
Aspiranet

~ November 2020 ~

Monthly Training Topic

Preparing for the Holidays

Each year as the holidays approach we provide suggestions and guidance in preparation for supporting and supervising the children and youth in your care, along with managing holiday activities and gatherings. With the current pandemic, holiday celebrations and traditions are perhaps more important than ever for many. And while holiday festivities can and will continue, modifications to celebrations and gatherings are necessary to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

On Oct. 9, 2020, the California Dept. of Public Health (CDPH) provided the following guidelines to all Californians:

This guidance applies to private gatherings, and all other gatherings not covered by existing sector guidance are prohibited. Gatherings are defined as social situations that bring together people from different households at the same time in a single space or place. When people from different households mix this increases the risk of transmission of COVID-19.

Mandatory Requirements for All Gatherings

All persons planning to host or participate in a private gathering, as defined above, must comply with the following requirements. Local health jurisdictions may be more restrictive than this guidance. Refer to your local guidance for what is allowed in your area.

1. Attendance

- Gatherings that include more than **3 households are prohibited**. This includes everyone present, including hosts and guests. Remember, the smaller the number of people, the safer.
- Keep the households that you interact with stable over time. By spending time with the same people, risk of transmission is reduced. Participating in multiple gatherings with different households or groups is strongly discouraged.

2. Gather Outdoors

- Gatherings that occur outdoors are significantly safer than indoor gatherings. All gatherings must be held outside. Attendees may go inside to use restrooms as long as the restrooms are frequently sanitized.
- Gatherings may occur in outdoor spaces that are covered by umbrellas, canopies, awnings, roofs, and other shade structures provided that at least three sides of the space (or 75%) are open to the outdoors.
- A gathering of no more than three households is permitted in a public park or other outdoor space, even if unrelated gatherings of other groups up to three households are also occurring in the same park or other outdoor space. If multiple such gatherings are occurring, mixing between group gatherings is not allowed. Additionally, multiple gatherings of three households cannot be jointly organized or coordinated to occur in the same public park or other outdoor space at the same time – this would constitute a gathering exceeding the permitted size.

3. **Don't Attend Gatherings If You Feel Sick or You Are in a High-Risk Group**

- Anyone with any COVID-19-like symptoms (fever, cough, shortness of breath, chills, night sweats, sore throat, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, tiredness, muscle or body aches, headaches, confusion, or loss of sense of taste/smell), **must stay home and not come into contact with anyone outside their household.**
- Anyone who develops COVID-19 within 48 hours after attending a gathering should notify the other attendees as soon as possible regarding the potential exposure.
- People at higher risk of severe illness or death from COVID-19 (such as older adults and people with chronic medical conditions) are strongly urged not to attend any gatherings.

4. **Practice Physical Distancing and Hand Hygiene at Gatherings**

- For any gatherings permitted under this guidance, the space must be large enough so that everyone at a gathering can maintain at least a 6-foot physical distance from others (not including their own household) at all times.
- Seating must provide at least 6 feet of distance (in all directions—front-to-back and side-to-side) between different households.
- Everyone at a gathering should frequently wash their hands with soap and water, or use hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available. A place to wash hands or hand sanitizer must be available for participants to use.
- Shared items should not be used during a gathering. As much as possible, any food or beverages at outdoor gatherings must be in single-serve disposable containers. If providing single-serve containers is not possible, food and beverages must be served by a person who washes or sanitizes their hands frequently, and wears a face covering. Self-serve items from communal containers should not be used.

5. **Wear a Face Covering to Keep COVID-19 from Spreading**

- When gathering, face coverings must be worn in accordance with the CDPH [Guidance on the Use of Face Coverings](#) (PDF), unless an exemption is applicable.
- People at gatherings may remove their face coverings briefly to eat or drink as long as they stay at least 6 feet away from everyone outside their own household, and put their face covering back on as soon as they are done with the activity.
- Face coverings can also be removed to meet urgent medical needs (for example, to use an asthma inhaler, take medication, or if feeling light-headed).

6. **Keep it short**

- Gatherings should be two hours or less. The longer the duration, the risk of transmission increases.

7. **Rules for Singing, Chanting, and Shouting at Outdoor Gatherings**

- Singing, chanting, shouting, and physical exertion significantly increases the risk of COVID-19 transmission because these activities increase the release of respiratory droplets and fine aerosols into the air. Because of this, singing, chanting, and shouting are strongly discouraged, but if they occur, the following rules and recommendations apply:
 - All people who are singing or chanting should wear a face covering at all times while singing or chanting, including anyone who is leading a song or chant. Because these activities pose a very high risk of COVID-19 transmission, face coverings are essential to reduce the spread of respiratory droplets and fine aerosols;

- People who are singing, shouting, chanting, or exercising are strongly encouraged to maintain physical distancing beyond 6 feet to further reduce risk.
- Instrumental music is allowed as long as the musicians maintain at least 6-foot physical distancing. Musicians must be from one of the three households. Playing of wind instruments is strongly discouraged.

While these guidelines may be frustrating or even seem “excessive”, it is important to remember that the CDPH notes that:

COVID-19 continues to pose a severe risk to communities and requires all people in California to follow necessary precautions and to adapt the way they live and function in light of this ongoing risk. The safest way to gather is to spend time with people in the same household or to gather virtually.

In general, the *more people from different households* a person interacts with at a gathering, the *closer* the physical interaction is, and the *longer* the interaction lasts, the higher the risk that a person with a COVID-19 infection, symptomatic or asymptomatic, may spread it to others. Public health studies have also shown that the risk of transmission is increased in indoor spaces, particularly when there isn't appropriate ventilation. Unlike indoor spaces, wind and air in outdoor spaces can help *reduce* spread of the virus from one person to another.

