COVID-19 prevention
- Age appropriate ASRH

The issues should be discussed in a very common and simple language for children to understand the facts. Ensure all messaging is in line with Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education guidelines and existing resources.

Psychosocial Support, Social Emotional Learning and Social Cohesion

The first aim of education in emergencies, and therefore of an emergency radio education programme, is to provide psychosocial support through the establishment of a routine / sense of normalcy, peer interaction, and recreational activities. Therefore, psychosocial support should be weaved throughout the radio education programme, through positive and engaging voices and making sure children feel part of a bigger initiative. For example:

- Start and end the programme the same way every day, so that it becomes a "ritual" for children. Starting with an easily recognisable song and ensuring consistent structure to the sessions helps create a sense of predictability.
- Create a sense of belonging and community through messages such as "You are listening to this radio program, together with hundreds of thousands of children across the country!"

In addition, the psychosocial component of the radio programme should include recreational activities and messages preventing stigma and reinforcing social cohesion. *(More information can be found in Additional Resources)*

Considerations for quality content delivery

- Ensure Literacy, Numeracy, Life Skills and PSS sessions are age appropriate and engaging by using stories, games, activities, songs etc.
- Ensure both male and female presenters are engaged in delivery of sessions and characters in stories represent boys and girls engaging in a range of activities that do not reinforce negative stereotypes.
- Make connections and reference to caregiver engagement and family literacy messaging throughout the sessions.

Additional Resources

INEE Resources: [Radio Education](#)

Psychosocial Support (PSS)

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It is normal in these circumstances for children, caregivers and teachers to feel concerned or worried and this document will give some examples of PSS activities to be implemented within Education interventions throughout all stages of the emergency.

Definitions and Guiding Principles

- **Psychosocial Support (PSS)** includes all actions to promote the wellbeing of people, considering their psychological state (thoughts, feelings, behaviours) together with their social connection and support around them (relationships, interactions). It includes support provided by family, friends and the wider community and giving individuals' strategies to support themselves.

PSS activities can be integrated into Education responses to COVID-19 at multiple levels. These respond to different needs and range from considering social and cultural aspects in basic services, to specialised services provided by health specialists.

4 Psychological & psychiatric support provided by specialists (psychologists, psychiatrists etc.)

Concern integrates PSS interventions within comprehensive programming, engaging in the **three lower levels** of the pyramid of intervention. Concern **does not directly implement any form of specialised care**.
If the need for specialised care is identified, the person must be referred to specialised services according to the national or inter-agency **Referral Pathway**.

3 Basic emotional and practical support by community workers.
- Psychological First Aid
- Violence prevention
- Lay counselling (attentive listening)
- GBV/SRGBV prevention, response and referral

2 Community structures and engagement
Activating social networks, Communal traditional supports
Positive parenting, Engaging Men
Social Emotional Learning, Child Friendly Spaces
Life Skills

1 Access to basic services that are safe, socially appropriate and protect dignity
Safe places

Specialised care

Focused non-specialised care

Family and community support

Basic services and security

- **Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)** is a component of PSS and is the process of acquiring core competencies to recognise and manage emotions, set and achieve goals, appreciate the perspectives of others, establish and maintain positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle interpersonal situations constructively.

- **Psychological first aid (PFA)** is one form of basic psychological support (not a clinical or psychiatric intervention) which consists in being attentive to individuals who may need support, listening and comforting them, helping them understand their concern, addressing their basic needs and linking them to information or services.

Core principles to be included throughout: do no harm, promote human rights and equality, use participatory approaches, build on existing resources and capacities, adopt multi-layered interventions and work with integrated support systems.

Look after yourself. Looking after your own wellbeing is the most important. It is essential to pay attention to your own wellbeing and be sure that you are physically and emotionally able to provide PSS to others. If working in a team, also be aware of the wellbeing of your colleagues and find ways to support each other.

Psychosocial Support (PSS)

Ideas for Integrating PSS into Education Responses to COVID-19

Assessing needs and planning for PSS interventions

- Work with partners to **identify culturally specific PSS needs**, issues and available resources.
- **Identify possible risks** or specific needs of the most vulnerable children or families, especially during lockdown (e.g. risk of physical abuse, GBV, access to information and care for children with disabilities).
- Ensure a response is in place (work with community, neighbours, families and other Concern teams).
- Update your **service mapping and referral pathways** to reflect health care facilities. Ensure all staff have reliable information on the virus and on the places and way to access care, know where to refer cases.
- Train on essential psychosocial care principles and how to make referrals. Online trainings might be used. **Reinforce staff codes of conduct** and ethical guidelines.

