

# Virtually There: Supporting Kids and Identifying Signs of Safety Concerns

## RECOGNIZE SIGNS OF ABUSE

If you have concerns about child safety, it is perfectly OK to talk to the parent or caregiver. Open up a dialogue and let them know you are available for them to talk to. Most parents or caregivers are not comfortable asking for help because it can feel like a failure. Let them know that especially now, we can all use a hand.

### Signs of child maltreatment include:

- Bruising to the ears, neck, or torso
- Unexplained injuries including cuts or welts
- Aggression toward siblings, pets, or other animals
- Sudden changes in behavior or unexpected drop in grades
- Seems afraid of parents or other adults
- Demonstration of sexual knowledge inappropriate for age
- Physical needs not being met (medical or dental)
- Caregiver is known or heard to repeatedly blame, belittle, or berate the child
- Child is aware of and exposed to domestic violence incidents between caregivers
- Child witnesses illegal substance use by a parent or caregiver



## OBSERVE AND TAKE NOTE

- Monitor the environment closely during video chats for changes in any behaviors, as well as any surrounding sounds, such as yelling.
- Observe and document any bruises or marks on the child during video chats. Remember that bruising on the ears and neck are particularly concerning and red flags for child abuse.
- Ask who is in the home and pay attention to who may be listening in to the call.

## WHEN IN DOUBT, REPORT IT OUT

If you suspect child abuse or neglect is occurring, report it. **All Kentuckians are mandated reporters.**

Examples of when you might follow-up for more information or call the **Department for Community Based Services** with a concern include:

- Anything the caregiver or child told you that raised concerns for the child's safety.
- The child or caregiver has concerning injuries or unexplained bruises, welts, or cuts.
- You observe evidence of illegal substance use in the home or other hazards that could lead to child injury/illness, such as weapons in reach or extremely unsanitary conditions.
- The caregiver appears to be impaired to the extent it impacts their ability to safely care for their child.
- The child looks or behaves significantly different than is typical for them or would be reasonably expected.
- You are repeatedly unable to get in touch with the family (unrelated to barriers like internet or phone access) and are seriously worried for their safety because of prior safety concerns due to domestic violence or substance use, for example.



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## PRACTICE TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE AND SELF-CARE

### **Practice patience and maintain flexibility**

- Teachers and school staff are feeling pressure to ensure learning is taking place, and families may be struggling with food insecurity, joblessness, or many other stressors exacerbated. Remember to practice patience with students and caregivers while they navigate virtual learning.

### **Give yourself (and others) some grace**

- Many of us are making decisions for ourselves and our family based on the available information and we can't be expected to do everything right all the time. Bad days (for everyone) are going to happen. Be gentle with yourself and others as we navigate this new way of doing things.

### **Practice self-care (and encourage others to do the same)**

- During stressful moments, focusing on breath allows you to take a moment to shift into a relaxed, calmer state.
- Get up and move. Movement and exercise can help reduce anxiety.

## CREATE CONNECTIONS

### **Regularly meet with children and their caregivers**

- Make a clear plan on how to and when to stay in contact while virtually learning.
- Ensure privacy when talking to children and families.
- Support families in accessing the tools they need for virtual contact.
- Explain how video chats, online forums, and phone calls will work.

### **Ask questions and be curious**

- Check in on what is going well, how they are feeling, what worries them, what they like best about being home and what they miss about not being in school.
- Listen to what children are saying and note any changes in responses.
- Ask if they are in need of support and work with them on solutions to find that support.

### **Talk about safety**

- Identify age appropriate ways to discuss safety and trusted adults.
- Encourage children to talk to adults, like teachers, or other family members if they don't feel safe.

*If you believe a child is being abused or neglected, call the Child Protection Hotline: 1-877-KYSAFE1 or [reportitky.org](https://reportitky.org)*

