

Five Ideas to Help Kids and Families

Generally speaking, children and youth do not get sick from or exhibit symptoms of COVID-19 (although there have been a few and we are still learning about the virus). They are, however, subject to many challenges arising from the pandemic and so they need special consideration so their generation does not mature into adults living and working at financial, physical or mental disadvantage, simply because we, the adults now, didn't think to ask, talk, or think outside the proverbial box.

What follows are five suggestions which could result in better outcomes for children and youth. They were written with the pandemic in mind. They bring to light, however, issues which have challenged families and youth for years prior to the onset of this novel coronavirus. We implore you to consider our recommendations now and also glean some ideas which can be carried forward once this odd era passes.

COVID-19 Resources

- Voices for Georgia's Children and the Georgia Statewide Afterschool Network (GSAN) have compiled a [family and community resources page](#), including resources for parents and kids, guidance from state agencies, online educational resources, and more.
- GSAN has curated a [list of resources, tools, and virtual trainings](#) to support afterschool and summer learning programs during COVID-19.
- Voices and GSAN are also offering a collection of [comprehensive charts](#) outlining how Georgia's child-serving agencies are responding to COVID-19, what state government is doing to mitigate these challenge, as well as lay out recommendations for actions not yet taken.

1. Ask youth summer enrichment and childcare providers what kind of support they need to serve children and youth and how the city can support their long-term sustainability.

Why? Many essential workers and parents who return or attempt to return to the workplace need safe, enriching and reliable providers to help care for their children and youth. Likewise, kids fare better when they have access to new ideas and experiences, and new ways to learn. Unfortunately, many childcare, afterschool and summer enrichment providers are already functioning on unforgiving business models, lacking funds or access to personal protective equipment, or unable to keep employees or clients as a result of contagion worries. Now, as a result of the pandemic, they are on the verge of shuttering their doors permanently.

Helpful Resources

- Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning created [school-age resources](#) to enhance a child's daily home schedule with creativity and fun learning.
- Get Georgia Reading created a list of [free learning resources](#) for families.
- [DECAL FAQ](#) provides PPE vendors and contact information.

- Boys and Girls Clubs [Youth Development Toolbox](#) app offering fun activities and learning opportunities.
- Girls Who Code Club has [activities](#) on STEM related topics. (Grades K – 12)
- [The American Federation of Teachers](#) has a wealth of resources to support activity planning for youth at home.
- [TED-Ed](#) has daily lesson plans with interactive, video-based learning. (Grades K – 12+)
- [Creativity Catapult](#) offers activities sorted by age, skills, difficulty, duration, participants, & topics. Free to access, but please note a cost is associated with some activities. (Ages 2 – 14+)
- [MENTOR The National Mentoring Partnership](#) has tips for mentors who are newly thrust into the world of text-based mentoring.
- [Respectful Ways](#) is offering FREE access to online programming to any school or camp in need of digital SEL curriculum. (Grades Pre-K – 12)
- [STEM at Home](#) has webinars and other resources from STEM Ecosystems to keep children engaged and learning with STEM at Home.
- [SafeCyber](#) has online safety guidance and resources for adults managing online activity of youth.

2. Encourage families to maintain regular child health and mental health care such as well child visits, immunizations, ongoing therapies, medications, and mental health appointments, as well as making sure children have health insurance coverage.

Why? In addition to the fact that immunizations prevent life-threatening illnesses for the immunized as well as infants or medically-compromised people near the immunized, vaccinations are required to return to school, whenever that happens. Plus, keeping up with pediatric appointments and physical and mental therapies give children the greatest chance at success by teaching families about healthy habits and by catching health and mental health issues as early as possible, thereby addressing concerns before they become worse. In addition, we need to ensure the protection of existing pediatric practices and encourage new ones, as the pandemic has kept children from regular visits, and financially endangered many providers' ability to maintain a practice. Prior to COVID-19, there were already 63 Georgia counties without a pediatrician. Let's not let the novel coronavirus make it worse! To that point, parents are more likely to maintain good health for children when they are not as worried about the cost – and since more than 220,000 children in Georgia lack health insurance, getting kids insured should be a priority for us all.

Helpful Resources

- [Find a Pediatrician or a Pediatric Specialist](#)- Parents can enter their zip code or city and state to find a pediatrician or pediatric specialist registered with the American Academy of Pediatrics.

