

# Foster Families.

## Supporting children with Histories of Instability



### Navigating, Growing and Thriving Through COVID-19 Uncertainty

Through the uncertainty associated with COVID-19, foster families require their supporting care team members (e.g., placement support workers, child protection case managers, professionals) to bring awareness to the needs of both children and caregivers. The support should bring collective intent to the building blocks of **'stability'**, **'connections in community'** and **'mindset of growth'**. This factsheet articulates 'how' this can be actioned through key scripts and strategies.

## WHAT?

### What's Happening?

- Foster families have a pivotal role in the growth and development of children and young people.
- Many children living in foster care have histories of instability which is associated with a loss of control and feelings of insecurity. Uncertainty attached to COVID-19 has the potential to: (1) re-trigger past experiences in children and young people, (2) lead to increased levels of 'under the surface' insecurity and (3) manifest in different coping behaviours (e.g., clinginess, avoidance, aggression). Changes in family contact and school arrangements at this time may also impact on this expression.
- Foster parents and caregivers are not immune from world uncertainty. Therefore, there is increased probability that 'foster families' (caregivers and children) are collectively under higher stress at this time.
- Therefore, care team members need to bring awareness to the needs of both children and caregivers, and bring ongoing focus and intent to building: (1) stability, (2) connections in community and (3) a mindset of growth. There are significant opportunities for child growth, healing and developmental outcomes being activated through this period.

# WHAT?

Building Blocks  
of Growth Intent

# HOW? scripts and strategies

## Stability

In times of uncertainty, it is important that care team members bring an intent to foster **'stability'** in and around the foster families (caregivers and children) they are supporting. In action this includes:

- **Routine** - Support children and caregivers implement a predictable daily routine, that includes structure and purpose, healthy eating and sleep patterns, showering and dressing, and balancing screen time and movement time, inside and outside time, and connection versus solo time. Encourage the family to document routine.
- **Rituals For Normality** - Encourage rituals that bring a sense of 'normality' (e.g., Friday take-away). Support and coach a 'parenting plan' that brings focus to consistency.
- **Consistent Messages** - Work side-by-side with caregivers to develop a communication plan for each child that brings focus to messages around COVID-19, changes in family contact (and why it is occurring) and future care planning. Remain on message.
- **Circle of Concern** - Encourage the family to have a daily routine where each family member has opportunities and activities that provide them 'choice' or a level of control (e.g., play led by child). Ensure both caregiver's and children's voices are heard.
- **Grounding Points** - Encourage and support the naming of healthy activities and experiences that 'ground' all family members. Encourage a shared and common language of being 'grounded' (e.g., 'being in zone', 'focused', 'present', 'in control'), and talk about the importance of side-by-side caregiver-child grounding activities (time-in or co-regulation). Encourage identified 'safe spaces' where all family members can go to ground self, including having some alone time (when needed).
- **Intentional Media Engagement** - Encourage and coach the implementation of family boundaries around media engagement, and only accessing trusted news sources.
- **Self-Care** - Encourage the development of a family 'Self-Care' or 'Keeping Us Strong' plan that is developed side-by-side with all family members, and brings focus to the family agreements to support positive relationships (given increased time together). Encourage family conversations about 'care' and 'safety', and role model and talk out loud about how you are bringing focus to this in your support. Help the family identify the key people, support services and professionals they can access, including back-up caregivers and other support services within their community (e.g., financial).

## Connections in Community

In times of uncertainty, it is important that care team members bring an intent to foster **'connections in community'** in and around the foster families (caregivers and children) they are supporting. In action this includes:

- **Keeping Connected Plan** - Talk about the importance of 'social connection'. Work side-by-side with individual children and family members to map and identify their key connections, friends and supports. Encourage (or develop) plans for safe and meaningful connections with these members (including children's biological family).
- **New Rituals** - Encourage the foster family to explore and taste test new rituals that foster fun and unconditional connection points between all family members (e.g., Try It Tuesdays, Fun Friday, Monopoly Mondays, weekend inside camping).
- **Negotiated Connection Points** - Be available in your support (for children and caregivers), and negotiate a routine for ongoing connection or communication points that you will enact consistently (e.g., weekly phone call, zoom meetings, text messaging).
- **Balanced Conversations** - Make yourself available for 'COVID-19 conversations' that focus on fact and explanations (child and/or caregiver). Coach families to have 'balanced conversations' that include factual COVID-19 conversations that are integrated within other 'life conversations' that bring focus to play, fun and future.
- **Suite of Connection Tools** - Coach and support the family to implement a suite of connection tools (phone, social media and online - as matched to children's developmental age). Encourage caregivers to implement up-front boundaries, with ongoing monitoring. Support the identification of 'tech savvy' support team members.
- **Respond Rather Than React** - Bring ongoing focus to remaining grounded and present in your support - where you respond rather than react - and focus on 'connection before correction' as the foundational pillars. Ensure you don't unintentionally reject nor abandon a child/caregiver at this time. Coach and role model proactive self-care, where caregivers do special things for themselves (e.g., read a book, watch a movie).

