



# Creating an Emotionally Healthy and Safe Child Nutrition Environment in Challenging Times

For additional COVID-19 Guidance, please visit the California Department of Education (CDE) COVID-19 Guidance in the Child Nutrition Programs (CNP) web page at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/cnpcovid19guidance.asp>.

## Emotional health matters in Child Nutrition Programs

Being essential employees, Child Nutrition Program (CNP) Operators may experience stress and anxiety during the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, unemployment, school closures, loss of loved ones, and necessary physical distancing measures are traumatic events that can lead to poorer health and wellness outcomes for children and individuals in our communities. Stress can show up in our bodies, emotions, and behavior in different ways; and can change our ability to do our jobs, learn, or care for others. The good news is there are simple things you can do to protect your health and create an emotionally healthy and safe environment for your staff and the students and families you serve during these challenging times.

### Start with Self-care



**Manage information responsibly.** Hearing about the pandemic repeatedly can be upsetting. Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories, including social media. Stay up-to-date about the outbreak by using reliable and accurate sources such as the Center for Disease Control (CDC) or the California Department of Public Health.

**Take care of your body.** It is important to honor your own basic needs and well-being. Maintain a healthy diet, get adequate sleep, and exercise. Take bathroom breaks and drink plenty of water. Avoid or limit caffeine and use of alcohol.

**Stick to a daily routine.** Everyone responds to stress differently. Know your emotional and physical limitations. It is okay to draw boundaries. Set regular "office" hours.



**Make time to unwind.** Taking breaks is the simplest way to manage stress and maintain your ability to care for others. Try to do activities you enjoy such as playing games and puzzles, going for walks, reading, or writing in a journal. Focus on positive aspects of your life and things that you can control. Practice mindfulness or breathing and relaxation techniques.

**Connect with others.** Whether working or staying at home, stress can increase feelings of isolation. Work in teams and limit the amount of time working alone. Talk to people you trust about your feelings and experiences. If you or a family member is feeling overwhelmed, seek support from your health care provider or religious leader.

## Use Trauma-informed Principles and Practices

Below is a list of trauma-informed practices that can be used in CNP activities to help staff, students, and families come through this experience more resilient and connected to their school community. You can use these practices at home or with family and friends. The six trauma-informed principles to apply are:

1. Safety
2. Trust and transparency
3. Peer support
4. Collaboration and community
5. Voice and choice
6. Respect



Additional information and infographic are available on the CDC 6 Principles Guiding a Trauma Informed Approach web page at [https://www.cdc.gov/cpr/infographics/6\\_principles\\_trauma\\_info.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/cpr/infographics/6_principles_trauma_info.htm).

### Staff

- Communicate clearly about procedures. Explain “the why” behind decisions or practices.
- Listen to ideas and ask for input. Ask if there is anything you can do to help staff feel safer.
- Build in staff time to check in about feelings about work and other stresses during the crisis.
- Reach out to new people and agencies who can help you and your team.
- Delegate. For example, what decisions can staff make without approval?
- Stop stigma related to COVID-19 by knowing and sharing the facts.

### Students

- Use kind but calm gestures, facial expressions, movements, and tone of voice.
- Show that you care, express strength and compassion.
- Support multiple ways for communicating with students and their families, such as video messages, social media platforms, email, phone, flyers, or text.
- Recognize school community events with colorful packaging, stickers, decorations, or signage.
- Invite students to give feedback about menu options with surveys or taste testing.
- Be a role model. Be respectful, fair, and without bias in interactions with all persons.



### Families

- Provide clear, direct, and frequent updates to families.
- Help families know what to expect, be consistent and predictable.
- Share information and resources available in the community for additional support.
- Provide choice whenever possible. Use menu boards and signage to show options.
- Work together with other agencies to offer shared delivery of services to families.
- Do not assume a particular age, culture, or people group is more likely to have COVID-19.

## Additional Resources

This information was adapted from a list of resources provided on the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Aware COVID-19 and Stress web page at <https://www.acesaware.org/heal/covid19/>. For additional resources download the ACEs Aware Stress Management Resource List (PDF) at <https://www.acesaware.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/ACEs-Aware-Stress-Management-Resource-List.pdf>

**This institution is an equal opportunity employer.**