- [Find Your Local Federally-Qualified Health Center \(FQHC\)](#)- To access pediatricians and other healthcare providers, parents can use this website to find a FQHC in/near their community. Follow the link and select a category/specialty (e.g. Primary Care, Family Planning, Pediatrics, Vision) to find the closest FQHC.
- The Georgia COVID-19 Emotional Support Line provides 24/7 free and confidential assistance to callers needing emotional support or resource information as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Emotional Support Line is staffed by volunteers, including mental health professionals and others who have received training in crisis counseling. 866-399-8938
- 1-800-CHILDREN (1-800-244-5373) is a free statewide helpline that will give you information you can use wherever you live in Georgia. Callers can talk to a trained individual who cares and wants to help. If you find yourself feeling isolated, worried about your family, concerned about being alone at home with children, or in need of essential resources like food or funds for utilities and rent, please call!
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network has created a resource of parent/caregivers guides to help families and children cope:
 - [Supporting children during COVID-19](#)
 - [Parent/Caregiver Guide to Helping Families Cope with COVID-19](#)
- Center for Disease Control and Prevention has created a resource page for [stress and coping](#).
- The [Georgia Department of Public Health](#) is providing COVID-19 testing information and public safety updates. Search your local public health department location [here](#).
- To apply for benefits, visit [Georgia Gateway](#).

3. Collaborate with landlords, tenant advocates and other stakeholders to mitigate rent payment and eviction challenges.

Why? While there is a national pandemic moratorium on immediate fiscal repercussions on federally-backed mortgages and evictions for federally-sponsored rent programs, and Georgia eviction hearings are supposedly stayed until at least June 13 per Georgia's Judicial State of Emergency, nevertheless, there is guidance neither for non-federal programs, nor regarding eviction notifications, the latter of which can follow a person for years, ruining credit and opportunity whether or not the notification resulted in an actual eviction. All this to say that home instability, transiency or homelessness is not good for child health or mental health. Trauma resulting from loss of place, changing of communities, and loss of friends and local relationships can all significantly affect how a child's brain develops. This stress can cause children to act out, become depressed, run away, and have suicidal ideation, as well as mental health issues and physical ailments lasting well into adulthood. Both the financial stability of landlords as well as the mental and physical stability of children and parents are crucial in these situations. Engagement by local leaders, along with helpful resources, interventions and mediation, can allow the

government, landlords and the community at large to find caring ways to solve or lessen such challenges.

Helpful Resources

- [United Way](#) provides a list of organizations that provide rental assistance for those unable to pay
- [Georgia Legal Services Program](#) provides free attorney assistance to clients for housing & benefits issues (and more) to people in all 154 counties outside metro Atlanta. New clients should call 1-833-GLSPLAW.
- The [Georgia Legal Aid COVID-19 Resource List](#) has helpful info on utilities (including those that have suspended service cancellations), evictions, foreclosures, and mortgages, as well as info on other basic needs.
- [Atlanta Volunteer Lawyers](#) provides free attorney assistance to clients facing evictions at or below 200% of the poverty rate. You can call (404) 521- 0709 to see if you qualify.
- [Atlanta Legal Aid](#) provides legal assistance to homeowners and tenants across metro Atlanta. You can call (770) 648-4290 to see if you qualify.

4. Work with local food banks, schools, afterschool and summer enrichment programs, local state agency personnel (DPH, DFCS, DBHDD/CSB), grocers, and farmers to develop long term food access plans.

Why? As many, if not all of you, are aware, Georgia's food banks, school personnel and national guard – and many others - have been working overtime to help get food to struggling Georgians. With summer on the horizon, schools scheduled to close for the year and no end in sight to economic woes for countless families and children, planning for the next phases of food access and distribution is going to be key. Food banks are already faced with diminishing reserves, and faith-based distributors are forced to compensate for the absence of elderly volunteers who are sheltering in place (and rightly so), as grocers navigate supply chain issues and farmers wrestle with harvest and decreased predictable demand. By coordinating existing government, non-profit, association and business networks, efficiencies and new strategies can be developed, perhaps lessening the strain of the foreseeable future.

