

Early Years Teams—Working Together During Covid-19 Crisis

In these times of uncertainty, we recognise that the stress coming from the closure of services has affected everyone in the Early Learning and Care sector and it has been an upsetting time for all. It has also changed the face of our work for the foreseeable future and we are all trying our best to adapt. Managers/owners will be trying to negotiate new changes and make good decisions both for the team and for the setting as a whole. Team members will understand that it is a stressful time for managers/owners and will also have their own fears and worries.

It is especially important at this time for the whole team, managers, educators and auxiliary staff, to maintain relationships by staying connected. Managers, show your team how much you value them. Trusting relationships are built upon openness so if you don't have the answers to questions being asked, be honest about this. Tell team members that you will try find out for them.

Educators can also be proactive in providing ideas, information and support at any meetings you have. You may be able to take on supportive roles to assist the manager in carrying out tasks. Also, you can stay in contact with your co-workers and not just the people you are friendly with. This peer support can assist people to feel valued and connected.

Stay connected

Continue to keep in contact with your team. **Communication is key** to maintaining support for one another. Managers, try to communicate daily with a positive message, balancing thoughtfulness with humour. Consider scheduling a virtual meeting with your team on a weekly basis so you can check in with each other.

Telephone calls/email/text/meeting regularly on a 1:1 basis is helpful for keeping up morale. Managers, **schedule calls with individual team members** and encourage team members to keep in contact with each other. You can also use video conferencing apps such as Skype, Zoom or Whatsapp to 'meet' with team members. Be aware that not everyone will feel comfortable using this technology and may require time to get used to it. You may also wish to practise on family or friends so you feel comfortable before hosting a meeting. Team members may have children and animals at home so accept there will need to be some accommodation around this when scheduling meetings.

You may also want to **schedule a group meeting**. When using video conferencing software for these, it may be helpful to establish a couple of ground rules as it will be different from usual face-to-face meetings. For example, agree on one voice at a time.

Listen

An important element of teamwork is feeling valued and this is supported through listening. When people feel they are being heard it will encourage them to share ideas and talk about any concerns they might have about what lies ahead. It can be difficult to allow for silences over phone or video calls. Ask questions such as ‘tell me more’ or ‘what do you think about..’, this lets the person know you are genuinely interested and also leads to new learning and ideas for you.

Check in

Check in with one another informally to keep up morale. **Ask about one another’s emotional and physical well-being and provide support** by accessing information and resources, that may help team members to stay well. There are many opportunities for meditation and mindfulness and guidance is available online and from organisations such as Barnardos. Also consider, for example, joining an exercise classes online or creating your own exercise class using video conferencing.

Keep going

Think of opportunities to work together on a project. For example, investigate the re-planning of the environment, consider how daily routines may have less transitions or work together to engage in courses to enhance knowledge and skills. There are free courses online on topics such as Attachment in the Early Years, Infant Mental Health or information on Resilience.

Managers, ask your team for suggestions about what you could include in discussions for meetings. Perhaps you could ask a team member to ‘present’ on a topic. Or do a ‘tell us about...’ session in which team members can share something new they have learned from research.

Choose a topic to discuss and use it as a time for **team reflection** on a topic. For example, reviewing the Aistear/Síolta Practice Guide and how the framework is being used. Spend time also on planning for when settings might open again and what that might look like.

Managers, **provide goals** for individuals to work towards or ask them to share their goal for the day.

Team members, stay **connected with key children and their parents**, providing them with support and sharing resources. Consider using video conferencing to deliver a song time or storytelling to your key children. Children will be missing you as an important adult in their lives and missing their friends.

[Check out Barnardos tip sheets for parents that may be useful.](#)

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