Promoting Wellbeing while schools are closed

- Ensure **accurate information** about COVID-19 and the prevention of its transmission is available and accessible to children and community members.
- **Spread messages** to promote psychosocial wellbeing. This can be done on the radio (embedded into radio learning programmes when applicable – See Additional Resources), visual posters, messages shared with teachers or community for children and caregivers. Ensure these **messages are accessible** for children with disabilities:
    - Provide **facts** about what is going on in a **reassuring, honest** way and give clear **child-friendly information** on how to stay safe. **Do not speculate about rumours** or unverified information in front of children.
    - Reassure children and caregivers that it is **normal to feel sad**, distressed, worried, confused, scared or angry during a crisis.
    - Encourage children to **talk** to a person they trust
- **Inform Caregivers** of normal reactions children may have (feeling anxious, angry, having nightmares, bedwetting). Use **Caregiver Engagement** to support children's wellbeing and inform on the virus (See Additional Resources):
    - **Listen** to children, **remain calm** and **reassure** children.
    - Encourage children **to express their feelings** (creative activity, playing, drawing can facilitate this).
    - Provide a **caring environment** around the child. Children need often more attention during difficult times.
    - Keep **regular routines** as much as possible or create new ones, including learning, playing and relaxing.
- Where applicable, organize **Community Groups** where small groups of children (maximum 5 to 10) can play and participate in structured, supportive and learning activities (See Guidance on Community Groups).

Limiting psychosocial negative long-term consequences

- **Reduce stigmatization** in communities and support reintegration
    - Provide **additional support** for families and children who have recovered from COVID19 and those who have been affected including orphans, unaccompanied minors etc.
    - Facilitate **community dialogue** in raising awareness and to promote community reintegration. Facilitate conditions for appropriate communal cultural, spiritual and religious healing practices.
- Integrate **psychosocial capacity building** into sustainable training mechanisms and reinforce **Social Emotional Learning** activities to support students to deal with their emotions and to cope with their situation.
- Encourage children to **go back to school** if it is not a risk to their health when allowed by the authorities.

Additional Resources

Child Protection Alliance: MHPP and Communication with Children

INEE Resources: Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

Child-Friendly Messages

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Guiding Principles: PSS messages shared with children should be:
- **Age-appropriate, child-friendly and engaging**
- **Adapted to the children's context and culture**
- **Accessible and inclusive of children with disability and from various ethnic groups**
- **Feature children's role models and the voices of children themselves**
- **Gender sensitive ensuring males and females are presenting and characters are not perpetuating gender stereotypes**

PSS messages can be integrated into other education activities, into radio programmes, shared during community groups, to caregivers through Caregiver Engagement or based on existing PSS programmes. They can also be spread via stand-alone activities such as radio jingles, songs, posters, storytelling, sent by voice or text messages.

HOW to disseminate Child-friendly Messaging?

Simply adding child-like characters or a child-friendly production format, such as using animation or comics, does not automatically make something "child friendly". Messages need to be tailored and have to include children's perspectives to be able to relate to them.
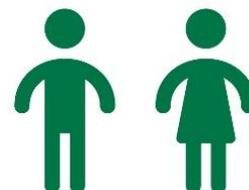
- **Adapt to the age of your specific target group**
  - Use **simple** descriptive language with **loving tones** for **short** messages with a **slow** pace.
  - Use **repetition**, rhythm, song, music and encourage activities (singing, clapping, dancing, movement) and games.
  - Use **everyday settings and experiences**; stories of other children, families, animals, daily activities and routines.
  - Use caring relations, **interactions** with loving adults and siblings.
  - Use **humour**, creativity and cognitive challenges (e.g., brain teasers, riddles, tongue twisters, etc.)
  - **Vary the messages** and the way they are shared (stories, games, activities, songs etc.)

- **Be engaging and encourage interaction**
  - Have **discussions** directly with the audience, invite children to express themselves, involve "question and answer".
  - Use **body movement** inviting singing, exercise, movement, dancing and other mimicking behaviours.
  - Build questions into stories and include **interactive activities** (write, draw, post a photo, etc.) at the end.
  - Ask children to "**go and teach** someone else what they learned so well".

