

## Supporting Caregivers

Caregivers are important partners in out-of-home care practice. They not only provide shelter, but also care for, nurture, and support the children temporarily in their care. Under stay-at-home orders, caregivers across Texas are experiencing new struggles. Some can't leave home, have a loss of income or a loss of childcare. The networks that usually fill those needs such as schools, government agencies and nonprofits are also under new strain due to the pandemic.

Below are some ways to support caregivers during this time of uncertainty:

- **Check in regularly with caregivers**
  - Maintain and schedule communication to engage foster and adoptive families and kinship caregivers socially.
  - Video calls from loved ones can help entertain children and ease common feelings of anxiety, loneliness and boredom for the whole family. With safe distance, we can remain close.
  - On-going communication may prevent placement disruptions.
- **Ask meaningful questions**
  - Can you tell me how your family has been affected by COVID-19, such as your ability to work or having someone sick in your home? If yes, is there any resource I might be able to help you locate? (how to file unemployment, food stamps, etc.)
  - How are the children in your care doing? (issues/concerns)
  - Do the children in your care have any appointments that need to be rescheduled? (Can we assist you with this?)
  - Do you need any information regarding continuing the education for the children in your home? (Are you getting what you need from the school? Do you need additional school supplies? Do you know how to reach the child's teacher? Do you need help with finding virtual resources?)
  - Do you need help setting up an app to have videoconferencing capability such as ZOOM or Google Hangout?
  - We want to ensure that children can maintain contact with their parents, siblings, CASA, attorney, etc. Is there a time of day/week that works best for you to ensure contact can happen through videoconferencing?
  - Do you need any additional support? Is there anything else I can do for you?
- **Share only accurate, up-to-date information**
  - Sharing false and outdated information can promote fear or panic.
  - Share this website for accurate, up to date information: <https://www.cdc.gov/>
- **Encourage a routine**
  - Even if a family is isolated or quarantined, realize this will be temporary.
  - Talk through ways the family can continue a consistent schedule when it comes to bedtimes, meals, and exercise.
  - Routines can help reduce feelings such as loneliness, boredom, fear of contracting disease, anxiety, stress, and panic. Children benefit from structure. It reduces the unknowns.
  - Having children participate in distance learning opportunities that may be offered by their schools or other institutions/organizations can be helpful with routine as well.
  - Help the family engage in fun and meaningful activities consistent with family and cultural values.

- **Pick up groceries/toiletries/household goods**
  - If you go out for essentials or have access to a Rainbow Room or Resource Room, consider getting items for the families that could use your support. BONUS: You're also helping to limit the amount of people out and about.
- **Bring the fun**
  - Families are working through extreme modifications in schedules and family time. For children in foster care, the disruption can feel extra scary.
  - Help your families engage in fun and meaningful activities consistent with the family's interest, hobbies, and cultural values.
  - Help families engage in fun meaningful activities to bring everyone together. Pickup puzzles, books, games from your Rainbow Room or Resource Room.
  - If resources allow, there are monthly subscription boxes with activities for children such as Little Learners Busy Box, and they will deliver right to the family's front door.
- **Self-Care & Coping**
  - How the caregivers handle this stressful situation can affect how the children manage their worries. If families have experienced a serious illness or the death of a loved one, find ways to support them.
  - Help them seek religious/spiritual help or professional counseling for support. This may be available online or by telephone.
  - Remind them to give themselves small breaks from the stress of the situation.
- **Emotional Support**
  - Emotional support helps to buffer the secondary traumatic stress caregivers experience as they help children.
  - Encourage caregivers to reach out to their support systems whenever possible.
  - Remind them that the agency has a wealth of knowledge and can help caregivers find community resources.
  - There are also foster parent organizations, local organizations, and support groups, such as the [Texas Foster Care Association](#) or [National Foster Parent Association](#), for foster parents and other caregivers to get connected, share strategies and ideas, and find support in their community.
- **Say thank you**
  - Kinship, foster, and adoptive families are often unsung heroes, but here is a chance to belt out their praises. Say thank you!
  - Every day they keep children safe, encourage families to become stronger and help build a brighter tomorrow.
  - Now – more than ever – their days are long, their work is hard, and still they serve.
  - Let's all show our appreciation.