

# Introduction

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During emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic, it is very important that all children **continue to learn**.

One of the best ways children can learn at home is by playing with their parents and other people who take care of them—we call these people caregivers.

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This booklet is your guide to helping make sure children are able to learn at home, in safe, nurturing, and playful ways, and caregivers are supported to guide them.

If you are calling or visiting caregivers, we suggest three goals:

- 1. Help caregivers understand how to use the “PlayMatters at Home” packet.**
- 2. Let caregivers talk about how they and their children are managing during the COVID-19 pandemic.**
- 3. Encourage caregivers, and remind them of ways to care for themselves and their families.**

The next sections will give you ideas about how to achieve each of these goals, and how to look after yourself at the same time.

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# GOAL 1:

Help caregivers understand how to use the “PlayMatters at Home” packet.

The “PlayMatters at Home” packets introduce fun learning games. We hope this will reduce stress for families while schools are closed. The packets include:

- Activities that help children keep their school knowledge fresh
- Games for caregivers and children to learn together
- Tips to support caregiver well-being
- Tips for caregivers about learning in the home
- Resources for extra support.

You can help caregivers to understand the key messages in the packet, and to use the activities. The key messages in the packet are outlined below.

**Be sure to remind caregivers of the tips available throughout the package.**

Tips can be found:  
→ On pages 2 and 3.  
→ At the bottom of every activity page.  
→ In the back of the book with resources.

## Message One: Routines are important for children, especially in emergencies.

During emergencies, children can feel like the world has turned upside down. Keeping some normal routines in emergencies can help children to feel safer and more in control. It is also much easier to manage children’s behaviour if they have a clear routine.

**You may like to discuss with caregivers how they can make a routine for their children which includes plenty of learning and play, using the examples in the packet.**



Hygiene is important every day. However we understand that water and soap are sometimes not available.



If it is possible, eating together at the same times each day can help create a routine.



Caregivers and children can make time every day to play some of the learning games in the packet.



It is important for children to have time to play each day. This can be alone, with other children, or with a caregiver. Play can be sports, dance, stories, and more!



Caregivers often have much work to do in the home. Children can learn a lot by helping them with safe tasks.



Sleep is very important for health and reducing stress. Putting children to bed at the same time each day is best. Stories at bedtime create warm, calm interactions for families that help everyone’s well-being.



A routine can also include naps or quiet activities (such as telling or reading a story), so that caregivers can take a break.

## Morning



WASH



BREAKFAST



LEARNING GAME



FAMILY CHORES

## Afternoon



WASH



LUNCH



PLAY



LEARNING GAME



REST OR SLEEP

## Evening



WASH



PLAY



DINNER



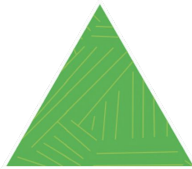
STORY AND SLEEP

**Message Two:**  
**Parents and caregivers can teach their children through play.**

Each packet includes activities that build the following skills:



Movement



Creative



Language



Cognitive



Number



Emotion

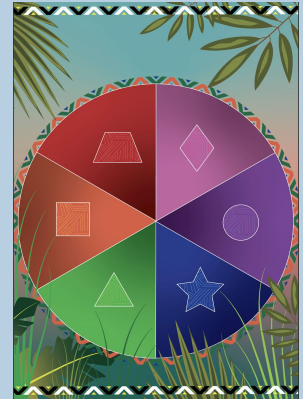
**Parents are a child's first teacher**, and play is a child's favourite way to learn! Playing games in the family is a great way for children to keep learning, and to build warm and positive family relationships. All children—girls, boys, children with disabilities, children of all ethnicities and backgrounds—can learn through play.

You can **encourage caregivers to support their children through play**, and help them understand the games and ideas in the packet.

These symbols can help caregivers to **choose a good mix of activities**. Families can use the packet in two ways. They can choose to use it as they wish throughout the day or they can use it as a game board.

**To use the packet as a game board:** The shapes are also used as part of the gameboard on the front cover of each packet.

1. First, from a short distance away, children or caregivers should gently throw a small item (such as a rock) at the gameboard.
2. Second, they should see where the small item landed on the gameboard.
  - a. For example: If the rock landed on the green triangle, for example, players should go through the packet and play ANY activity that also has a green triangle.
3. Once this activity is completed, players can try again for another shape.
4. Children and caregivers should be encouraged to try and try an activity from each shape! If they complete one activity from each shape, they have won the game.



**Note:** If caregivers cannot understand the shapes and symbols, that is ok too. The most important thing is for them to keep trying out the activities and having fun with their children!

The picture to the right **key parts** of each learning game in the packet. You can use this to help caregivers and children understand the activities in the packet.

You may also have received extra training materials. These will help you to get specific support for individual activities **if needed, or you can contact your supervisor.**

**Activity Number**  
To find an activity easily.

**Important Action**  
To see important helpful steps.

**Activity Instructions**  
To understand what to do.

**Activity Direction**

**Repeat Symbol**  
To try an activity again!

23

First, gather items and place them in a bag. Next, without looking, challenge a family member to reach in and describe what they feel inside the bag. Is it smooth or bumpy? Big or small? Hard or soft? Finally, guess the item! Switch roles and try again!