- **Offer positive role models for adults** (caregivers, families, health workers etc.) showing **positive adult/child interactions**. For example, a father explaining how to protect ourselves from the virus, playing a game naming and showing parts of the face (nose, mouth etc.). Use children's role models (football player, singer) to speak directly to them.

- **Create safe spaces for children**, helping them understand that they are not alone and that what they feel is normal:
  - Focus on **care** and **joy** found in small things. Have children make lists of things they like or that they are good at.
  - Give examples with **stories** told in first person and using **children's voices** about how to deal with emotions: "My mum is sick from the COVID19 and I would like to share my story with you," "I am sad that I can't see my friends. This is what I do when I feel sad…"

- **Be positive**
  - Support **self-confidence** "Now I know what to do to protect myself from the virus" "Look how well I cleaned my hands"
  - Show that "**children can make a difference** in their own and other's life" by washing their hands regularly or knowing where to go to ask for help and show children taking positive actions instead of showing what not to do.
  - Give ways for children to **help themselves** when they are afraid (talk to a trusted adult, sing, think of happy memory)

- **Be inclusive and address the needs and abilities of all**. Include positive characters of children from different ethnic groups, gender and socio-economic backgrounds, those with disabilities, and children who have or are affected by COVID19. These should be characters with **high self-esteem**, coming up with ideas and solutions.

WHAT? Examples of child-friendly messages

1) Social Emotional Learning and Development *(More available upon request)*

- "You are listening to this radio program, together with hundreds of thousands of children across the country!"
- "You have the right to be (sad, worried, scared…), the situation affects all of us and your reactions are normal"
- It can feel scary and confusing when things are changing. When I feel scared, I breathe very slowly and breathe out all the air I can, I also talk with my brother or I think about someone I love."
- "Sometimes by staying at home I fight with my family, but I am learning to be extra patient, I understand that my brother is also worried, so I say I'm sorry. That is a real superpower, because it can make ourselves and others feel better."

2) Skills, Knowledge and Positive Behaviour Change

Information on COVID-19

- "COVID19 or the coronavirus is so tiny we can't see it. It spreads in the saliva or coughs of people who are sick and when they touch people or things around them. People who are sick get fever, cough and have trouble breathing."
- "Did you know that children can keep their neighbours, friends, grandparents safe from the coronavirus? We all need to wash our hands with soap and water! We also cough into our elbows and we wave instead of touching."
- "Some people don't feel sick at all, but other people can be very sick, some might die. That's why we all have to be especially careful with older people, and those with other illnesses, because they tend to get sicker."
- "As a young person, you have fewer chances to be very sick with the virus but you can have it in your body, even if you don't feel sick and then the virus can go on other people or things that you touch."

Handwashing Messages

- "Don't be dirty, be neat. Wash your hands before you eat." (What words sound the same?)
- "What are the top ten carriers of infection? Answer: each one of your fingers."
- "We're counting on you to clean your hands." "Great job, every germs are now washed away!"

Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health *(More examples on request or in Additional Resources)*

- "Schools are closed and you have more free time but if you are sexually active, remember that kissing and sex can pass COVID-19. Avoid kissing or sex with anyone who is not part of your small circle of close contacts."
- "Avoid sex and kissing, if you or a partner have the symptoms of COVID-19."

3) Supportive Care and PSS

- "Someone sick can survive the disease with good treatment but we also need to make sure that the families and communities fight the virus together. We need to make sure no-one is left alone, as they are one of us."
- "The spread of COVID19 can be prevented. We have to work together, trust, respect and care for each other. "
- "We trust that you will do what is good for your communities and you can trust that we are good and responsible in what we do. If we can trust and respect each other, we can fight COVID19. "

Caregiver Engagement and COVID-19 (*See Additional Resources)*

- Talk to your child about COVID-19 and ask him/her if they have any questions.
- Spend time at home praying/meditating with your child.

Addressing common issues (Fear, Stigma)

- "Sometimes we all feel scared and it's ok, but if we know how to stay safe, we can protect ourselves and others."
- "If we understand what COVID19 is and know how to protect ourselves, the virus can be stopped."
- "When someone has got better from COVID-19, they can't catch it again so they can't spread it to you."
- "Someone who has survived COVID19 sickness has been very, very strong, so strong that their bodies could kill the virus inside them. When they come home they are very tired and weak, and they need help".

