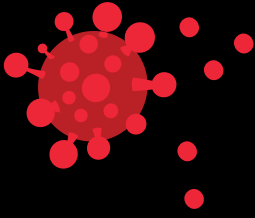


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ISOLATE DON'T ABANDON

Helping **CHILDREN** Cope
with the **COVID-19** crisis



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Helping **CHILDREN** cope
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he COVID-19 crisis is adversely impacting the well-being of children. The impact is most acute on children belonging to the most marginalised and vulnerable sections of the society who are already facing huge challenges in terms of income, food security and health risk, due to the near impossibility of practicing social distancing in the houses and localities they live in. Children will be exposed to various vulnerabilities and risks when it comes to their protection, nutrition, health and education. These are difficult times, and children, especially girls, will need special care and protection. The safety and protection of the girl child could be severely compromised.

There is a need of counsellors and therapists to take care of the emotional needs of children. Under lockdown, children are in stress. The situation that households are facing is unprecedented hence teachers and all others who work with children should be treated as essential service providers and should get oriented to spread awareness towards prevention of infection, as well as be available to provide counselling and psychosocial support to children when needed. It is important to reiterate that most cases of COVID-19 would be mild, especially amongst children, and can be treated with adequate care at home. Teachers and aanganwadis, who enjoy a level of trust within communities would be very helpful in advising families proper care for children in these times. Also, there are appointed trained professionals in different institutions, thus necessary instruction needs to be issued for effective engagement of these facilities.

We also request that police, army officials and other responsible for law and order, care and protection, need to be extremely child sensitive and child friendly in their duties during the lockdown. There should be zero tolerance of any misuse or abuse of power during health emergency, as per the Juvenile Justice Act.

Government needs to add to its relief package an announcement of a Special Relief Package for all Children in difficult circumstances due to COVID-19, which builds on existing mechanisms at the central and state levels. To ensure the well-being of children in this crisis, the package should include the aspects of:

- 1. Child protection**
- 2. Child nutrition**
- 3. Education.**

1

Child protection

- » Special measures for child protection should be taken up. For many vulnerable girls and boys, loss of household income and wages will heighten risk of neglect, violence and abuse, the risk of children ending up as victims of child labour, child trafficking and child marriage will increase. There is a high possibility of a rise in domestic violence and child sexual abuse in families. Thus, the members in the Integrated Child Protection System (ICPS) structure, which includes members of the District Child Protection Committees (DCPC), Child Welfare Committee (CWC) and the Village Child Protection Committee (VCPC), should be active and need to carry out special safety drives in all urban and rural locations. There is a need to direct the members of child protection committees to carry out monthly tracking drives, either telephonically or physically, while maintaining adequate physical distancing, to ensure status of children and to check the risk of trafficking, migration, child marriage and child labour. It is also essential to provide necessary arrangements for the members of CWC and VCPC to deliver their duties with limited hurdles.
- » There is possibility of increase of children in need of care and protection. Hence DCPC and CWCs need to be equipped and prepared to handle a greater number of cases.
- » There is a high possibility of increased care work burden on women and girls. There is a need to create awareness measures for redistribution of work at home among all family members. Such messages can be shared widely, especially if it can be shared in all public announcements, including the Prime Minister's "Man ki Baat" with an appeal to the larger public to be caring. There is a need for sensitive messaging/appeal/advertisements on this issue which should be shared through all mediums.
- » Special helplines for children should be set up, or Childline 1098 services need to be activated to play an important role in reaching

out to children in need of care and protection as well as in need of immediate support. Childline number: 1098, should be advertised through different mediums so that children in need can reach out to them. The team members working in Childline need to be declared as essential service providers to ease out their travel restrictions. Reports are that due to the COVID-19 crisis, their services are very limited.

