



Restoration assessment and planning during COVID-19

Practice tips for Service Providers

Children and families have a right to live together safely and it is important during the pandemic that they are supported to make this possible where it is safe to do so. You will need to be innovative about the ways you support the restoration of each child, while minimising the health risks to the child, their family and carers.

Decisions about restoring a child home during COVID-19 need to consider a number of factors including that:

- children will be at varying stages of the restoration process, including those children entering care
- the environment, support systems and responsibilities have likely changed
- the ways you, and other services, support parents and meet the safety and wellbeing needs of children may be carried out differently at the moment.

Seek approval by the relevant District Principal Officer if you are:

- changing the way court ordered family time occurs
- restoring a child or young person safely at home (court approved restoration plan only)
- delaying the commencement of a transition plan to restore a child or young person.

Guidance about domestic violence, problematic use of alcohol or other substances, neglect, and culturally-safe practice for Aboriginal communities is available in the [restoration practice tip sheet](#).

Limitations on social gatherings and the impact on restorations

Casework is considered essential work. This means that it is not subject to the same restrictions on social gatherings or when people can leave their home. Other exemptions to the restrictions apply for:

- the purposes of work
- caring reasons, or when providing care or assistance to a vulnerable person
- existing arrangements for children to see their parents or siblings, or
- legal purposes.

This means if it is required and safe to do so, assessments, home visits and family time *can* continue to occur face-to-face with appropriate social distancing and hygiene precautions. Where appropriate, phone and video platforms should be used to reduce risks of contracting COVID-19.

How to decide on and carry out family time

Family time during a restoration is critical and helps with strengthening parenting skills, bonding, healing and the transition back together as a family. Family time also provides a vital opportunity for you to assess the strengths and needs of the parents and each child to review the Family Action Plan for Change and inform the restoration assessment.

Where possible, family time should continue to occur face-to-face. Take reasonable precautions, including social distancing, proper hygiene, and meeting outdoors.

What to do

- Speak with the parents, carers and child to seek their views and understand how changes as a result of COVID-19 may be impacting them. Explore any health or other risk factors.



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- Consider the health of the child, parents and carers (including those living in the home); and any other risks. Determine what strategies (if any) need to be implemented to reduce any health risks and document it in the child's case plan.
- Seek information from [HealthDirect](#) where the parents, carers or child are at high risk for COVID-19. Think about whether they should self-isolate to reduce the risks of contracting COVID-19. Weigh up and balance the health of the parents, carers and child with the plan to return the child home safely.
- Review the child's court order to determine whether any changes can be made to family time arrangements if required. Seek legal advice (or advice from the local Child and Family District Unit) if you are unsure.
- Seek Aboriginal consultation before making any changes to the way family time occurs: this includes talking with the child's family and community. Seek advice from your local [Aboriginal Medical Service](#) before going out to small and remote communities.
- Consider the impact that any changes (i.e. from face-to-face to electronic means), reduction or cessation of face-to-face family time would have on the safe return home for the child. Decisions must be focused on the best interests of the child.
- Decide whether face-to-face contact is safe to continue, or whether any changes need to be made to the way family time occurs (i.e. changes to who transports the child, location, contact facilitator, how to implement social distancing, number of attendees).
- Consider if increasing family time with the view to transitioning the child home sooner during COVID-19 would be in the child's best interests; or whether family time should be reduced with the view to slowing down restoration or transition would meet the needs and wishes of the parents and child. Consider the impact this would have on safely restoring the child and make sure this is in line with the court order.
- Explain to parents, carers and children what health precautions will be taken during family time to ensure everyone's safety. Come up with a plan together that meets the needs and wishes of everyone.
- Request a consultation with your casework specialist (or permanency coordinator for NGOs), or a group supervision via videoconference to seek a range of views and expert advice.
- Talk with the parents and provide clear information about the reasons why any changes to family time are occurring. It is important parents don't perceive any changes as delaying or stopping restoration. Provide them with a copy of any plans agreed to including how and when decisions will be made about face-to-face family time resuming and increasing.

If face- to-face family time is assessed as safe to occur, follow the [DCJ guidance for frontline practitioners](#).

Carer support and placement stability during restoration

Children will experience a range of emotions during the COVID-19 pandemic and a stable and supportive home environment is important for their wellbeing.

Provide strong carer support – this is essential to assist with the child's restoration, particularly during this period of additional stress. Support to carers during the restoration of children has a



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positive impact on the child returning home successfully. Take into consideration the carers role, alongside the child's and parents needs when making decisions.

If a carer is at [high risk](#) if they contract COVID-19 you will need to consider additional needs and supports. Discuss with the carer if they need additional support or changes to the way family time occurs (i.e. caseworker to take over transporting the child and facilitating family time). Assist the carer to seek health advice.

