

Caregiver Practice Guidance: Coronavirus (COVID-19)

UPDATED AS OF 3:30 PM APRIL 14, 2020

UPDATES HIGHLIGHTED

This document is intended to provide guidance to caseworkers, foster and kinship care support workers about how best to support caregivers to be able to continue to provide a home and care to children and youth in care during the COVID-19 Pandemic. This document will be regularly updated with any new practice guidance identified.

QUICK LINKS

Click on one of the headings below to quickly navigate to that section of the document.

[Educational Support](#)

[Childcare \(Relief and Respite\)](#)

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EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT

This section provides guidance regarding how to support caregivers while schools are closed and learning is to be completed remotely and online.

Ministry of Education

Expectations by Grade:

- Kindergarten to Grade 6 - 5 hours per week with a focus on language/literary and mathematics/numeracy;
- Grades 7 to 9 – 10 hours per week with a focus on language/literacy and mathematics/numeracy with an opportunity to incorporate science and social studies;
- Grades 10 to 12 - three hours per course per week with a focus on specified and core courses required for high school graduation requirements, including language (English, French and French language arts), social studies, mathematics, biology, chemistry and physics.

Assessment

Teachers are responsible for assessing progress and assigning a final grade. Every student will receive final grades and a report card appropriate to their grade level. Grade 6 and 9 provincial achievement tests are cancelled. Grade 12 students on track to receive 100 credits or more will still be eligible to graduate. Principals have some flexibility in awarding up to 15 credits. General diploma exams are cancelled.

Teacher's Role

Teachers have already contacted, or will soon contact, families and caregivers directly to provide information about learning expectations and educational materials for their individual children. They should have assessed the family's ability to access technology in support of their children's learning. Students, especially those in the lower grades or without technology access, are often receiving paper-

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based learning packages, with delivery and return negotiated between the teacher and the family. Teachers may have deemed this most appropriate for these students.

Children's Services Role

As custodians and guardians of children, Children's Services has an obligation to work with schools to ensure that children have their educational needs met. This includes assisting caregivers with balancing the additional pressures of caregiving and implementing education plans as well as ensuring that children and youth in care have the right tools and support to participate fully in their education.

Policy already stipulates that children in care are *entitled* to have their education needs met and that *all* education related expenses *will* be covered. This may include devices, internet connection, school supplies, tutors, or even toilet paper. Some families will need assistance in obtaining and using technology to support the children in their care. Please be creative in considering and supporting this access.

During the Covid-19 Pandemic, Foster and Kinship Support Workers and Caseworkers are expected to coordinate and specifically connect with caregivers AND the children or youths' teachers to ensure their foster and kinship families have the sufficient support to participate in their education online. This may include – both *appropriate* devices and *sufficient* internet access for the work expected of the children (i.e. chrome books or iPads). Support Workers and Caseworkers are expected to ask specifically *how* to help caregivers have access to what they need.

It appears that many schools have *some* Chromebooks or other tablets to lend, rent or sell to caregivers. Assist caregivers in accessing these devices, especially for lower grades. Rental costs will be covered by Children's Services as an educational expense. Younger children can likely share these in the same home given lighter school demands and with proper sanitizing between users. If a caregiver is unable to access required devices through their schools, one should be purchased for them and claimed by the caregiver as an educational expense. If a caregiver will have difficulty with paying for the device directly, support workers or caseworkers are expected to arrange for the device to be purchased and provided to the child.

Higher grades or technology-heavy learning may require more robust devices such as full laptops, or even supplementary devices such as headphones, etc., may be necessary. Consider individual circumstances and any special needs in determining the most suitable supports.

Caregivers' Role

Individual school websites or teacher contacts will have the most relevant information for individual students. School Division websites may also have important updates. Caseworkers should ensure that they are aware of the online learning that is happening for children they are responsible for. To find the appropriate school division (authority) contact information and individual schools [here](#).

While education may seem like it is a bit lower on the priority list these days, here are some resources for when you are better able to focus on these:

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- [Telus Internet for Good Program](#) – helps provide internet access to low-income families.
- [LearnAlberta.ca](#) - more than 4,000 digital resources aligned with Alberta's K-12 curriculum.
- [My Child's Learning: A Parent Resource](#) - provides parents with information specific to each grade level.

Further information from Alberta Education is available [here](#).

Additionally, many Alberta school authorities have a variety of resources available to support parents and students in learning at home. The Edmonton Public Library has [tutoring](#) available.

Children Services kinship and foster support and caseworkers can access the [CI Portal](#) for a list of available resources for sharing with caregivers.