- » Special drives to identify children in difficult circumstances should be carried out to address their immediate needs. These include children on the streets, homeless children, children of families dependent on the informal economy, including daily wage labourers and families dependent on microenterprise, children with disabilities, children in care institutions and other such categories. There are high possibilities of exposure of children on the street and especially homeless children. It is essential that all such children and their family members are immediately accommodated in shelters with necessary food arrangements. Closed school buildings can be used in this regard. Civil society organizations could be brought in to facilitate the process, especially those who have experience of working with street and homeless children. At the district level, the administration should call for an online or telephonic meeting with all civil society organizations and other individuals who are permitted to work inside child care institutions (CCIs) to be able to support better in such difficult times.
- » Protective measures need to be put into place in juvenile homes, orphanages and other CCIs. These include informing and training them on hygiene measures, providing adequate soaps, water, and hand sanitizers, training staff to identify early on-set of symptoms, and setting up an isolation bed or ward for children who may show symptoms and can be treated easily. There needs to be a special assessment of children's safety. There is a need to create such health and hygiene systems, report to health authorities, and other matters relating to safety are adhered to as per Government guidelines and the Supreme Court's directions (03.04.20).

2

Child nutrition

- » As schools have been closed for an indefinite period, millions of children have not only been deprived of education, they have also been deprived of their mid-day meals (MDM). Even though many states have announced the home delivery of MDM ration, it is a challenge to reach out to all children and many states are yet to implement this. To ensure food security of all children, immediate steps must be taken to set up the delivery mechanisms in place so that dry ration or cooked food reaches all. There is a need to direct all states to follow the guidelines from the Ministry of Human Resource Development and State Education Departments. Since there are gaps, there is a need for follow up on the delivery and access of food grains to children and identify the practical gaps.
- » The anganwadi centre (AWC) must continue with their services, they play a crucial role in providing nutrition services to children under six, pregnant and lactating mothers. Special care should be taken so that there is no gap in the delivery of these services, as this will impact the health and nutrition of malnourished children. In most places, immunization service has completely stopped putting health and life of children in danger. It is essential that immunization is resumed at the earliest and health workers do it through home visits of the children and pregnant and lactating women as much as possible. Health care services including sanitary napkins for adolescent girls should continue, either through door to door delivery or by ensuring that people come in slots and other preventative measures at the centres.
- » Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) and Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM) should be treated as essential service providers and should be given all the protective gears for delivery of their services. There should be deployment of special transportation facilities for Anganwadis and other essential workers, especially in remote areas, to ensure delivery of these services.

- » Since large numbers of migrant workers with their children are stranded in various states, it is essential that all pregnant and lactating women receive ante-natal care (ANC) and post-natal care (PNC) at the place they are stranded in and children receive immunization as per norm. It is essential that children also receive free hot cooked meals in all shelters.

3

Education

- » As per recent government orders, all children from standards I to VIII, have been promoted to the next level. However, as schools are closed now for an indefinite period, the administration should take necessary steps to distribute the textbooks/workbooks at the doorstep through the teachers. This can be useful during this lockdown as well as summer vacation. As children are at home and all parents will not be able to give academic inputs, necessary arrangements need to be made for interactions of students with schoolteachers. Teachers can guide, counsel and provide worksheets to keep children occupied meaningfully.
- » Since schools have been closed and, in many places, used as quarantine centres, there is a need for a proper plan towards reopening the schools when it is felt safe. It is also necessary to rethink the new academic session plan for 2020-21 due to the loss of time. All state governments should institute committees to take stock of this matter and inform children.
- » This is an opportunity to improve school infrastructure with not only proper toilets but also with adequate hand washing stations. This can be undertaken through convergence with MGNREGS work plans while strictly adhering to social distancing norm or make advance payments for such work. There should be proper integration of health and hygiene components in school education/curriculum to develop these practices in children.
- » In the given conditions, due to the stress of loss of income by parents, there are chances of increase in the number of dropouts and Out-of-School Children (OOSC). Hence, teachers will need to be in continuous touch with children and it will be necessary to carry out home-based tracking of all children even if schools don't open soon. Once schools open, there is a need for a rapid survey to identify Out of School Children/drop-outs and bring them back to school.

- » Children themselves can play an important role in spreading awareness in their communities as they are technology proficient and innovative. Therefore, state governments should work together with civil society organizations to create and distribute information and education communication (IEC) material in simple formats over WhatsApp, TikTok, radio and television that is targeted at children.

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