Where a carer requires practical assistance due to COVID-19 the priority is to put in additional supports to ensure the child can remain with their carer. It is important during times of stress and anxiety children remain connected to the adults in their life caring for them. Where this is not possible there may be other adults in the child's life who can support the carer such as an existing respite carer, relative or family friend of the carer.

Carers may naturally be anxious about face-to-face events such as family time, especially if children are being kept at home to complete schooling online. Listen to their worries and concerns and come up with a plan to best meet the needs of all people wherever possible. Ask for their ideas about how they think family time could take place in a way that limits risks to their health.

Review the Family Action Plan for Change

Contact the parents, the child and carer to understand how COVID-19 has impacted on their supports, daily life and functioning.

Decide if the Family Action Plan for Change needs to be reviewed to reflect any changes as a result of social distancing, changes in services provided to the family during COVID-19 or learning how to use (and support their child to use) hygiene practices.

To accurately carry out the Family Action Plan for Change, use information from the risk reassessment or restoration assessment tool, and consult with the family. In most situations, you will need to speak with children and their families on more than one occasion to collaboratively develop goal statements and plan how the family will meet these goals with the support of their network.

Engaging families in discussion about change may be more challenging during the COVID-19 pandemic. When people are worried and concerned about their immediate wellbeing, it can be harder for them to focus on future goals. This may require us to be more open to providing practical assistance to families to help alleviate some of their immediate concerns (i.e. food, toilet paper, hand soap, phone credit). Offer Aboriginal families extra support, such as engaging family members or a community organisation.

Explain the timeframe and purpose of the Restoration Assessment that follows after reviewing the Family Action Plan to the family. Let them know the type of information required to complete the assessment adequately (i.e. progress towards the families goals, family time progress notes, information from support services). This allows the family to understand that ongoing family time during this time period is needed in order for you to understand how they are progressing.

It remains important that we communicate all of our worries for the children clearly to the family so that they understand what we need them to work towards their child returning to live safely at



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home. Breaking Family Action Planning down into shorter time periods and smaller steps could support families to commit to changes needed to achieve this.

What to do

- Find a way to involve all the important people to review the Family Action Plan. It may not be appropriate to get everyone together face-to-face.
- Identify opportunities to link people into meetings over the phone or video and use video (when available) or visits (where essential) to check in with families.
- Speak with service providers to see what changes in their face-to-face engagement will look like and how you can work together to support the family both before the child comes home and, importantly, once the child has returned home . Negotiate alternate options for the family to continue to access support during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Be mindful of how COVID-19 restrictions may impact on the family and ask questions about what this may look like. Ask the family to discuss triggers and situations (i.e. social isolation) which may increase the risk to the children.
- Give the Family Action Plan for change to the family and explain what your role, their role and other people’s role will be in relation to the planning process (monitoring and review). Be clear about who will be in contact with the family, both remotely and face-to-face, and build in clear points of review and connection to identify any parts of the plan that are not working as soon as possible.

Restoration practice considerations during COVID-19

Practice consideration	What to do
Services change, reduce or stop providing supports to families as a result of COVID-19.	<p>Connect with all service providers involved, or referred to, to find out about changes to how they deliver services.</p> <p>Be clear about what progress towards goals would look like and how they will know if the parent is progressing, given any communication limitations.</p> <p>Consider any gaps as a result of changes to services and look at alternate options. Ask the parents for their ideas about how they could create changes needed as a result of changes to supports, including identifying supports in their family or community network.</p>
Direct casework with the child is limited because of reduced face-to-face visits. As a result the child’s experiences and voice may be more easily overlooked or forgotten.	<p>Make sure you have in place options to speak to each child to get their input into family action planning and risk reassessments.</p> <p>Wherever possible speak to the child alone and using methods that they choose, so that they feel comfortable to share their views with you.</p>
The parents face additional barriers as a result of COVID-related issues, such increased	Provide practical assistance using your professional influence and resources; including access to funds, goods, IT equipment or data, referrals and so forth.