Additional Resources

INEE Resources: Child Friendly Resources

IASC: My Hero Is You

Caregiver Engagement and Family Literacy

Guiding Principles:

Messages shared with families should be:

- **Simple and practical**
- **Easy to understand so that parents/caregivers with limited literacy levels can participate**
- **Linked to any other Education interventions such as radio education or community learning groups where these are present**
- **Targeted towards both male and female caregivers, highlighting the need to engage both boys and girls**

Messages shared with families are reminders for parents and caregivers to spend time engaging in learning and play at home with their children. The focus should not be on formal learning, but instead, learning for enjoyment. Messages will also remind parents and caregivers to support their children emotionally and ways in which they can provide a safe environment for them.

HOW to disseminate key messages:

1. Decide on the medium that will be used to share messages. Where possible, use more than one medium.
   - If individuals have mobile phones, messages can be sent through messaging and WhatsApp.
   - Both texts and voice messages can be used so that those with limited literacy skills can listen.
   - If there is radio availability in communities, messages can be added on to other radio programming.
2. Develop a plan.
   - Try to align messages being shared with the curriculum.
3. Do not overload parents and caregivers with too many messages.
   - Stick to two or three key messages a week.
   - You can recycle messages and use them again.
4. Use the local languages when you can.

WHAT kind of messages to disseminate:

Examples of key messages have been developed for each of the six core components of Concern's Approach to Caregiver Engagement and Family Literacy. In addition, messages for caregivers around child protection and psychosocial support have been added for this specific emergency response. The messages align with what parents and caregivers would learn from those modules, however, it is important to remember that the needs of communities differ from one context to another and messaging should be aligned with those needs. Links to more detailed messaging related to psychosocial support and child protection during the COVID-19 crisis can be found in the Additional Resources section below.

Caregiver Engagement and Family Literacy

1. **Spending time and age-appropriate play key messages:**
   - Put aside 30 minutes to talk and play with your child.
   - Make a meal together and eat as a family.
   - Sing a song or play a game with your child.

2. **Art and Music:**
   - Sing and song and dance with your child.
   - Draw and colour a picture together.
   - Use pots and pans to play music.

3. **Read-alouds and storytelling:**
   - Read a book or use pictures to tell your child a story. Ask your child questions as you read it.
   - Tell your child a story you were told when you were young.
   - Ask your child to read you a story.

4. **Low-cost literacy materials:**
   - Make paper puppets and tell your child a story.
   - Make a booklet with paper and tell a story while your child draws it out.

5. **Numeracy Games:**
   - Play counting games with your child.
   - Talk about the different items in the house and what shape they are.
   - Let children count while they set out plates, cups, spoons, etc. during mealtimes.

6. **Positive Parenting:**
   - Create clear and simple rules that your child can follow while home.
   - Listen to your child and his/her needs and respond in a kind and caring way.
   - Praise your child when he/she does something well or for listening.

7. **Protection:**
   - Keep your child safe by keeping him/her in the house; if possible do not leave your child alone in the house without any supervision but ask someone you trust to look after him/her.
   - If you need someone to take care of your child, make sure it is someone that you trust.
   - Do not let your child wander in the community on his/her own.

8. **Psychosocial support:**
   - Remind you child that you love him/her and assure him/her that everything will be okay.
   - Talk to your child about COVID-19 and ask him/her if they have any questions.
   - Spend time at home praying/meditating with your child.

This resource will be updated throughout the response, so please share additional messages with the Education team.

Additional Resources

Child Protection Alliance: Parenting Supports

INEE Resources: Guidance for Parents and Caregivers

Community Learning Groups

CONCERN worldwide — ENDING EXTREME POVERTY WHATEVER IT TAKES

Guiding Principles: Community Learning Groups should:

- **Be in line with country specific Government and Ministry of Health restrictions on gatherings, movement and hygiene practices**
- **Be complementary to any Education initiatives such Radio Learning Programmes, distant learning, Caregiver Engagement and Family Literacy and PSS**
- **Be focused on wellbeing including Child Protection and Child Safeguarding**
- **Address the needs of all; boys, girls those who are most disadvantaged**

Community Learning Groups are a safe space for small numbers of children from a close community to meet, engage and learn together. They should not be about formal learning, grades, or substituting classroom instruction, but rather are intended to provide an opportunity for engagement, learning, routine and stability, improving basic learning outcomes and psychosocial wellbeing.