Caregivers can access the [AFKA website](#) and [ALIGN website](#) for a list of available resources for caregivers.

Policy References

Please see [Appendix 1](#) for policy references related to educational supports.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

As per current policy and compensation guides, all caregivers receive financial compensation to care for children in their home. All children in care are additionally entitled to receive further specific financial benefits to support them in their placements, some of which are prescribed and some of which are tied to the particular unique situation for the child and the caregiver. During the Covid-19 pandemic, existing policy should be interpreted flexibly in order to assist children and caregivers to address the day to day challenges posed by Alberta Health restrictions and overall impacts it has on day to day living for Albertans.

Use the following Guiding Principles in Family Based Care during COVID-19 as you interpret policy on Financial Support:

- Stability is important during these challenging times.
- Caregivers and children may require additional supports.
- Traditional forms of natural and formal supports may not be accessible or feasible.
- With the requirements on social distancing and schools being closed, respite is a priority for caregivers who care for multiple children with various needs; creativity and flexibility in the provision of respite is a priority.
- Approaches taken to support children and caregivers during the Covid-19 Pandemic are time limited and will not be precedent setting.

The relationships with support workers and caseworkers are intended to be supportive. In this circumstance with staff potentially off or inaccessible, BOTH CS foster/kinship care workers and Caseworkers can approve and authorize the payment of reimbursement for COVID-19 related

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supports. The child's caseworker or foster/kinship care worker's supervisors/managers (with delegated expenditure authority) can approve and sign off costs directly identified in policy or already identified in a support plan. Identifying support needs will continue in collaboration with the child's network and pre-approvals of financial supports will be in consultation with the child's case team.

Childcare

Please see [Childcare Section](#) for more information.

Recreation Fund

The full Recreation Fund is available between April 1 and March 31 each year. At this time, recreation that supports children, youth in a foster or kinship care placement may not be what has been traditionally considered appropriate use of the Recreation Fund. Support creativity and flexibility in the use of the Recreation Fund. Some examples might be the purchase of crafts or yard play equipment to use within the home or back yard.

Additionally, current Policy, including 2.3 Kinship Care Support Plan (Placement Resources) and 3.3.5 Foster Care Support Plan (Placement Resources) supports the ability to cover additional needs outside and beyond the Recreation Fund including "exceptional recreation". Please see [Caregiver Support Plans](#) below. Foster Care/Kinship Care workers and Caseworkers should work with each caregiver to ensure that they have adequate supports.

Camp/Vacation

Given the current uncertainty as it relates to the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic, it will be very important to remain flexible in terms of the interpretation of all financial provisions. It is very possible that in person camps will not be available this summer; instead workers and caregivers could consider online activities, etc. While travel outside of Alberta is not currently permitted, we should be mindful that this may change and opportunities for vacation may be available before the end of this fiscal year.

Remember: Recreation and Vacation/Camp Allowances can also be applied in any combination.

Caregiver Illness and Emergency Situations

Current policy states, in consultation with the caseworker, compensation for child care related expenses, other in-home or placement supports may be provided to caregivers if they must be away from home or are unable to provide care in emergency situations, due to personal illness, sickness or death within the immediate family. Due to COVID-19, there is the possibility caregivers will temporarily be away from the home or unable to temporarily provide care. Should a caregiver become ill, the plan and options will be dependent on the individual circumstances of the caregiver family and must be developed in partnership with the entire casework team based on the best interests of the child. In

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these situations, compensation for supports such as relief or respite will be provided by Children's Services through a Kinship or Foster Care Support Plan. Please see [Policy Kinship Care: 2.4 Emergency Situations and Foster Care: 3.3.6 Emergency Situations](#) (Placement Resources). See Childcare section for additional information.

Approved Absences

Current policy indicates that Kinship and foster caregivers are eligible to receive basic maintenance (as well as skill fees for foster caregivers) during a child or youth's *approved temporary absence* from the kinship or foster home. Reasons for an Approved Absence are listed in Policy 7.3.3 Casework Responsibilities During Placement (Intervention). **Absences related to COVID-19 will also be considered approved absences.**

Current policy provides for 7 days at full basic maintenance and skill fees for foster caregivers, followed by 7 days at 50% as well as 7 days at full basic maintenance for Kinship caregivers followed by 7 days at 50% during an approved absence.

During the COVID-19 Pandemic, the time period for providing full basic maintenance (as well as full skill fees for foster caregivers) during a child or youth's approved temporary absence has been extended to 14 days. This timeframe can be further extended further by the caseworker's manager in order to maintain the placement.