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## Mindset of Growth

In times of uncertainty, it is important that care team members bring an intent to foster a **mindset of growth** in and around the foster families (caregivers and children) they are supporting. In action this includes:

- **Side-By-Side Support With Shared Hope** - Create a space to validate or acknowledge that anxiety, ups and downs, and uncertainty are normal during times of significant change. Encourage and coach child-caregiver 'time-in' together to reflect and process the experience, including curious reflections about how the child is experiencing their world ('I wonder how you feeling about the changes around you'). Role model a dialogue of shared hope: 'we are in this together - we will get through this together'.
- **Forward Intentions** - Role model and encourage conversations that tap everyone's hopes and dreams for the future, including identifying a meaningful shared activity that the family (or yourself and family members) will undertake together at the end of the transition (e.g., camp, going to a coffee shop). Encourage 'family projects' that provide a positive legacy for future (e.g., vegetable garden) and the mastering of new skills (e.g., riding their bike, musical instrument, reading).
- **Realistic Expectations** - Encourage the family to set realistic expectations or goals for each day – and allowing some grace when things don't go to plan, and rewarding small achievements. Coach caregivers to monitor and manage their expectations of themselves and their children (e.g., 'letting go of the small stuff').
- **Balanced Thinking** - Role model and coach balanced thinking, and identifying key scripts carers can apply to support healthy and growth-focused reflections with children. Talk about the potential of significant child growth (e.g., improved attachment, resilience) to occur at this time. Conduct caregiver-led conversations that focus on 'how' child growth could be activated at this time (empower caregiver wisdom).
- **Growth Opportunities** - Provide permission for everyone to think differently or construct different meanings or stories about challenging or uncertain times. Role model and coach how families can look for growth opportunities.
- **Connecting to Nature** - Encourage the family's connection with nature (e.g., nature walk) that include reflections on how everything is adapting and growing to change.

## Who is LBI Foundation?

Life Buoyancy Institute Foundation is a Public Benevolent Institution dedicated to building the mental health and wellbeing of Australians in need by empowering and growing local community capacity.

We support individuals, teams and communities integrate the science of wellbeing, resilience, trauma-informed practice and growth with their local wisdom and knowledge to make a difference within their community.

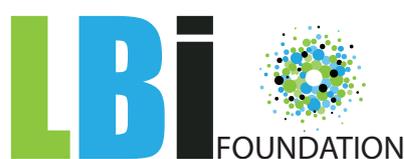
We offer a suite of services that draws upon the IMPACT Program and the What-What-How® method to enable parents, teachers, schools, agencies, programs, supporting adults and practitioners to implement intentional, personalised and practical responses that:

- Respond (rather than react) to the unique growth needs of individual and community
- Build individual and collective capacity for whole-of-life outcomes

We have a growing network of IMPACT Coaches. These are community members who are trained, accredited and supported to build the capacity of their communities across education (primary, secondary, alternative and adult), foster care, child protection, residential care, mental health, disability, homelessness, family preservation and other community service settings.



**IMPACT**



[www.lbi.org.au](http://www.lbi.org.au)

The content on this factsheet was reviewed in consultation with members of LBI Foundation's 'Science to Practice' Group (see [www.lbi.org.au/science-to-practice-group](http://www.lbi.org.au/science-to-practice-group)).

These are IMPACT Coaches and key community representatives who are embedded within local schools and agencies who support the translation of best-practice science to local context. The content of this factsheet is mapped to an explainer video on LBI Foundation's online training and resource platform: [www.lblearninghub.org/navigating-uncertainty](http://www.lblearninghub.org/navigating-uncertainty).

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