

How did New Hampshire create and distribute a resource guide to support child and family well-being during the COVID-19 emergency?

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To engage community members in proactively supporting children and families during the COVID-19 emergency, New Hampshire's Division of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) developed and released a "Supporting Child and Family Wellbeing" resource guide. This strategy brief describes why and how the guide was developed, how it has been distributed, and plans for sustaining these tools as part of regular agency operations.

Why the guide was needed

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in early spring 2020, reports of suspected child abuse and neglect across the country plummeted at the same time that children and parents faced increased stressors. In New Hampshire, DCYF saw a 40% reduction in the number of child abuse and neglect reports it was receiving relative to the two years prior. The



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state's data also showed that the sources and nature of reports were changing, with the most substantial drop in calls from schools and healthcare professionals, and an increase by nearly half in the portion of allegations citing lack of supervision.¹

Pandemic-related school and business closures, along with isolation from friends and family, have been linked to increased unemployment and financial instability, substance use, mental-health challenges, and instances of domestic violence — issues that often are risk factors for child abuse and neglect.^{2,3} After New Hampshire's stay-at-home order was issued, many community members (including school administrators, teachers, and social workers) had fewer opportunities to interact with families. In addition, professionals working with families across a range of services reported widespread confusion about what resources were still available and how to help families access them during the pandemic.

New Hampshire's "[Supporting Child and Family Wellbeing](#)" resource guide was developed to encourage community members who regularly interact with children and families, such as teachers, neighbors, or child care providers, to check in on families and help them access needed supports. The simple yet detailed two-page guide provides sample questions for professionals and community members to ask both parents and children to help determine resource or support needs. It also contains lists and links to access concrete services, including financial assistance, food and nutrition resources, crisis support, and housing programs. (A copy of the state's original July 2020 guide is included as an appendix to this brief.)

By creating and distributing a simple, holistic resource guide to inform both professionals and community members about different ways to help families during the pandemic, DCYF sought to proactively support child and family well-being to both prevent child abuse and neglect and, in the case of legitimate child safety concerns, intervene most effectively.

How the guide was created

DCYF had three main priorities in creating the resource guide: 1) produce it as quickly as possible, as families already were navigating the effects of COVID-19; 2) offer helpful and accessible guidance and resources to support a wide range of community members and their needs; and 3) articulate a supportive message that encouraged families to reach out for help, rather than a surveillance-based message that might cause vulnerable families to avoid interactions with potential reporters.

To accomplish this and create the guide, DCYF:

- **Used data analysis from the hotline to prioritize audiences for the guide and inform the state's distribution strategy.** DCYF found that the total number of calls to the child abuse and neglect hotline had fallen by roughly 40% in the weeks after COVID-19 hit. One of the largest declines in reports was from schools and teachers (down more than 60% compared to a typical week in 2019), many of whom were still in contact with families virtually and could leverage the guide in these virtual interactions. DCYF also prioritized other traditionally high-volume reporter groups

STAKEHOLDER QUESTIONS ASKED BY DCYF DURING THE GUIDE DESIGN PROCESS

Questions for agency professionals

- What are the most important things for families to know right now?
- Have any services or resources changed as a result of COVID-19?
- What are some strategies to engage families and children in conversations that are non-threatening and supportive?
- What are the best ways to ask what a family might need right now, particularly for families who might not know what is available to them?

Questions for parents and community members

- What are some of the biggest needs families might have right now?
- Is the current framing of the guide supportive? How can we adjust the questions in ways that feel accessible, helpful, and supportive?
- Are the resources currently listed on the guide reflective of what you might need?

How the guide was distributed

After finalizing the resource guide, DCYF began its dissemination efforts. The agency emailed the guide to service providers, community organizations, homeless shelters, child care facilities, and other organizations identified as still in regular contact with families. The email included a cover letter written by the DCYF director that encouraged recipients to continue forwarding the guide to anyone in their contact list. (A copy of the letter is included as an appendix to this brief.)