Designing Community Learning Groups

WHO can be part of Community Learning Groups?

A group of approximately five to ten children (depending on country level restrictions and available space for maintaining social distancing) within the same age or educational level (e.g.: ages 5-9, grades 1-3, adolescents etc.) in a household or neighbouring households can be part of the group with a helper assigned to guide and support their learning. Groups should be available to boys and girls and inclusion of children with disabilities should be considered.

HOW can Community Learning Groups be established?

Concern Education teams can support communities including; caregivers, School Management Committees, Head teachers, teachers and facilitators, to form small learning groups based on the needs of children in the community. Prior to the formation of the group, the following should take place, in person if possible, or over telephone if communities are inaccessible:

1. Meet with or contact a small group community stakeholders to explain the rationale, seek consent and buy-in from caregivers and the broader community and agree on frequency and length of groups
2. Support communities to identify and train appropriate helpers to implement the initiative
3. Brief communities and helpers on the COVID-19 messages and child protection guidelines
4. Ensure the groups have safe spaces, time, timetables of other education programming such as radio education, learning materials and appropriate hygiene materials to actively and safely engage with the education activities
5. Once established, ensure helpers are provided with regular support through weekly/biweekly meetings where possible and ongoing phone/WhatsApp support as required

WHAT can be done in Community Learning Groups?

Community Learning Groups should meet regularly (at least 2-3 times per week) for short engaging sessions lasting between 30 minutes to 2 hours depending on the planned activities and age of the children. Depending on broader education initiatives, a number of activities can be conducted to enhance children's learning and engagement.

- If radio education programming is available in country, helpers can guide children to listen to and engage with the programme. The group can play games related to the programme and talk about the activities together.
- Helpers can be provided with resources and information to conduct simple Social Emotional Learning, recreational and basic Literacy and Numeracy activities, games and songs adapted from existing curricula and materials including Caregiver Engagement and Family Literacy messaging. Ensure all guidance provided to helpers clearly outlines how to conduct these activities in an engaging child friendly way while reducing physical contact. *(Examples of resources available on request)*

Community Learning Helpers

Who can be a helper?
A helper can be any trusted member of the community who is committed to supporting the ongoing learning of children within their community as per the agreed frequency and length of sessions. A helper may be a teacher or a facilitator, a caregiver, a youth, an older sibling or a community member. Both males and females should be encouraged to be helpers.

What is the role of a helper?
Depending on the activities of the Community Learning Group, the role of the helper may vary. However, the minimum roles of a helper could include:

- Liaising with community stakeholders to identify children and form groups
- Meet with caregivers to explain the purpose of the groups and nature/scope of community participation
- Work with children and caregivers to identify time, space and materials to support children's participation
- Support Concern teams with the distribution of learning materials and resources to children
- Act as a mentor to the children and promote peer leadership among the children in the group
- Work with children to set rules and expectations for the group and provide daily guidance to their learning
- On a daily basis, support children to engage in learning activities. If applicable, support children to listen to and understand radio learning programmes giving them feedback during and after the sessions
- Act as a focal point person for the group and liaise closely with Concern teams on any related issue
- Regularly provide feedback on the process and progress of the group to community stakeholders and Concern
- Encourage children and community members to participate in the learning programmes
- Ensure strict adherence to COVID-19 restrictions and safety precautions/risk mitigation strategies including providing child friendly and accurate health messages when needed
- Report any child protection issues as appropriate

Child Protection Considerations

Child protection is an issue that concerns each and every community member. Children are entitled to expect and receive every possible protection from their caregivers, community and their State to ensure that their childhood years are filled with rewarding and enriching experiences. The closure of schools brings a significant increase in child protection risks for all children, with the more vulnerable at an even higher risk. The establishment of Community Learning Groups must not compound these risks further so it is imperative that child protection is placed at the centre of the initiative.