# Suggested steps for conversations with caregivers.

## Step One:

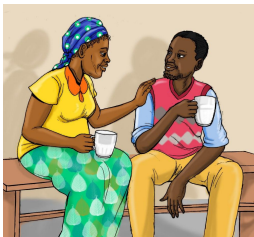
- **Greetings** and a brief **chat** to establish a connection and open communication, "Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_ and I am the teacher of \_\_\_\_ (child's name) at \_\_\_\_ (school name). How are you today?"
- **Introduce** yourself and the reason for your call/visit -- that you would like to check-in with them, hear about their situation, and share a bit about the packets.
  - Check if this is a good time to call or visit - if it is not, make a different time with the caregiver and call them or visit them then. If they do not want to talk with you, you can try gentle encouragement, but do not pressure or force them to.
  - If you do not know the family yet, ask about them - how many children are in the home, what games do they like to play together? Check whether any of the children have disabilities or special needs, and make sure to consider their needs in the rest of the discussion.
  - Ask, with warmth in your voice, "how have things changed for you during this pandemic?" Respond empathetically (refer to listening skills on page 5)



## Step Two:

- **Ask** if they have looked through their packet yet, eg. ask,
  - "What did you like in the packet?"
  - "Have you tried any of the games with your child? (Which one? How did it go? Was it fun? Did you notice what new skill or concept your child was learning?)"
  - "Have you tried one of the caregiver well-being tips?" Encourage the caregiver to try the different tips and reassure them that it may take time to feel the benefits.
  - If they have **not yet** opened the packet just say, "that's ok," ask them to bring it and explain they can look through it together now. Describe it to them, ask them what they notice about the packet. Highlight the key sections: the daily routine, the icons and the activities for literacy, numeracy and building values, caregiver well-being section and numbers to call.
- **Ask** if they have any questions about the packet, the games, and home learning?

## Step Three:



- **Plan and commit:** help the caregiver make a plan to use the packets in the next week. You can ask:
  - "Which games would you like to do with your child in the coming week? What do you think of the routine on page XX? Or are other times of day you think you can play learning activities?"
  - "Which of the caregiver well-being suggestions do you think would make you feel less stressed and give you a moment of relaxation?"
  - "What materials do you have in the home that can be used for play? Some ideas are pictures in the packet (Insert play materials image), do you have any other ideas?"

## Step Four:

- **Summarize.** e.g. "Great, we have talked about the packet, you planned to do XYZ activities"
- **Set a time** for the next call or visit, if you intend to call back. eg "Is it ok if I call/visit you again next week at XX time?"
- **Collect feedback:**
  - "Do you have any suggestions how I can support you over the phone or during my next visit, as we have done today, in order to use the games in the packet with your children?"
- **Thank** the caregiver for their time, **remind** them what a wonderful job they are doing as a parent, **praise** a specific thing they had mentioned on the call/visit that they are doing for their children now, and say goodbye.

If you call the family again, you can **follow up from last week's call/visit:** eg. "What games have you and your children played since we last spoke? Can you describe to me how it went? (Pick a nice detail and praise them for it!)"

# GOAL 2:

Let caregivers talk about how they and their children are managing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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When someone else really listens to you, without judging or interrupting, it is a very powerful and positive experience. Your best tools for providing support are your listening skills! Listening is truly a skill which takes thought and practice. Take a few minutes to think of a time you've had someone to talk to who listened without judgement or interrupting.

Write it here: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## LISTEN

If you wish to, you can provide support by listening in this way to the caregivers you speak with. Below are some tips to build your listening skills:

**Pay attention:** Give your full attention to the person. Ignore distractions and focus on what they are saying. Try not to interrupt or jump in to fill silences.

**Ask effective questions:** Asking questions is a good way to show you care. Choose questions that help the person to:

- express themselves
- think clearly about their options
- remember their own coping skills, strengths, and knowledge

Try to ask questions that cannot be answered with just a yes or no. These questions usually begin with “who”, “what”, “how”, “when”, or “where”.

**Repeat:** Repeat back what the other person has said, but using different words. This shows you are listening, and helps you check you have understood. For example: “So you’re saying that... ..have I understood you?”

**Where to stop:** If you can simply listen with empathy to caregivers, this is a great way to support them. To do this well, there are some boundaries you need to keep. Some issues should only be addressed by trained professionals. Below are some tips on what to avoid:

- Do not give medical or mental health opinions. Just refer to the phone numbers listed in the packet page XX.
- Do not make decisions or suggest solutions for caregivers’ personal problems
- Do not talk about your own problems
- Avoid judging, interrogating, blaming, preaching, arguing
- Be careful not to make promises that you cannot keep
- Never guess or invent information to make someone feel better
- Do not discuss religious matters or evangelise
- Do not ask people to discuss highly upsetting or traumatic events

**Confidentiality:** When you encourage people to share their concerns with you, this places you in a position of trust. To maintain confidentiality, be careful not to tell stories or give any information about the families you call to anyone other than your supervisor. Do not tell these things to other families, friends or neighbours.

