



## Check on students at risk of neglect, abuse

Educators have an obligation to report suspected child abuse. That responsibility is more difficult to meet now that students are no longer attending school in-person due to COVID-19.

In fact, reports of alleged child abuse have dropped since the beginning of the coronavirus outbreak in places such as Oregon, Wisconsin, and Montana, according to news outlets.

But there are steps you can take to help keep students safe -- even when learning is occurring remotely.

The Mitchell (S.D.) School District, for example, has assigned each related service provider, art teacher, and music teacher several families to check in on and provide care outreach on a regular basis, said Tracy Christensen, director of special education. The educators reach out by phone or offer to deliver supplies or instruction packets.

"The more people who check in and can drop off supplies, the more we can learn that the children are doing all right," Christensen said.

Here are other strategies to consider to help keep at-risk students safe:

- **Provide positive messaging about school closures.** According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, extended school closures can increase anxiety for students and families. It's most helpful to send positive messages of continued learning and connections rather than negative messages to avoid heightening that anxiety.
- **Partner with community agencies.** Work with local health providers and community agencies to ensure at-risk children and their families have access to mental health supports, essential supplies, and food. Lack of these supports and supplies and uncertainty how to obtain them can leave caregivers overwhelmed and unable to manage stress.
- **Remind educators of when and how to report child maltreatment.** Many educators have been focused on building capacity for distance learning since the coronavirus outbreak. It may be helpful to remind them of their responsibility as mandatory reporters of child abuse and neglect, even during distance learning. The Council for Exceptional Children offers guidance that promotes clearly articulated maltreatment prevention and response policies, procedures, and curricula.

See also:

- [Train 'mandatory reporters' on steps to take when they suspect abuse](#)
- [RUILING ROUNDUP: Abuse and neglect](#)
- [YOU BE THE JUDGE: Did Mass. district's reports of truancy, neglect amount to disability discrimination?](#)

*For more stories and guidance on this topic, access the [COVID-19 Roundup](#).*

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