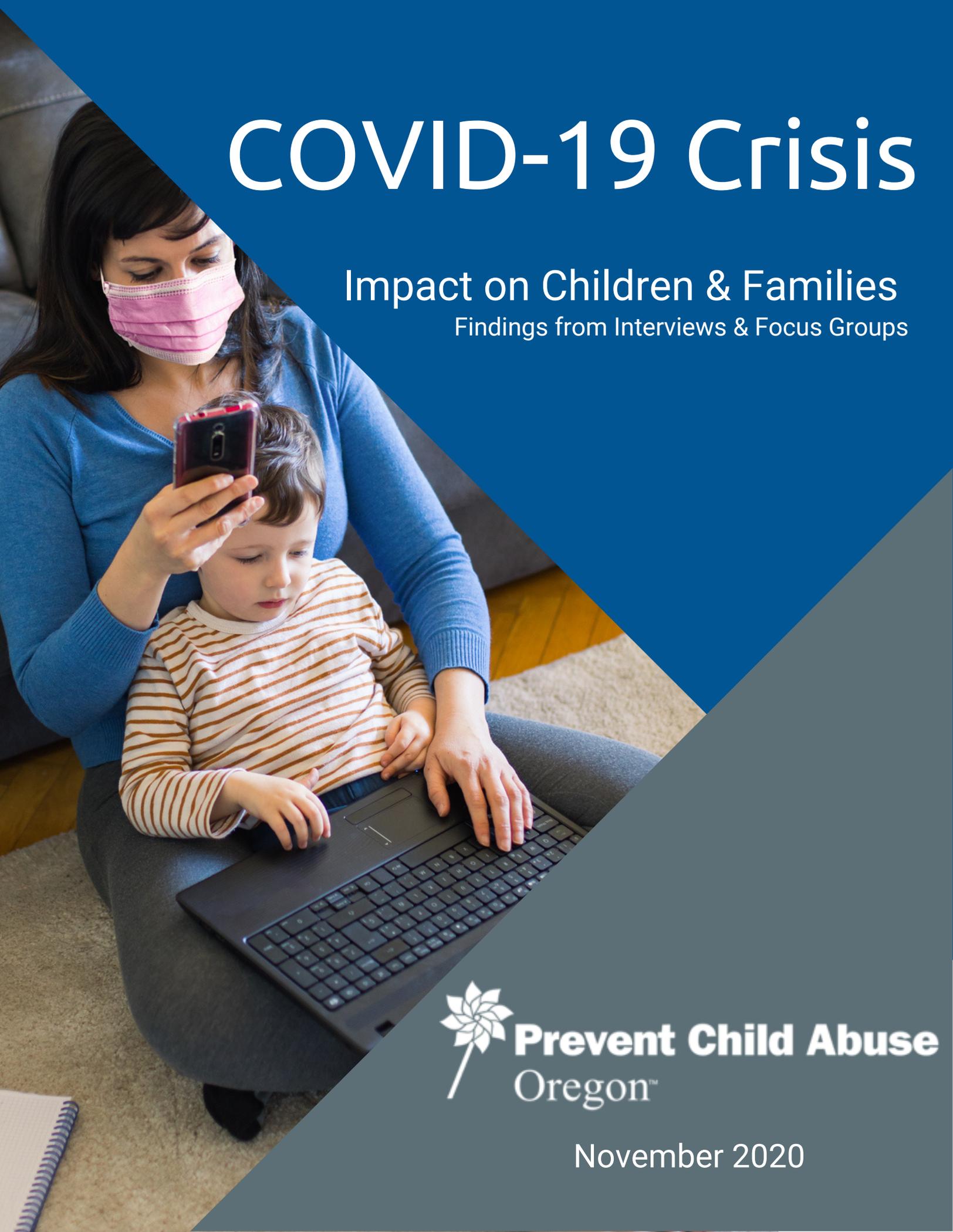


COVID-19 Crisis

Impact on Children & Families

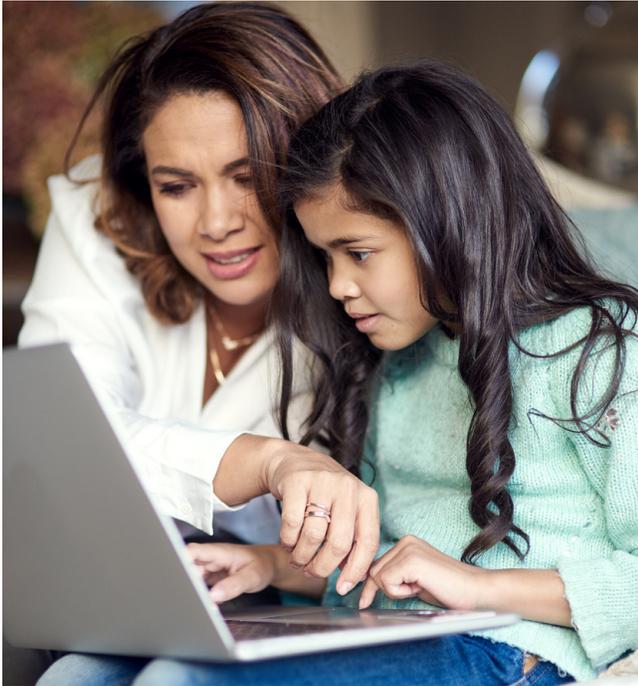
Findings from Interviews & Focus Groups



Prevent Child Abuse
Oregon™

November 2020

Findings from Focus Groups & Interviews



INTRODUCTION

We are witnessing an immediate crisis for parents and families – juggling financial stressors, job loss, virtual schooling, isolation, and challenges for access to technology and high-speed internet. In particular, families involved in child welfare have experienced no relief in expectations despite the understandable challenges related to COVID-19.

As a result, Prevent Child Abuse Oregon (PCAO) convened parents and partners working with families to learn about the most pressing issues during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The goal was to learn from them and develop a plan of action.

METHODS

This process was initiated by the members of PCAO's Prevention Community Advisory Council and is the product of interviews and small group discussions conducted by board members and staff. During the month of October PCAO held a series of small group discussions and one-on-one interviews with 45 people representing partners, parents, and professionals working on the front lines with families. Additionally, written feedback was aggregated and submitted from 400 parents. The purpose was to gather specific information about the most pressing issues facing Oregon families during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.



“...I'M WATCHING EVERY GAIN MY KIDS AND I HAVE WORKED FOR OVER THE YEARS BE FOR NOTHING.” MOM OF 3

METHODS CONTINUED

We intentionally engaged in conversations which were inclusive of diverse rural and urban voices focusing on education, child welfare, and self-sufficiency. This did not include interviews with everyone with an interest in, or who works in, the field of child abuse prevention.

INTENT

These findings reflect what we heard from interviewees at a single point in time about the impacts on families from the pandemic. It is an overview for providers and policy makers about current topics of concern as parties work to prevent child abuse and strengthen families during this challenging time. It is not intended to be a census of all current perspectives and issues on how the current pandemic has impacted efforts to prevent child abuse.

HIGH LEVEL FINDINGS

1.) Families, especially those with younger school-aged children, are at a crisis point with virtual school.

- Parents are seeing normally easy-going children begin to exhibit aggression, tantrums, sadness, and anxiety related to virtual school.
- Parents indicate they need to sit at the computer with their younger child the entire time to ensure they stay engaged.
