

Additional considerations for children and young people with high behavioural needs



This factsheet provides advice for staff about the additional considerations when supporting children and young people with high behavioural needs in residential OOHG settings during the COVID-19 pandemic period.

The following safety precautions should be considered when working with a child or young person with high behavioural needs.

Young Person-Focused Risk Mitigation Strategies

Some children and young people have high behavioural support needs. During these uncertain times, these behaviours may be triggered more easily and/or escalation may be quicker. Staff can support these young people as follows:

- Staff should be cognisant of potential spikes and likely triggers and refer back to each young person's Behaviour Support Plan (BSP) to manage the behaviour and re-direct the young person elsewhere
- Staff should be trained in de-escalation techniques and strategies
- Psychotropic medication and restrictions can be used *only* if it is in the BSP/case management plan
- Staff should be responsive to current known behaviours and cognisant of new and potential behaviours—this requires updating the BSP and case management plan to document changes as required
- With young people spending more time indoors, tensions may be heightened. Frontline staff may need to be more patient and understanding and in turn are likely to need additional managerial support to respond appropriately to day to day behaviours
- Staff should remain aware of young people whose risk of self-harm and suicidal behaviour may escalate, and supervision plans and targeted intervention should be actively considered and obtained
- Should new staff be swapped in, a thorough briefing should be shared of the behavioural history of, and the triggers for, young person(s) in their care
- To deal with escalated needs, consider the out-of-hours response requirements during the crisis

Some high needs young people are likely to abscond and may struggle to adhere to government advice on physical distancing.

The risks to the individual should be clearly explained in an accessible manner.

If a young person who is well and has not been directed to self-isolate leaves the house without a reasonable excuse, and/or breaches the public health orders, staff do not need to contact the Police. Staff should engage and educate the young person and support them to return to the house.

If Police engage the person while they are out of their placement and without a reasonable excuse, they will take appropriate action under the *Joint Protocol for Reducing the Contact of Young People in Residential Care with the Criminal Justice System*.

Suspected Young Person Case of COVID-19

While the primary aim is to keep young people in their existing and stable accommodation setting, there may be some instances where this is not appropriate (i.e. distressed behaviour resulting in risk to others, behaviours escalating, not getting on with housemates, non-compliance).

If a young person who is a suspected case is unable to cooperate with self-isolation rules, staff should:

- In the first instance, rely on the relationship between worker and young person (support them to self-isolate because of public health order)
- For children and young people with a Behaviour Support Plan (BSP) or other Individualised Plan, utilise strategies outlined in the BSP where relevant. Plans contain actions to strengthen positive behaviours and reduce behaviours of concerns

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The advice in this fact sheet has been taken from the *Guidelines: Residential Care Settings for Young People in Out of Home Care (OOHC) and COVID-19*, prepared by the Department of Communities and Justice, in consultation with ACWA and an expert group of service providers, and the Australian Services Union (ASU).

- Contact the National Coronavirus Health Information line 1800 020 080. The Information line will provide you with instructions and guide you through a process based on the information provided to them about the situation
- Inform your DCJ contract manager and CAU if a young person in your care is a suspected or confirmed case for COVID-19 and refuses to self-isolate
- If non-compliance with isolation measures is posing a risk to other young people or staff, the decision might be made (with advice from the DCJ advisory panel if required) to move the young person. If you want to consult on other placement possibilities, please contact the CAU at CentralAccessUnit@facs.nsw.gov.au

Apply the principles and procedures outlined in the NSW Joint Protocol.

Police also have the authority to respond to those not abiding by the self-isolation rules, but they will likely only be called upon to act in such cases as a last resort.

Confirmed Young Person Case of COVID-19

The general Public Health Order also relates to self-isolation of persons following **diagnosis** with COVID-19. If a young person is confirmed with COVID-19 they will be automatically required to isolate at a hospital or residence considered suitable by a health practitioner, and not leave that residence until they are medically cleared.

If a young person refuses to comply with self-isolation, contact the National Coronavirus Health Information line on 1800 020 080 and follow instructions on reporting requirements. You should also contact your DCJ contract manager to discuss how the situation could be managed.

NSW Police have advised DCJ that reasonable attempts should be made to educate the child or young person in care on the importance of isolating, and to get them to return home, before law enforcement action is considered. However, if Police support is required, Police can be contacted through Crime Stoppers on 1800 333 000, or an appropriate police officer, or police liaison officer.

If there is repeated non-compliance, a specific Public Health Order can be obtained that will enable Police to arrest a person in order to return them to their place of isolation).

This fact sheet should be read alongside **Fact Sheet 4: Preventing the spread of COVID-19**; **Fact Sheet 5: How to Manage a suspected COVID-19 case in a young person**; and **Fact Sheet 6: How to Manage a confirmed COVID-19 case in a young person**.

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