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<p>poverty, housing instability and difficulty accessing essential services and goods.</p>	<p>Take into consideration these additional barriers in assessment, but proactively work to help the parents navigate or overcome these.</p>
<p>Reduced or paused face-to-face family time makes it difficult to give parents the opportunity to learn new safe parenting skills and behaviours; and they find it more difficult to stay focussed and motivated.</p>	<p>Develop a creative family-time program that allows the parents, wherever possible, to engage in daily caregiving situations with their child. This may be support with home-schooling via video link; reading stories each night, bedtime routines like brushing teeth or eating a meal together via video.</p> <p>You can also be involved in some of these video routines to provide advice or suggestions about what could be helpful or role modelling serve and return behaviours.</p> <p>Acknowledge the parents' emotions and impact on their motivation with empathy. Use motivational interviewing techniques in our conversations with them to support the focus on change. Develop strategies together about how they can maintain motivation and focus during this period. Also develop a plan for how to manage any lapse in changes including what may be the impact as a result. Lapses should be planned for and expected.</p>

SDM Restoration Assessment Tool

The SDM Restoration Assessment Tool is mandatory for all Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) managed children, and is the preferred tool to be used by non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Complete the restoration tool within 90 days of the Family Action Plan for Change being developed, and every 90 days thereafter.

The Restoration Assessment Tool is used to guide decision making about when to restore the child. It includes an assessment of the safety needs of the child, progress towards the case plan and quality of contact.

Remain connected and engaged with families during the COVID-19 pandemic. Families will have less social and service supports readily available to assist them to make the changes needed and outlined in the Family Action Plan for Change.

Connect with them regularly to discuss their progress, their support needs and any barriers to achieving their goals to be responsive to their changing needs as a result of COVID-19 restrictions and understand the risk level to the children more fully.

Develop a plan about how to provide practical and emotional support and how they can raise concerns as they arise, particularly in situations where doing so may increase the risk level for them.



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What to do

- After reviewing the Family Action Plan for Change, explain the timeframe and purpose of the Restoration Assessment to the family and the type of information required to complete the assessment adequately (i.e. progress towards goals, family time progress notes, information from support services). This allows the family to understand that ongoing contact during this time period is required.
- Ensure you have sufficient information to answer the indices of the SDM restoration assessment. You may need to check information obtained with a range of sources to test its accuracy.
- If you have been unable to sustain contact with the family during the COVID-19 pandemic and do not have adequate information to complete the restoration assessment:
 - Consult with your Manager Casework (DCJ) or Permanency Coordinator (NGOs) about when your last visit with the family was and whether you were able to develop a collaborative Family Action Plan for Change.
 - Reach out to the family network to explore all options to contact the family and understand what may be happening for them during COVID-19.
 - If no Family Action Plan for Change was developed, a restoration assessment cannot be completed.

Completing the restoration assessment decision tree during COVID-19

During COVID-19 there is likely to be changes made to the Family Action Plan for Change; families may also experience a range of factors that may impact progress towards restoration. These may include reduction in family time, family time occurring via video platforms, limited access to some services and supports and a range of other factors.

Provide proactive assistance to the family to help them manage or navigate any barriers they now face as a result of COVID-19.

Consider the changes to the Family Action Plan and family time, and any impact of COVID-19 when completing Section D of the SDM Restoration Assessment Tool. The decision to either restore a child or change the case plan goal is structured around an assessment of safety and risk, progress towards the family's goals and the suitability of family time between the child and parents.

During the pandemic, if the assessment recommendation is to change the goal, or restore the child home, determine if this accurately reflects the circumstances, or whether an override may need to be applied. Consider the following:

- whether any worries and concerns can be addressed between now and the next Assessment (90 days), or within the maximum period of 24 months
- whether changes to the way family time occurs (as a result of COVID-19) has impacted the assessment of whether the parents engagement during contact has been adequate or not
- whether COVID-19 has impacted the parents ability to make progress towards the goals in the Family Action Plan (i.e. limited access to services, reduction in parenting supports).

Consult with your Manager Casework (DCJ) or Permanency Coordinator (NGOs) when completing the Decision Tree during COVID-19.



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Transitioning a child home during COVID-19

It is important that any decision about a child is focussed on their needs, wishes and best interests. Where a transition of a child was due to occur soon and there are no safety concerns or risks to increase the transition, and any risks can be mitigated by additional support, it may be in the child's best interests to return home safely to live together with their parents.

Decide if bringing the transition plan forward is in the child's best interests and if any risks can be mitigated by increased support to the parents (i.e. by the agency supporting the family, family members or support networks, support services).

Include this in the Family Action Plan for Change leading up to, and following, the child's return home.

Let the parents know that an assessment will be conducted every 90 days to make sure the child is safe to remain at home and ensure any worries or concerns are planned for.

Discuss what supports and services are in place, and how often you will visit them. Provide the parents with information about where they can seek help.

Support parents to [learn](#) safe hygiene practices, social distancing requirements and when to self-isolate.

Where to find more information

Information on [social distancing](#) can be found in the [Department of Health social distancing factsheet](#).

Please see [NSW Health advice about casual contact with people who may be affected](#).

Please refer to the [advice from NSW Health about face masks](#).