DCYF's regional field offices circulated the guide to local service providers and community organizations and asked them to distribute the guide directly to families in their networks. Staff regularly followed up to resolve questions and encourage proactive outreach to families. DCYF headquarters supported this local outreach effort by sending its district offices a "how to" packet, which included analysis of the decline in reporter data specific to their region so they could target organizations showing more marked declines, a sample email to reach out to community partners, and a suggested conversation guide to use when engaging community partners. The agency also distributed the guide to about 700 parent partners who previously had been involved in DCYF's regional advisory committees and practice-improvement workshops.

At DCYF's central intake hotline, staff referred to the guide to counsel reporters on potential resource connections for families, as well as emailing it directly to reporters as a follow-up to their calls. The agency encouraged intake hotline workers to directly transfer callers to local family resource centers (one of the "go-to" general resources featured in the guide) in circumstances where a report would not be investigated but the family otherwise might benefit from additional supports — a previously rare practice.

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To reach the broader public, DCYF launched an earned media campaign to bring attention to the resource guide, including a press release, multiple newspaper articles, and an hour-long segment on New Hampshire Public Radio.

Other state agencies also helped distribute the guide. New Hampshire's Department of Education shared the guide with every teacher across all of the state's 167 school districts, and the Attorney General's office sent the guide to the state's 200-plus law enforcement agencies. The education agency and DCYF also partnered with the New Hampshire National Guard to pack the guide inside 25,000 "health and wellness" kits distributed to families, alongside dental supplies, medication disposal pouches, and resources. New Hampshire's refugee health coordinator also circulated the guide to resettlement agencies.

Looking ahead

The state has plans to sustain much of this work as part of regular agency practice after the COVID-19 emergency ends. DCYF will continue to closely monitor reporting trends at intake. The guide will be updated as resources in the community change. The agency also is working with the state's family resource centers so that central intake hotline staff can continue to directly connect callers to the centers when reports are screened out.

1. NH Department of Health & Human Services, Division for Children, Youth, and Families. "Trending in Data During COVID-19." June 10, 2020. <https://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dcyf/documents/dcyf-covid19-tracking-06102020.pdf>
2. Nirmita Panchal et al. "The Implications of COVID-19 for Mental Health and Substance Use." Kaiser Family Foundation. April 21, 2020. <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/the-implications-of-covid-19-for-mental-health-and-substance-use/>
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Child Abuse & Neglect: Risk and Protective Factors." Accessed July 7, 2020. <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/riskprotectivefactors.html>

**The Government Performance Lab (GPL) at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government conducts research on how governments can improve the results they achieve for their citizens. An important part of this research model involves providing hands-on technical assistance to state and local governments. Through this involvement, the GPL gains insights into the barriers that governments face and the solutions that can overcome these barriers. By engaging current students and recent graduates in this effort, the GPL is able to provide experiential learning as well. The GPL wishes to acknowledge that these materials are made possible by grants and support from Casey Family Programs, the Endowment for Health, and the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation. For more information about the Government Performance Lab, please visit our website at <http://govlab.hks.harvard.edu>.*

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Supporting Child and Family Wellbeing during the COVID-19 Emergency

July, 2020 - We all have a collective responsibility to make sure kids are healthy, safe, and thriving – especially during challenging times. Parents and other caregivers are their children’s most important protectors and may need extra support during the COVID-19 pandemic. We encourage you to check in with caregivers and children you interact with to ask how they’re doing and what they need. Lending an ear and helping families access available supports can go a long way to keeping families well.



NH Department of Health & Human Services
Division for Children, Youth & Families

Thank you for doing your part to support New Hampshire’s children and families!

Check in with Families in your Community to see how you can help

It is important to remind caregivers and children that you are there to help, not judge them. If a child raises a concern, consider if you can safely follow-up with their caregiver. Validate that this is a difficult time, everyone is struggling, and that support is still available. See page 2 for a list of resources you can connect families with based on their needs.