- Children are overwhelmed with assignments, lack of social connection and frustrated parents.
- Many parents believe they need to leave the workforce to ensure their children's academic success. Parents are sacrificing work and relationships with their child to ensure participation in school.
- Some schools require up to eight logins daily for young children, proving stressful for both parents and children.
- We learned there are children who have not participated since school began and are “missing”. Schools may or may not be doing anything to find and engage these children and their families.
- In some cases, children with special needs or IEP's have yet to start school, and others who have, are doing so with no additional support. Parents are attempting to fill these gaps, further increasing their stress.

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS:

- a. Create public awareness campaign assuring parents that children’s behaviors are normal as a result of social isolation/COVID; reminding parents it’s okay to opt out of school if current expectations are unmanageable and impacting the health of their family.
- b. Consider re-visiting the virtual school approach for all young children and divert time and funds to providing activity packets, materials, and support directly to families.
- c. Reduce required check-in times, length of sessions, and eliminate “homework/busy work”.
- d. Create ‘parent cohorts’ or ‘pods’ allowing opportunities for parents to share strategies and discuss challenges and offer mutual support.
- e. Increase communication and coordinating between school districts and programs serving families and youth with boots on the ground. For instance, North Clackamas formed a diverse group, led by social workers from their district, who meet weekly to address current crisis and respond to parent’s needs.
- f. School personnel connect with parents in communities, knocking on doors, providing parental/educational support, and safely connecting with families.
- g. Launch or explore expansion of a Parent Warm Line utilizing either professionals or peers to support parents.
- h. Encourage and support homeschooling for families experiencing intense stress from virtual learning.
- i. Advocate for the development of comprehensive resources guides by school district for extensive distribution through schools and other support programs.
- j. Create easy access social-emotional support for caregivers to be delivered via mass media- tv, radio, livestream, etc.



2. Disparities in access to technology and internet is leaving our most vulnerable children and families, and those in rural communities, with little to no access to the myriad of essential supports.