Helpful Resources

- Georgia Organics has created a [Good Food Guide](#), which is a list of farmers and businesses to help connect with food resources nearby.
- Georgia Organics has created a document on [farmer's markets](#) locations, operation hours, and safety protocol.
- Food banks:
 - [America's Second Harvest of Coastal Georgia](#)
 - [Atlanta Community Food Bank](#)

- [Chattanooga Area Food Bank](#)
- [Feeding the Valley](#)
- [Food Bank of Northeast Georgia](#)
- [Georgia Mountain Food Bank](#)
- [Golden Harvest Food Bank](#)
- [Middle Georgia Community Food Bank](#)
- [Second Harvest of South Georgia](#)
- [DECAL FAQ](#) provides Child and Adult Care Food Program and Summer Feeding Service Program updates and information.
- [Wholesome Wave Georgia](#) helps people across the state of Georgia enroll in SNAP (Spanish-speaking staff are available)
- Resources and information regarding the Women, Infant, and Children program can be found [here](#).
- The [Georgia Department of Agriculture](#) is providing COVID-19 updates and information regarding food access and food safety.
- To apply for benefits, visit [Georgia Gateway](#).

5. Work with your juvenile court, schools, DFCS office and DBHDD contacts to get on the same page about restorative child-centered responses to challenging behaviors. A thoughtful approach can offset child and youth reactions to trauma, abuse and/or stress incurred while sheltering-in-place.

Why? We know that the majority of children will return to school (and the world in general) with some behaviors that arise out of the strain of the pandemic. Grief, fear, anxiety, depression, and ramifications of unaddressed issues of domestic violence, abuse and neglect inevitably lead to behaviors confusing to school personnel, families and the children and youth themselves. Instead of addressing such with punitive measures (which rarely are successful in addressing root causes of misbehavior), it is more productive to respond in manners proven to be successful in supporting youth and helping them grow. By practicing positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) and preparing those who engage with children and youth to ask not “why did you do this?” but rather, “what happened to you?” can make all the difference in short- and long-term outcomes. By so doing, the conversation can change from accusatory to restorative, and takes into account those things that trouble a child or youth, allowing for government and community systems or protocols to be developed for cost-effective success. By being trauma responsive schools, courts and public safety personnel can significantly improve the trajectory of a kid’s development for years to come.

Helpful Resources

- [At least 100 youth](#) have been released and transitioned to community-based forms of intervention by the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice or the presiding judge. Find the contact information for your jurisdiction’s juvenile court judges [here](#).

- Contact your local DFCS and DBHDD offices to identify ways to collaborate on a restorative child-centered response. DFCS office contact information can be found [here](#); DBHDD contact information can be found [here](#).
- The schools and school districts in your jurisdiction will be the primary source of information and collaboration. GaDOE is sharing resources for schools and communities on their *Georgia Insights* website, [here](#).

Below are a few helpful things to consider across *all* COVID response policy-making for children:

- Disproportionate effect of unemployment on families and children of color
- Transportation of people or supplies to people or supplies
- Cost/federal grants/state support
- PPE for child-serving populations and families
- Streamlined application processes for processing efficiency and contactless submission
- Challenges faced by: single parents, those caring for ill or elderly family members, and pregnant or new moms, essential workers who are parents
- Exacerbated (and hidden) occurrence of child abuse and domestic violence as a result of shelter-in-place isolation

Voices for Georgia's Children, founded in 2003, is the only comprehensive policy and advocacy organization committed to improving the lives of children in Georgia. Voices is comprised of insiders, conveners, and experts. We are pragmatic, data-driven, nonpartisan, and focused on equitable, comprehensive policy solutions for Georgia's children. Our work is framed in a holistic "whole child" perspective that allows us to identify how different policies impact children and to propose solutions that benefit children on multiple levels.

The Georgia Statewide Afterschool Network (GSAN) is a public-private collaborative that envisions a day when all communities in Georgia have the resources to provide exceptional afterschool and summer programming. Our mission is to advance, connect, and support high quality afterschool and summer learning programs to promote the success of children and youth throughout Georgia.

The Georgia Municipal Association, founded in 1933, is the only state organization that represents municipal governments in Georgia. It is a voluntary, non-profit organization that provides legislative advocacy, educational, employee benefit and technical consulting services to its members. Its mission is to anticipate and influence the forces shaping Georgia's cities and to provide leadership, tools and services that assist municipal governments in becoming more innovative, effective and responsive.