It is essential that context specific minimum guidelines on child protection are developed for helpers that will voluntarily assist children in their communities through Community Learning Groups and that helpers, communities and children are thoroughly familiarised with these guidelines and the Concern Code of Conduct and Associated Policies. The guidelines must give direction and guidance to helpers in protecting children and dealing with allegations/suspicions of child abuse appropriately. *(See example Guidelines and Helper Dos and Don'ts attached).*

Additional Resources

Child Protection Alliance: General Protection Guidance, Disability and Inclusion

INEE Resources: Child Protection, Inclusion, Accelerate Education, Distance Learning

Example: Community Learning Groups Child Protection Considerations

Child protection is an issue that concerns each and every community member. Children are entitled to expect and receive every possible protection from their caregivers, community and their State to ensure that their childhood years are filled with rewarding and enriching experiences. The closure of schools brings a significant increase in child protection risks for all children, with the more vulnerable at an even higher risk. The establishment of Community Learning Groups must not compound these risks further so it is imperative that child protection is placed at the centre of the initiative. The following minimum guidelines on child protection have been developed for helpers that will voluntarily assist children in their communities through Community Learning Groups. The intention is to assist and give direction and guidance to all helpers in protecting children and dealing with allegations/suspicions of child abuse appropriately.

1. **Permission/consent from caregivers and community**
   - Make sure the child's caregivers and, where appropriate, the SMC are aware of your visit to the small learning group and the caregivers give consent for you to work with the children
   - Ensure you are not alone in a house with a child, do not enter the house unless the adult responsible for the children is present and gives you consent
   - Ensure you can be seen by another adult from the community, sitting with the group on the porch/veranda is recommended

2. **Participants**
   - Make sure there are no more than 5-6 children gathered in each small group
   - Helpers should set ground rules with the children and ensure that all children are safe from harm
   - Treat all children with respect and dignity and ensure the children are respecting each other and their rights
   - Always speak to all children in a respectful and courteous manner.

3. **Contact, abuse, neglect & bullying**
   - Avoid all forms of physical contact with children and ensure they are avoiding contact with each other
   - In the case of an unexpected incident (child is upset or injured due to an accident) comfort the child and immediately inform the caregiver and, where appropriate, the SMC
   - In a situation where child abuse is alleged to have been carried out, the helper should report to the appropriate authority within the community
   - Sexual behaviour between children is inappropriate and must be taken seriously, this should be reported immediately through the agreed reporting and referral pathways
   - Helpers should make appropriate arrangements to minimise the possibility of any abusive behaviour occurring within the group.
   - Do not take photographs or video of the children in the groups without caregiver consent
   - Bullying can be defined as repeated aggression be it verbal, psychological or physical (teasing, taunting, threatening, hitting, exclusion or extortion by one or more pupils against a victim) which is conducted by an individual or group against others. It is behaviour that is intentionally aggravating and intimidating children to an extent of withdrawal and drop from the group and therefore the helper should be very sensitive to it.

4. **Confidentiality**
   - The best interest of the children should be highly considered at all times and particularly when dealing with all information regarding child abuse.
   - If the child discloses sensitive information and there is a reasonable ground for suspecting the child's welfare is at risk, immediately report it to the appropriate authorities to keep them safe and healthy. Ensure you are not putting the child at further risk and do not disclose the information to other community members.

Example: Helper Dos and Don'ts

Dos for Helpers

- ✓ Ensure you are providing support for the children to listen to the radio/engage in the activities during the appropriate airing times (and/or normal school hours) and ensure you are following the content of the learning programme
- ✓ Protect children in the group from physical and emotional harm
- ✓ Communicate clearly with caregivers and children
- ✓ Be an excellent role model and display high standards of behaviour and appearance
- ✓ Build relationships based on mutual trust and respect
- ✓ Ensure adequate supervision
- ✓ Respond to children's basic emotional needs
- ✓ Observe and report abuses and signs/symptoms of bullying to your community as appropriate
- ✓ Place wellbeing and safety above everything

Don'ts for Helpers

- ✗ Do not give or accept gifts or payment of any sort from any child or family
- ✗ Do not conduct excessively long sessions with children, particularly the younger age groups
- ✗ Do not use inappropriate language or make comments about a child/young person's appearance
- ✗ Do not drink alcohol or smoke when working directly with children
- ✗ Do not have physical contact with a child

- ✗ Do not physically punish or belittle a child
- ✗ Do not use physical discipline at any time
- ✗ Do not exclude or prevent children from participating *(unless the child is displaying symptoms in which case the child and caregiver should be supported to seek medical advice)*

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