- Many services have been launched to support families virtually, and yet still too many families do not have smart phones or other technology to access these services.
- Many parents are using their cell phones to log their children in to virtual schooling.
- Even where school districts have provided tablets or computers, they lack the infrastructure to offer TA to parents when the technology does not work or breaks, and reports or replacements can be 2-4 weeks delayed, forcing children to miss school for long periods of time.
- Families with children 0-4 are experiencing a gap without the same access to technology or hotspots some school districts have organized for school-aged children.

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS:

- a. Build partnerships with tech companies to sponsor technology for every family in Oregon
- b. Identify partnership to ensure increased access to high speed internet that is readily available for all families
- c. Expand the use of traveling hot spots to include families with young children.



"WHEN I CALLED THE SCHOOL TO ASK FOR A HOTSPOT, THEY SAID THEY WERE ALL OUT AND THAT I WAS WELCOME TO BRING MY TWO BOYS, 6 AND 9, ALONG WITH MY NEWBORN BABY, TO THE SCHOOL PARKING LOT TO DO CLASS ON THE WIFI"-MOM OF 3



3. Mental health support that is responsive to culture and language is in dire need.

- Parents in treatment/addiction recovery through virtual support are overwhelmed with lack of one-on-one peer support while also doing virtual learning with their children.
 - Youth and parents alike frequently have no privacy options to engage in any available mental health supports
 - Black families have been hardest hit by COVID and yet have little to no support with their grief and healing.
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- Teens are exhibiting depression from being on computers for lengthy periods- some reporting not getting out of bed all day while they complete classes.
 - Foster parents are lacking support from the state or schools in helping them during this crisis-forcing many are considering ending their foster care roles.

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS:

- a. Explore virtual mental health for families, especially families color, connecting them to culturally and linguistically appropriate providers
- b. Have realistic school expectations, thus ensuring parents can focus time on the mental health challenges within their family
- c. Create and encourage opportunities for peer support and coaching
- d. Engage recovery programs in more individualized support for parents that is flexible to meet their current availability

4. Youth are at increased risk for online sexual predators.

- School counselors are hearing from teens engaging in increased time on all forms of social media during school time, leading to fears about online safety.
- Parents are concerned about online safety but don't know how to keep their children safe when they are on screens all day.

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS:

- a. Create youth friendly announcements and tips for safety to promote on popular social media sites aimed directed at youth
- b. Increase teachers awareness of concerns and request discussion of online safety regularly during class time
- c. Develop handout for parents with strategies to educate and increase the online safety of their children

5. Children and youth who may be unsafe at home have always been told “tell a trusted adult”, but many lack private access to a trusted adult right now, and also teachers are at a loss as to what to report of things they may be observing in homes.

- Many children are online with their teachers while caregivers are sitting next to them or within earshot.
- Children have been told to tell a trusted adult if they are unsafe, but many don't know that they can make a report themselves or reach out directly for help.

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS:

- a. **Involve teachers in educating children and youth about safety during their virtual check ins**
- b. Create a pop-up in online classrooms informing youth that they can report and how to do it safely
- c. Encourage schools to divert funds for dedicated School Social Workers where teachers can refer students in need
- d. Create a handout and training for teachers for recognizing signs of abuse and when to report versus when to refer to a school counselor or other designated individual

6. Safe and stable housing is at risk for many families.

- Families reported being behind on rent and utilities, some up to three months and were worried about what would happen when the moratorium on evictions ends.
- Parents reported layoffs and struggles obtaining eligible unemployment benefits.
- In some cases where parents have maintained employment, reduced hours has meant increased financial struggles.

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS:

- a. Provide direct financial relief to families.
- b. Expedite unemployment benefits.
- c. Extend moratorium on evictions.

In response to these findings, PCAO will:

- **Beginning January 2021, launch a virtual emotional support series** with Dr. Amy Stoeber, Licensed Psychologist and Trauma-Informed Consultant, along with a parent consultant: **“I DIDN’T SIGN UP FOR THIS”**.
 - This series will validate the experiences of parents, address their concerns, and create a safe space for families to process stress in their current environment. It will offer tangible tools for parents to support their children and manage overwhelming stress.
- **Create statewide partnerships** to elevate the struggles all parents are experiencing and ways families can cope.

Partner with PCAO to support Oregon’s children and families by:

Offering Financial Support:

- PCAO is investing in the initial launch of Dr. Amy’s parenting series for children of all ages. Will you consider investing?
- How else might you be able to **invest** in our efforts?

Provide Expertise - What is Your Role?

- Create connections for parents – providing support groups or mentoring
- Create connections for parents within school settings to provide much needed support
- Connect community partners to align resources to better support children and families
- Weigh-in on the recommendations, or share new ideas, particularly on how to
- effectively provide relief for families

For more information, or to join the effort to support families, contact Pamela Heisler, Executive Director, pamela@preventchildabuseoregon.org, 971-350-9384. To access to this document and the 2-page summary, visit our website:

www.preventchildabuseoregon.org/news.