**Positive Attitude:** Be calm, serious, and kind. Try to understand the other person’s point of view and feelings. Remember that they may have a lot going on in their lives. If you are talking to an angry or anxious person, stay calm, keep your voice soft, and speak slowly.

# GOAL 3:

Encourage caregivers, and remind them of ways to care for themselves and their families.

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Many caregivers are under a lot of stress right now - you may be stressed yourself.

If discussing other matters will add to your own stress too much, you can stick to explaining the educational packet. Just encourage them to try some of the coping strategies on the last two pages of the book, and make sure they see the **“Resources to Call”** section.

However, if you would like to provide some extra support to caregivers who are stressed, you can try the tips below.

## Key tips to support caregivers

- **Reassure caregivers** that it is normal for them and their children to feel sad, worried, or angry. Some examples of the ways children commonly show these feelings are:
  - Becoming afraid easily, and clinging to parents
  - Easily becoming irritated and upset or angry
  - Bedwetting and nightmares
  - Acting younger than they are
  - Experiencing stomach aches and other pains, when they are not sick
  - Changes to eating and sleeping.
- **Praise and congratulate them** for protecting others by following the COVID-19 restrictions.
- Find out and repeat their own good ideas back to them with praise
  - eg. “oh great, so you're going to play XYZ after breakfast, wonderful!”
- **Listen for ways they are already supporting their children and coping with the situation.** Rather than focusing on things they are doing “wrong”, build upon their strengths!
- **Encourage them to remember their own strengths.** Questions can help, like:
  - What have you done in the past to overcome problems like this?
  - What have you already tried doing?
  - Is there someone who can help with managing this problem (e.g. friends, loved ones or organizations)?
  - Do other people you know have similar problems? How have they managed?

## Noticing “danger signs”

When speaking with caregivers, you **are not expected** to ask about serious issues or to look for particular problems.

However while talking about other things, you may notice something serious which makes you worried about the safety of a child or caregiver.

### **If this happens, inform your supervisor immediately.**

Do not “investigate” the issue yourself - your supervisor can notify trained protection colleagues who can follow up professionally.

If you notice anything that indicates the following situations, **you must report it immediately to your supervisor:**

- **Exploitation or abuse of children:** including severe neglect, sexual abuse, trafficking, and early marriage.
- **Family violence:** including violence between husband and wife and violence towards children or elders. You must tell your supervisor immediately if you think someone in a family is at risk of being seriously injured due to family violence.
- **Severe mental health problems:** if you notice that someone cannot care for themselves because of a mental health problem, you must tell your supervisor. Danger signs include when someone:
  - no longer understands what is real and what is not
  - has stopped eating, washing, or caring for themselves
  - is using a lot of drugs or alcohol
  - has no hope left
  - thinks or talks about hurting themselves

**Be safe and seek support.**

## Talking about COVID-19

**You should not give advice or information about COVID-19** unless you have training in this. However you can help direct people to accurate information.

- Remind caregivers to refer to the Resources section of their packet.
- Encourage caregivers to keep following the official restrictions in order to keep their family and community safe. Praise and respect them for doing this.
- Caregivers may want to talk about their frustration with the restrictions - it is ok to listen to this with empathy, but do not join in criticizing the restrictions.
- Reduce stigma and promote harmony in the community. When a disease spreads in a community, people can become suspicious of each other. Never join in blaming anyone for the disease, or discussing rumours.

During crises such as the **COVID-19 pandemic**, family violence often increases. Some example danger signs of family violence are:

- If an adult or child tells you they are afraid of someone in the house
- If an adult or child seems afraid someone will hear them speaking to you
- If someone in the family is forbidden to speak to you

## Caring for yourself

For example, you could write about:

**What does self-care/well being mean to you?**

What is difficult for you as an educator right now?

**What are some techniques that can help you to manage your stress in these challenging times?**

What are some of your biggest strengths in supporting families and children's learning?

**What are you most proud of?**

Providing support to others in an emergency can be rewarding but also difficult. It is important to **care for your own health and wellbeing as well!**

Below are some tips to remember:

- **Listen to your body.** If it is tense or sore from working too much, do not ignore it. Take a break!
- **Practice deep breathing** to relax.
- Eat meals with your family if you can, and **find opportunities to laugh and smile** with the people you love.
- **Get enough sleep** (for many this is 8 hours)
- Only look at **accurate sources of information** about COVID-19 (such as the Ministry of Health and the WHO).
- **Find other teachers** who are supporting families, and talk to them. Share experiences, feelings, and tips.
- **Make a list of ways you have coped** in the past and what you can do to stay strong and healthy.
- Remember that you are not responsible for solving other people's problems. **Listening is enough.**
- **Talk with people you trust** when you are stressed, or try writing down your thoughts and emotions.

## Need extra help?

In the back of the packet, there are resources that you and caregivers can refer to for **psychosocial, COVID-19, health, or educator support**. These resources also include national educational resources for children.

Encourage caregivers to use the resources they need, and feel **free to use them yourself** too! If you are confused about a particular activity or receive a question from a caregiver that you need help answering, **contact your supervisor**.

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