Learning Supports

See [Educational Supports](#) section.

Special Rates

Special rates that are currently in place for foster parents that continue to be supported by the foster care support workers and where there are no changes, may be extended for a period of three months from April 1, 2020. If all parties do not agree upon the three-month extension or changes to the special rates are required, coordinate a teleconference between the foster caregiver(s), foster care support worker, and caseworker to determine what changes need to be made. Follow current procedures for reviewing special rates.

All extensions and new agreements must be documented in CICIO.

Caregiver Support Plans

Any additional supports necessary to maintain a child or youth during the COVID-19 Pandemic must be identified on the Kinship Care Support Plan [[FC3899](#)] or Foster Care Support Plan [[FC3605](#)]. It is important that there is a plan for every child in care and that this plan is documented. This is important so that, in the circumstance of the caseworker or support worker being absent, other caseworkers can ensure that a plan is in place to support the child.

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NEW

Child Maintenance Invoice

To support caregivers and young adults in being reimbursed for funds in a timely manner, the Child Maintenance Invoice has been converted to an electronic form. The Child Maintenance Invoice can be found on the CI Portal [here](#).

The following is the process for completing and submitting the form for payment:

1. The caregiver/young person completes the form, ensuring all relevant fields are filled in.
2. The caregiver/young person emails the completed, electronically signed form and all related receipts and/or approval letters to the caseworker/administrative assistant.
 - a. Pictures or scanned copies of receipts/approval letters are acceptable. The caregiver/young person should retain copies of all original receipts.
3. The caseworker/administrative assistant reviews the form and attached receipts/approval letters (pictures/scanned copies) to ensure accuracy. The administrative assistant completes shaded fields, including generating an invoice number (see directions [here](#)).
4. The caseworker/administrative assistant forwards the electronically signed form and all receipts/approval letters to the casework supervisor/expenditure officer.
5. Casework supervisor/expenditure officer reviews and electronically signs the completed form, then forwards to Administrative Assistant for payment process.

Policy References

Please see [Appendix 1](#) for existing policy related to financial supports for caregivers.

CHILDCARE

Current policy states that foster and kinship caregivers may require resources to provide childcare while they attend appointments, other responsibilities and to allow for breaks from day-to-day demands of parenting. Childcare arrangements may include; babysitting, relief, respite and alternate childcare (see [Appendix 2](#)). Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, caregivers' access to childcare has become limited or has ceased altogether. The policy-authorized use of childcare has created confusion for staff and caregivers as it appears to conflict with recommendations by the Chief Medical Officer of Health for Alberta to practice physical distancing and staying home to decrease exposure.

As a result, the use of childcare is not recommended at this time; other supports for caregivers should be explored. Caregivers are encouraged to stay inside (whenever possible), take all precautions when going out, and try not to use childcare that is not needed.

Caseworker, Kinship or Foster Care Support Worker and Support Network

There may be times, however, when childcare is essential and special consideration is required to support the health and well-being of the child or caregiver.

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The child's caseworker and foster or kinship care support worker are to pre-plan with the caregiver as well as their support network to identify available options for childcare. Staff will support caregivers who do not have a plan with identifying potential childcare.

Considerations in planning for childcare during the Covid-19 Pandemic may include:

- the caregiver is required to work outside the home;
- the caregiver is working in the home and the children are under school age or not in classes;
- caregiver is unable to care for the child due to attending essential appointments;
- continuation of current respite to support the complex needs of a child in the home;
- relief or respite will prevent the potential breakdown of a placement due to caregiver burnout; and
- contingency planning if a caregiver were to become ill.

When making a plan for childcare, it is important to develop back up arrangements, in case the original plan is impacted by illness or exposure of an identified caregiver. Should relief or respite become necessary, the entire team will review the plan with the caregivers to determine if the plan is still current or if adjustments are required.

Families may wish to explore the possibility of partnering with a 'cohort family' if a caregiver family needs to self-isolate due to COVID-19 or COVID-19 symptoms as recommended by the Chief Medical Officer of Health for Alberta.

A cohort family consists of:

- Two families who isolate together, not necessarily in the same home, but from everyone else and have limited contact with the outside.
- Families agree to isolate from everyone else but the two families. Both families limit their contact to the outside.
- This can continue as long as both families are healthy, no underlying health conditions, not high risk and have not symptoms and no travel.