Questions you might ask Parents/Caregivers

- Is now a good time to talk? If not, is there a better time?
- Now is a difficult, stressful time for everyone. How are you? Are you okay and safe? Is there anything you need?
- We all need support right now. Who are the supports in your life? Are you able to connect with them right now?
- Since the COVID-19 emergency started, what’s changed for your family? Has anything been more of a struggle? Are you facing new worries or needs?
- Is everyone in your family able to get what they need to get by (for example, you can ask the family about food, housing, income/employment, safety, education, health, heat, internet, etc.)?
- Do you need help connecting to _____? (see page 2 for local resource suggestions based on family’s needs)

Questions you might ask Children

- How is virtual learning working for you? How is it affecting you? Your family? Do you need help with anything?
- How are things going at home for you and your family? Are you feeling okay? Are you worried about anything?
- What do you like most about staying at home? What do you like least? Why?
- What was the best part of your day? What was the hardest part of your day?
- Who is taking care of you? What are they doing? Who makes sure you have everything you need?
- Who do you feel safe talking to about needs or worries? Do you have a way to talk to that person right now?
- If you were stranded on a desert island, what would you need? Are those things in your house right now?
- What did you have to eat for breakfast today? Yesterday?
- What are the rules in your house? What happens when someone breaks a rule? (Sibling, pet, mom, dad?)
- How is everyone getting along? Is anyone having a hard time? Are you worried about anyone? Why?
- Ask the child to describe a typical day – what they eat, who makes the food, where do they play, who comes to or leaves the house and when, do they have electricity, etc.?
- *To follow up, ask open-ended questions:* Tell me more about that. . . What happened next? What is happening right now?

To learn more about how to talk to children about COVID-19:

- NH Children’s Trust: <https://www.nhchildrenstrust.org/covid-19>
- SAMHSA: <http://store.samhsa.gov/product/Talking-With-Children-Tips-for-Caregivers-Parents-and-Teachers-During-Infectious-Disease-Outbreaks/PEP20-01-01-006>

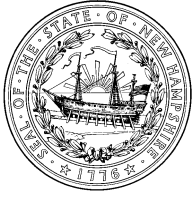
Common Resources that may be needed during the COVID-19 Emergency	
General support <i>(When in doubt start here!)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ 2-1-1: Directs to all information and supports available during COVID-19. Call 2-1-1 or visit www.211nh.org. ❖ Family Resource Centers: FRCs act as a “front-door” to services—they provide many supports directly and help families navigate to whatever else they might need. Find a local FRC: www.nhchildrenstrust.org/local-services. ❖ Waypoint Warm Line: Free guidance and support for parents/caregivers. Call: 1-800-640-6486 M-F, 8:30-4:30.
Financial & other Assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Unemployment Insurance Benefits have been expanded during COVID-19: Call NH Employment Security at 603-271-7700 or visit www.nhes.nh.gov/ to assess eligibility and get further instructions, e.g. call times. ❖ Cash and other Assistance: For Cash and other state assistance, visit https://nheasy.nh.gov/#/ or call 1-800-852-3345. Visit www.dhhs.nh.gov/dfa/covid19-changes.htm for temporary eligibility and program changes.
Food & Nutrition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Food Pantries: NH Food Bank’s list of local agencies: www.nhfoodbank.org/need-food/agency-list. ❖ NH Food Access Map: Crowd-sourced listing of food resources during COVID-19: bit.ly/nhfoodaccessmap. ❖ WIC: Nutrition support for pregnant women, new mothers, children 0-5. Services remain accessible by telephone only. More info: www.dhhs.nh.gov/dphs/nhp/wic/index.htm or 1-800-942-4321. ❖ Food Stamps (SNAP): Visit https://nheasy.nh.gov/#/ or call 1-844-275-3447.
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ 2-1-1: Directs to most available housing supports, including the new NH Housing Relief Program (www.capnh.org) designed to support those in need of housing assistance as a result of COVID-19. ❖ Municipal Welfare Offices: Contact your local municipal welfare office to inquire about available housing and other supports: www.nhmunicipal.org/municipal-directory. Call ahead for current operations. ❖ NH Legal Aid: Offers legal information and referrals for housing and other concerns at https://nhlegalaid.org.
Crisis Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Domestic Violence Helpline: 24/7 help at 1-866-644-3574 or www.nhcadv.org for free, confidential support. ❖ Crisis Text Line: Text 741741 or visit crisistextline.org for free, 24/7 support from a trained Crisis Counselor. ❖ NAMI: For information on a variety of crisis and mental health supports visit www.naminh.org/resources-2/covid-19 or call (800) 950-6264 M-F, 10am- 6pm. For 24/7 crisis support text "NAMI" TO 741741.
Substance Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ NH Doorways: Call 2-1-1 for information on substance use disorder treatment, or visit www.thedoorway.nh.gov.
Child Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ ChildCare Aware: Visit nh.childcareaware.org for information on childcare support and resources.
COVID-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ NH DHHS: Visit www.nh.gov/covid19 or call 2-1-1 for COVID-19 related guidance and resources.