It is recognized that for the vast majority, if not all of us, we are ready to get back to our “normal” way of living our lives. As it's been said many times since the start of the pandemic, for now, this is the “new normal”. Yes, life *is* different, but different doesn't necessarily have to mean “bad”. On the positive side, it's an opportunity to maintain traditions while perhaps adding some new creative ideas to our celebrations. It's also an important opportunity to reflect on what is truly important, particularly with regard to with whom and how we will spend the holidays this year.

It is acknowledged that the holiday season is a time when the loss of being apart from family or loved ones can be especially difficult, and this loss is felt more deeply by children and youth in foster care. For children and youth who may have restrictions to visitation along with other safety steps taken in response to COVID-19 this holiday season may be particularly challenging.

It is important to validate the feelings of loss and disappointment that your family and your children and youth may be feeling this year regarding the holidays. Share your own feelings and encourage your children and youth to express their thoughts and feelings by simply being available to listen.

While it's important to acknowledge that things *are* different, it is also important to focus on the traditions and festivities that you can enjoy this holiday season. Ask your children and youth what traditions, foods, or activities they celebrated with their family and find a way to incorporate their favorites into your holidays this year.

Maintain Routines & Structure: We frequently emphasize the importance of family routines and structure because they provide predictability which can help to increase a sense of safety, while reducing anxiety and acting out behavior. With the current situation, this is probably more important than ever.

Activities: An important aspect of structure is planning activities that keep for children and youth engaged. Together with your children & youth plan some activities (low or no cost). Keep your children engaged by involving them in holiday arts & crafts, cooking, board games, baking, homemade cards or gifts, watching favorite holiday movies, outings to the library, volunteering, etc.

Family Connection & Visitation: To help children and youth with separation from their family check with your Aspiranet Social Worker about plans for family contact during the holidays. The County Social Worker may approve additional video calls and/or schedule in person visitation (with masks and safety protocols). To further help with family connection suggest your child/youth make handmade cards and even simple handmade gifts for their birth family. If there is not in-person visitation, check with your Aspiranet Social Worker about mailing card/gifts to the birth parents or through the County Social Worker. Always check with your Aspiranet Social Worker to confirm visitation and phone contact as approved by County Social Worker.

Houseguests & Visitors:

- * As noted above, at this time, ideally visitors to your home are very limited. If you do plan to have visitors, please discuss in advance with your Aspiranet Social Worker possible visitors and houseguests, particularly if overnight guests are anticipated.
- * As always, it is important to take into consideration the safety and supervision of your foster children when there are additional people and activities in the home and with COVID-19, health and safety precautions will need to be carefully considered.
- * Houseguests may not dislodge a foster child from his/her bedroom, and houseguests who are 18 or over may not share a bedroom with a foster child. In addition, houseguests that remain for 14 consecutive nights or 21 nights in a calendar year, must complete a background check, including fingerprints.
- * Consider the comfort and protection of your foster child(ren) when planning for visitors and houseguests. Talk with your children and youth about who will be visiting and review sleeping arrangements, etc. Be aware that children in your care may react differently to additional people in your home and they may need additional supervision and support during that time.
- * It is important to also be respectful of children and youths' right and need for privacy. As age appropriate, talk with your children and youth about what they want others to know about them, and how to respond to questions that may come up. It's also helpful to remind family and friends ahead of time of the confidentiality you honor regarding the children in your care.

Important Confidentiality Reminder:

The holidays are a natural time to share photos and excitement about celebrations over social media, but remember that as a foster parent you may not post any information or photos of children/youth placed in your care anywhere others may have access to the information or photos. Please also remind your family and others who may be celebrating with you to not post photos or info of the children or youth in your care.

Holiday Travel:

As you know, travel as this time increases the risk for exposure to COVID-19. If you are planning to travel during the holidays, according to the CDC it is important to consider current COVID-19 cases in the area you will travel, any possible travel restrictions, and frequency of stops during travel to your destination. Make sure each family member has a mask and discuss with children the importance of social distancing and hand washing/sanitizing when stopping along the way. Consider packing your own food and beverages to reduce the need to stop in crowded fast food restaurants, and have a picnic at a rest stop instead. If travel will take you out of county, please notify your Aspiranet Social Worker as soon as possible, as advance approval will need to be obtained from the child's County Social Worker.

Supervision & Safety:

- * With the hustle and bustle of the holidays, supervision becomes even more important at home as you will likely be busier than normal. Engage your children as much as possible in holiday preparation to help provide for both structure and supervision during this busy time. It may mean letting go a little but ideas such as setting the table, putting bows on packages, sprinkles on cookie dough, etc. can be made into fun, simple activities.

Pay close attention to the following during the holidays for older children and youth:

- * Access to alcohol at that may be available during holiday festivities.
- * Increased "at risk" behaviors, including AWOL, suicidal thoughts/gestures, cutting, signs of depression, anxiety, etc. due to the potential for heightened struggles during the holidays.

Communicate your Plans and Concerns:

Most importantly while preparing for the holidays, we ask that you inform your Social Worker of your holiday and supervision plans as it will help your Social Worker to best support you and the children in your care. Also, please notify Aspiranet (including On Call Social Worker if after hours) immediately if you have any concerns regarding the youth in your care.

Please sign and return this page to your Aspiranet Social Worker for training credit.

My signature below indicates that I have completed the November 2020 "Preparing for the Holidays" training.

Signature Foster Parent #1

Date

Print Name Foster Parent #1

Signature Foster Parent #2

Date

Print Name Foster Parent #2

Aspiranet Authorized Signature

Date

Training credit: _____ minutes