



School Social Work Association of America Position Paper

SSWAA Response to COVID-19 Health Crisis and the Role of School Social Workers

As members of the SSWAA Board of Directors, we acknowledge the urgency and fluid nature of these times, with the increasing impacts of the COVID-19 virus being felt all around the country and the world. Many of you are reading this knowing that your schools are either temporarily closed or closing soon for the foreseeable future, and this is in many ways an unprecedented development with dramatic implications for our schools, students, families, and staff colleagues. While all of us are learning the practices we need to do to stay safe and mitigate the spread of the virus, we are also trying to navigate the many questions and concerns that this crisis is raising for us, both professionally as school social workers and personally, as we worry about our own health and the health of those we love. We offer some overarching messages and recommendations in this brief statement, with a host of supporting resources to help you manage over the next few weeks and beyond as this crisis evolves and hopefully ends at some point.

1. ***Stay safe and practice good healthy habits and self-care.*** We often talk about self-care in school social work, and it's never been more important than right now. All of us are people who have many people who rely on us, who look to us for guidance, who consider us a stable presence in their lives. We can be that person now, but we need to be sure to take the time we need to rest, go outside, exercise, and talk about our own anxieties about the crisis with people we trust. Checking with your EAP on your own support resources would be a good step as well, to make sure you have supports in place when you need them. And we need to pair this with obviously modeling the very recommendations that we're hearing from our leaders (social distancing, hand washing, staying home if we're sick ourselves) and to show others that we can all do these things and that if we do them, we're going to get through this time.
2. ***Identify what your state and school district's policies are regarding SSW services as this crisis unfolds.*** Many states and local districts have shut down the physical school building but are maintaining online e-learning; others are cancelling all educational activities for a stretch of time. Still others are still open, though that could change rapidly. What is most important for this time is for you to be fully clear on what is (and isn't) expected of you and your school social work service provision during this time. For example, guidance from the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) document, "Questions and Answers On Providing Services To Children With Disabilities During The Coronavirus Disease 2019 Outbreak" indicates that schools that stay open (even if open only online for e-learning) are also required to provide special education services to students during that time (including related services). The same document states that schools and districts that fully close (no instruction) aren't required to provide special education services during the shut-down. There are also provisions for how schools are expected to provide services to students who may themselves contract the COVID-19 virus and require homebound tutoring. These issues are complex and require specific guidance from district and state education leaders,

and we encourage you to review all the supplemental resources we provide here with your administrators.

3. **Clarify how SSW services will be done in the event that you're providing them online.** Most of us are accustomed to doing most (if not all) of our work face-to-face with our students. This crisis situation may necessitate that we provide SSW services through new delivery mechanisms (Skype, Zoom, or other online videoconference technology) or via asynchronous communication e.g. having students complete SEL lessons online and reviewing them and tracking their progress using tools like Google Docs. These ideas (and many more we aren't listing here) are likely new ones for most of us, but there is a well-developed set of practices related to telehealth and e-therapy that can be drawn from, with the understanding that, again, these practices need to be fully vetted and approved by the relevant district leadership.
4. **Anticipate that this will be a long process of getting "back to normal" and may in fact require us all to become more trauma-informed in our SSW practices as schools eventually re-open.** While nobody knows the extent and scope of this crisis, and when schools will eventually re-open across the country and the world, what is certain is that these moments we're in now will have lasting impacts on all of us, most importantly the students we serve and educate. Many students are confused and fearful and are looking to us and their parents for a sense of calm and hope in this tough time. We know that many of our students' families are carrying the heavy burdens of figuring out child care, health care, and their own work situation at the very time when our country largely doesn't provide a social safety net that might ease that burden. All of these things alone are likely to produce significant and potentially ongoing trauma to vulnerable families, and we will need to do what we can to ameliorate those impacts in the weeks to come. We also should anticipate that our school educator colleagues are also dealing with multiple demands and worries and that those impacts will make a strong impression on the schools we all (hopefully) return to soon.

Earlier today, the NASW Ohio Chapter tweeted this out: "'The outbreak of COVID-19 has demonstrated how interconnected & interdependent we all are. If you need help, reach out. If you can offer help, reach out. Many communities are forming mutual aid collaboratives, connect to yours. Stay safe & well everyone.'" As much as we are the ones that many turn to, we are human and we need to find our own community supports even as we plan to keep our schools going. We stand ready at SSWAA to provide additional support and will keep our resources updated as we receive them.

Resources to guide your practice:

1. Talking with Children about Coronavirus Disease <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/talking-with-children.html>
2. Caring for Children, Helping Children Cope (Spanish Version Available) <https://www.cdc.gov/childrenindisasters/helping-children-cope.html>
3. SAMHA's Coping With Stress During Infectious Disease Outbreaks. <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/Coping-with-Stress-During-Infectious-Disease-Outbreaks/sma14-4885>
4. SAMSHA's Taking Care of Your Behavioral Health: Tips for Social Distancing, Quarantine, and Isolation During an Infectious Disease Outbreak - <https://store.samhsa.gov/system/files/sma14-4894.pdf>
5. Questions and Answers on Providing Services to Children with Disabilities During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Outbreak (March 2020). <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/idea-files/q-and-a-providing-services-to-children-with-disabilities-during-the-coronavirus-disease-2019-outbreak/>

6. Child Trends: Response to COVID-19 virus, most states have state laws that address how schools should respond to pandemics. <https://www.childtrends.org/as-covid-19-spreads-most-states-have-laws-that-address-how-schools-should-respond-to-pandemics>
7. Coronavirus: Multilingual Resources for Schools <https://www.colorincolorado.org/coronavirus>

National Mental Health and Healthcare Resources:

1. <https://www.crisistextline.org/>
2. <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org>
3. SAMHSA's National Helpline – [1-800-662-HELP](https://www.samhsa.gov/1-800-662-HELP) (English/Spanish)
4. [HealthCare.gov](https://www.healthcare.gov) provides specific information about coverage options in your state, including private options, high-risk pools and other public programs (800-318-2596)

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