Before the continuation of current respite arrangements OR approving any childcare, consultation with a supervisor is required. Careful consideration should be given to the need for childcare and whether it balances the risk of COVID-19 exposure for children, youth and families. Planning between the child's caseworker, foster or kinship care support worker, caregiver and alternate caregiver must identify the protocols required to mitigate exposure risk exposure between the caregiver home and alternate caregiver home.

All staff must follow Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services (AHS) guidelines to mitigate risk and caregivers are to report any potential exposure risk. It is essential to follow preventative measures and avoid contact with others who have COVID-19 symptoms and have travelled outside Canada; or were exposed to someone who has confirmed COVID-19.

Documentation

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In addition to documenting on a contact log, the resulting COVID-19 related plans must be recorded in CICIO in special cautions.

Enter a Special Caution for planning childcare options and temporary placements needed due to COVID-19. Please review current Special Cautions placed on the system and end date any that no longer apply in order to ensure all special cautions are current.

The impact of COVID-19 requires flexibility in our approach to childcare and supporting caregivers. Below is a chart outlining current policy and COVID-19 adjusted practice. **Any childcare arrangements** must be discussed with child's caseworker as well as foster or kinship care support worker and approved by CS supervisor.

Policy References

Please see [Appendix 2](#) for existing policy related to childcare supports for caregivers.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Travel

All prior approved international and provincial travel is suspended. If there are exceptional circumstances to be considered, please elevate those requests to Office of the Statutory Director through your Regional Director.

Attending Funerals and Wakes

If a child in care has a family member die, they need to be supported to connect and receive comfort. If a family member passes away and a wake or funeral is being held, support the child in attending the funeral in person if the funeral/wake is following Alberta Health guidelines, including:

- The funeral/wake has no more than 15 individuals;
- Social distancing (2m) can be maintained; and
- The child will not be participating in activities that promote disease transmission (e.g. singing, cheering, close contact, sharing food or beverages, buffet-style meals).

If the child cannot attend the funeral/wake in person, explore other options to have the child attend the funeral/wake virtually, such as Skype or FaceTime.

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APPENDIX 1: EXISTING POLICY SUPPORTS FOR CHILDREN IN CARE

Policy	Purpose	Staff Role During Pandemic
<p>2.3 (Placement Resources) Kinship Support Plan [FC3899]</p>	<p>MANDATORY!</p> <p>Initial and on-going supports assist kinship care providers in meeting the needs of children placed in their homes; ensures kinship care providers have any supports they may need to successfully care for the children.</p>	<p>Complete a collaborative assessment with the kinship caregiver, the kinship and child's case team to identify COVID-19 related support needs and include them on Kinship Support Plan. Review if circumstances change.</p> <p>Form FC3899: Check "Other" under "Situation" and write "COVID-19" in the line below Include details of the situation requiring the Support Plan. Include details of supports required under "Support Services". .</p>
<p>2.4 (Placement Resources) Kinship Financial Compensation</p>	<p>Financial compensation to care for children in their home; every child is unique; caregivers may be compensated for <i>other needs</i> that <i>may arise</i> that are consistent with the care of the child; child <i>entitlements</i>.</p>	<p>Additional Supports:</p> <p>Use the listed compensation and entitlements <i>plus</i> there is extensive flexibility in addressing factors that could become a barrier to caring for a child. Please consider the guiding principles</p> <p>Special Costs: exceptional expenditures; caseworker consultation required</p>
<p>3.3.5 (Placement Resources) Foster Care Support Plan [FC3605]</p>	<p>A foster care support plan applies when there are ...<i>exceptional circumstances</i> of a foster home; to help provide foster parents with <i>the supports necessary to meet the needs of children in their care</i>.</p>	<p>Support plans require the approval of the caseworker's supervisor; however, it is expected that such approval will not be unreasonably withheld and will be exercised in a manner enabling the provision of the right services to maintain the</p>

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Policy	Purpose	Staff Role During Pandemic
		<p>child's well-being. Use the principles outlined at the beginning of this document as a guide. Form FC3605 - Check "Other" under "Situation" and write "COVID-19" in the line below Include details of the situation requiring the Support Plan. Include details of supports required under "Support Services".</p>
<p>3.3.6 (Placement Resources) Foster Care Financial Compensation</p>	<p>Financial compensation to care for children in their home; child <i>entitlements</i>.</p>	<p>Additional Compensation: equipment or supplies to facilitate or support placement</p> <p>Special Costs: consider exceptional expenditures; caseworker consultation required</p>
<p>Policy 9.2 (Intervention) Education</p>	<p>Accessing appropriate educational programming that meets the child's needs.</p>	<p>Collaborate with Education & caregiver partners to develop a plan and advocate for appropriate programs and supports; this will include ensuring that caregivers have access to all additional technology and any other additional support i.e. tutoring support. Required supports can be claimed as educational expenses.</p>

