**CHILD USA’s WEEKLY BLOG | March 19, 2020**

**Coronavirus, Children, and the Common Good** by Professor Marci Hamilton, Founder and CEO CHILD USA

If nothing else has been learned in the last twenty years from the child sex abuse scandals, it is that adults tend to prefer and protect their own interests and treat harm to children as collateral damage.  Again and again we see powerful adults choose image, power, and money over defenseless children.  It has taken sweeping legal reform of statutes of limitations, massive media attention, and a sea change in public opinion to begin to rein in this instinct.   Let’s not let the novel coronavirus, or COVID-19, be another example of adults focused on their well-being while children are abandoned, neglected, and abused.

You might say to me now that COVID-19 is actually much more dangerous to the elderly and, therefore, it is only appropriate that children taken a backseat right now.  Well, not so fast.  It appears that children have not been as threatened by COVID-19 as the elderly, but a new study indicates that it can be severe in the most vulnerable children: babies and toddlers.  <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/17/health/coronavirus-childen.html>

Have you watched the Netflix series [*The Trials of Gabriel Fernandez*](https://www.netflix.com/title/80220207?source=35)?  It is a searing portrait of the ability of our culture to let a child die from the most severe abuse and neglect by his own mother.  Actually, it is an indictment of every adult who came into contact with that child.  As heartbreaking as this brilliant series is, it is the right time for us to watch it, because the lesson is this: we have to go beyond our comfort zone, our rote requirements, and our usual “procedures” to save the most vulnerable.

I make this point to raise awareness that the pandemic poses dangers to children beyond the virus itself as certain, potentially deadly, threats to children can increase with their isolation – hunger, abuse, and neglect rise when the social safety net is cut as it is in a nation on quarantine.

**The Checklist for Child Well-Being**

Today, CHILD USA is releasing a [checklist](http://www.childusa.org/) for the well-being of each child.   It is up to each of us to ensure that the children of this nation are protected during this period of upheaval, each and every one.   The challenges are extraordinary as millions of children are not in school and therefore do not have the safety net of teachers and administrators who are mandated reporters of abuse and neglect.  But we can take measures to mitigate these new shortcomings.

First, kids must eat.  For every school district that is closing, there is a moral obligation to continue to feed the kids who normally receive breakfast and/or lunch.  The ten largest cities have various initiatives**,**as we documented in our [weekly CHILD USA data drop](http://www.childusa.org/).  Districts should be keeping the bus drivers in business and let them deliver breakfast and lunch to as many kids as possible.  As parents lose work and income, the list of kids getting food must increase.

But couldn’t the school districts do more through their bus routes to ensure the well-being of the children who are now at home?  What about using the buses to distribute textbooks and books from the school libraries?  How about soccer balls and footballs and anything else a kid could play with in their backyard, or chess and checkers sets for indoor play?  Teachers (or even the PTA) could devise a reading contest and kids could sign out books and return them on a weekly basis.  Yes, books!  What about a guidance counselor or nurse on each bus to talk to kids about health, mental health, or other questions?  Just having another set of eyeballs on these children is a good thing, assuming the adults do what they should if they see a child at risk of abuse or neglect.

Second, this is not the time to abandon bedtime rituals.  Kids need sleep to stay healthy and the parents who insist on keeping everything as normal as possible including bedtime will do their children a huge favor.

Third, children deserve to have their health*and* safety protected.  For the kids who are already being monitored in some way by state services, let’s also protect them from COVID-19.  With children stranded at home, this is not the time to halt oversight.  State workers need to continue home visits, but they need protective gear and state workplaces need to mandate that those employees who are ill stay home, unlike the [New Jersey Department of Children and Families](https://www.change.org/p/phil-murphy-protect-nj-dcpp-workers-from-covid-19?recruited_by_id=28e66310-5ca4-11e9-ba48-9da6d0c6c2d4&recruiter=951648901&use_react=false&utm_campaign=psf_combo_share_initial&utm_content=fht-20910688-en-us%3Av12&utm_medium=facebook&utm_source=share_petition&utm_term=psf_combo_share_initial).

We call on all governors to order their state child protection agencies to step up home visits and safety checks for children.   This part of the social safety net needs to stay intact.  Let’s be clear: the perpetrators who seek out children for trafficking and/or sex will look at this moment as a golden opportunity unless we make these children our shared priority.

You can find CHILD USA’s full checklist [**here**](http://www.childusa.org/).   Please read it and share it.

In the context of this emergency, we cannot abandon our children, because we know better.  Instead, let’s learn from recent lessons and curb the instinct to set kids aside while we attend to “more important” issues.  This pandemic could easily introduce more dangers to our vulnerable youth than the virus itself.  It doesn’t have to.