Look out for children’s and families’ safety

- ❖ **If you have any concerns that a child or caregiver is in immediate danger, call 911.**
- ❖ **If you suspect that a child is being abused or neglected, you must call DCYF at 1-800-894-5533.** DCYF Central Intake can determine whether DCYF involvement is warranted, or if other community supports are more appropriate.

Examples of when you might follow-up for more information or call DCYF with a concern include:

- Anything the caregiver or child told you raised concerns for the child’s safety
- The child OR caregiver has concerning injuries or unexplained bruises, welts, or cuts
- The caregiver appears to be under the influence to the extent they could not care for their child
- You observe evidence of illicit substance use in the home (e.g., drug paraphernalia) or other hazards that could lead to child injury/illness (e.g., weapons in reach, extremely unsanitary conditions)
- The child looks or behaves significantly differently than is typical for them or would be reasonably expected
- The child is frequently missing school (and the school has exhausted every reasonable effort to address barriers to learning and support the family, e.g. helping with internet access, calling emergency contacts or neighbors)
- You are repeatedly unable to get in touch with the family (unrelated to barriers like internet, phone access) AND are seriously worried for their safety (e.g. prior safety concerns due to domestic violence or substance use)



Lori A. Shibinette
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Director

STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE
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April 7, 2020

Dear Educators, Neighbors, and All Other Helpers,

I am reaching out to ask for your help in distributing the attached short guide designed to help you – people who care about New Hampshire’s children and families – proactively support child and family wellbeing at this difficult time.

This guide was created in response to the challenges many New Hampshire families may experience during the COVID-19 emergency, including financial instability, food insecurity, and family stress. School closures and social distancing have reduced the level of community contact with children and families, which in turn has resulted in fewer calls to the DCYF hotline. Reporting suspected child abuse or neglect is critical and is your legal mandate. Helping children and families get the support they need before child abuse or neglect occurs is just as critical. Governor Sununu has implemented several Emergency Orders to provide financial relief and expand the supports available to New Hampshire families, and we are relying on our community helpers to serve as a link between our families and the resources they need.

We encourage all of our helpers who engage with families – including neighbors, teachers, nurses, counselors, food delivery people, police officers, grocery store staff, and all of the other heroes who continue to serve others at this time – to check-in, lend a “helping hand” to caregivers, and look out for children’s safety.

This guide aims to support that and includes:

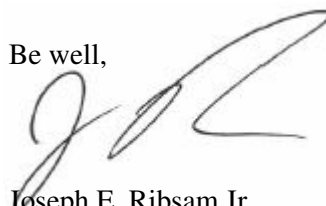
- **Example questions** you can ask caregivers and children to understand what a family might need.
- **Information on how to connect families to key supports** that may be helpful during the COVID-19 emergency (e.g., food and cash assistance and mental health supports).
 - Note: this is not a comprehensive guide, so when in doubt encourage caregivers to contact [2-1-1](#) or your local [Family Resource Center](#) for help navigating to appropriate, available supports.
- **Concerns that would warrant a call to DCYF** for suspected child abuse and neglect (1-800-894-5533).

You can help by (1) **using this guide to check in with children and families to help them get the support they need**, and (2) **sharing this guide with other helpers who have contact with children and families so they can do the same**.

It is now more important than ever that we all do our part to make sure children, youth, and their families remain healthy, safe, and connected.

Thank you for all you do for children, youth, caregivers, and families. Stay safe in these unprecedented times.

Be well,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'JER', is positioned above the printed name.

Joseph E. Ribsam Jr.
Director
Division for Children, Youth, and Families
Department of Health and Human Services

Attachment