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APPENDIX 2: EXISTING CHILDCARE POLICY SUPPORTS FOR CHILDREN IN CARE AND MODIFICATIONS DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Policy 3.4 (Placement Resources) Child Care Arrangements for Caregivers

Child Care Options	Babysitting	Relief	Respite	Alternate Child Care	Modified approach during COVID-19
Reason	Short-term care (not overnight).	Caregiver away for an extended period of time.	Provided to caregivers caring for children with complex needs or for exceptional circumstances of a caregiver.	Caregivers who work out of the home or attend school and have alternate child care providers (e.g. nannies) who relate to the child in a parenting capacity. Note: This does not apply to licensed childcare providers (e.g. day care, family day home etc.) as defined under the <i>Child Care Licensing Act</i> .	Need for respite and identified as essential (ex. set up prior to COVID-19 and ongoing) Risk of caregiver burnout (need a break) Caregiver is temporarily unable to care for the child. Caregiver or family member is sick or tests positive for COVID-19
Duration	Up to 12 hours on any one occasion and usually occurs in the caregiver's home.	Overnight, weekend, a week at a time.	As outlined in a Support Plan.	Regular and ongoing basis.	As required and discussed with child's caseworker and kinship/foster care support worker.
Safety Checks	Caregivers hire babysitters at their discretion, considering the maturity, skill level and experience of the babysitter	An Intervention Record Check (IRC) is required for the relief care provider as well as any additional	Must be provided out of the caregiver's home by licensed foster parents or residential facilities.	A Criminal Record Check with Vulnerable Sector Search and an Intervention Record Check	Must follow Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services (AHS) guidelines to mitigate the risk. AHS Screening

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Child Care Options	Babysitting	Relief	Respite	Alternate Child Care	Modified approach during COVID-19
	<p>as well as the number and special needs of the children.</p> <p>The babysitter must be able to reach the caregiver in the event of an emergency.</p>	<p>information requested by the caseworker.</p> <p>Caregivers must provide the name, address and contact information of the relief care provider, the dates the child will be in relief care, and the names of any other persons in the relief caregiver's home to the caseworker and foster care/kinship care worker.</p>	<p>Caregivers must provide the caseworker's contact information to the caregiver for emergency use, in addition to the caregivers contact information.</p>	<p>The foster care/kinship care worker or caseworker will conduct face-to-face interview of the childcare provider.</p> <p>Caregivers must provide the caseworker's contact information to the alternate caregiver for emergency use, in addition to the caregivers contact information.</p>	<p>IRC as per current practice</p> <p>CRC as per current practice. See CI practice guide for further information.</p> <p>Caregivers must provide the name, address and contact information of the childcare provider, the dates of child care, and the names of any other persons in the alternate caregiver's home to the caseworker and foster care/kinship care support worker.</p>
<p>Compensation</p> <p>See Compensation Guide - For Foster and Kinship Caregivers for</p>	<p>Babysitting will be reimbursed as per the Caregiver Rate Schedule [FC1263]</p> <p>For any other reasons, caregivers compensate the babysitter.</p>	<p>Automatic Relief/Respite: As per the Caregiver Rate Schedule [FC1263], caregivers will be reimbursed for two days a month for each child placed in their home and can bank up to six days to be used at one time. Prior approval is not required.</p> <p>Relief care will be reimbursed as per Caregiver Rate Schedule [FC1263] if it is for mandatory training or other business related to caregiving.</p>		<p>Caregivers compensate alternate childcare, or may have costs included in their support plan.</p>	<p>Automatic Relief/Respite: Due to potential need for further relief/respite after COVID-19 Pandemic caregiver can bank up to twelve days to be used at one time. Prior approval is not required.</p> <p>If caregiver is sick due to COVID-19 and requires relief/respite see Policy 3.3.6</p>

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Child Care Options	Babysitting	Relief	Respite	Alternate Child Care	Modified approach during COVID-19
further details.		<p>If there are exceptional circumstances of the home, regular relief or respite may be included and reimbursed through a Support Plan.</p> <p>For any other reasons, caregivers compensate the relief caregiver.</p>			<p>Emergency Situations (Placement Resources)</p> <p>As per CI Practice Guidance:</p> <p>Coronavirus (COVID-19), caregiver will be reimbursed for alternate child care arrangements with NO PREAPPROVAL REQUIRED</p>