

Child welfare  
engagement with  
families during a  
pandemic: A  
clinical tool  
initiative across  
Ontario, Quebec  
and New  
Brunswick

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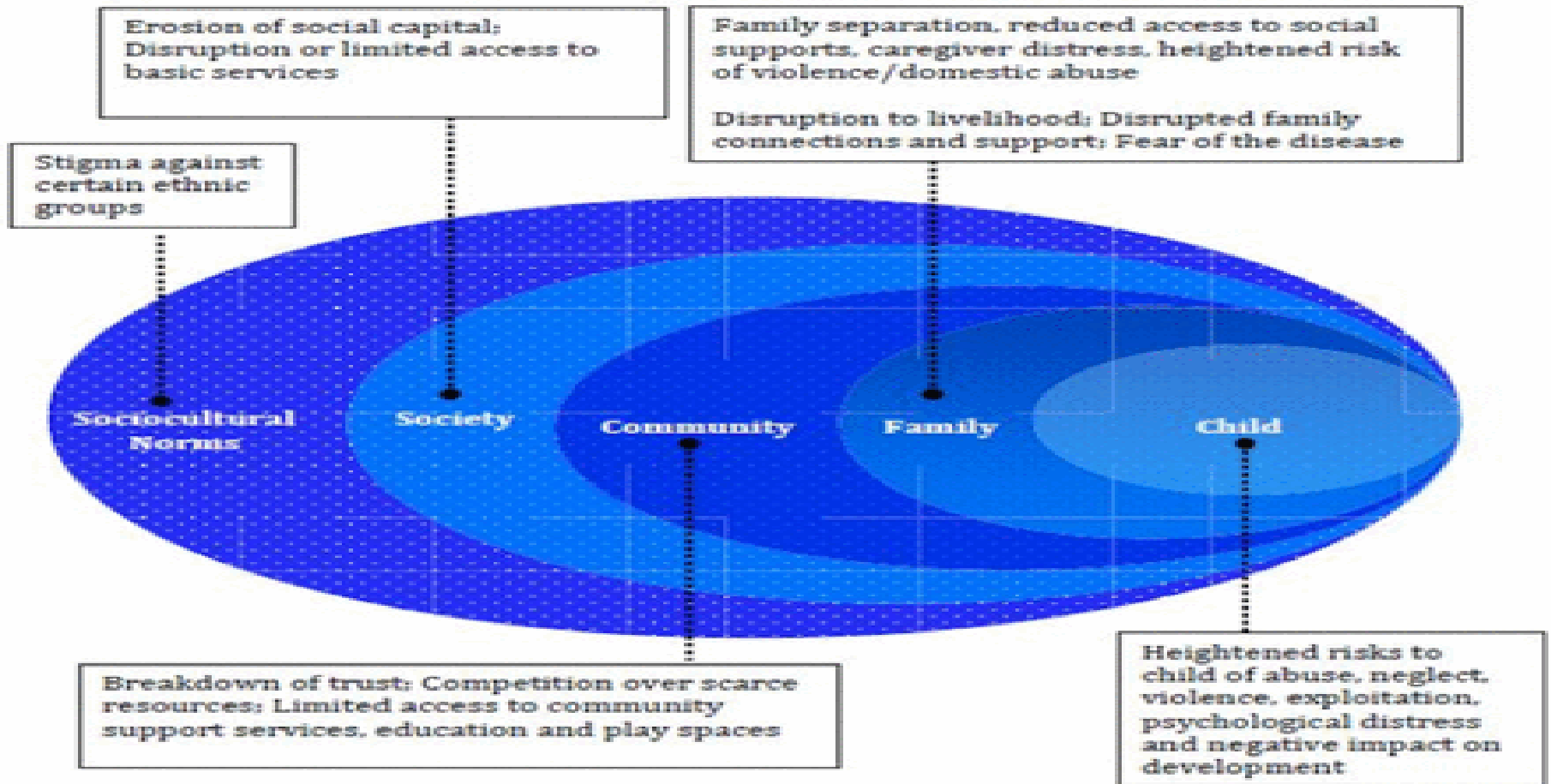
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Delphine Collin-Vézina*

# COVID and Vulnerable Children and Youth

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- According to [APA](#), [The Alliance](#), [UNICEF](#), and [the Quebec National Institute of Excellence in Health and Social Services](#), children and youth are likely to have been exposed to greater risk of child maltreatment and exposure to violence amidst COVID.
- This outcome has been observed following other health emergencies and natural disasters:

*“We know from previous health emergencies that children are at heightened risk of exploitation, violence and abuse when schools are closed, social services are interrupted and movement is restricted.”(UNICEF, 2020)*



Socio-ecological impact of COVID-19, from The [Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action](#)

# COVID and Vulnerable Children and Youth

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- Paradoxically, the number of cases of maltreatment reported to child protection services has been declining.
- This decline in reporting has already been observed in Canadian cities/provinces and some US states:
  - 32% in Montreal,
  - 31% in Edmonton,
  - 40% in New Brunswick,
  - 50% in Los Angeles,
  - 60% in Massachusetts, and
  - 62% in Washington.

# COVID and Vulnerable Children and Youth

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- This decrease can be explained, at least partly, by the lack of contact of children and adolescents with other adults, especially school staff, who usually are looking out for students' well-being and who report worrying situations to authorities.
- Recent analyses in [Quebec](#) and [Ontario](#) have shown that 1/3 of reports to child protection services are made by teachers and school staff, and that suspicion of physical abuse was the main concern for school referrals.

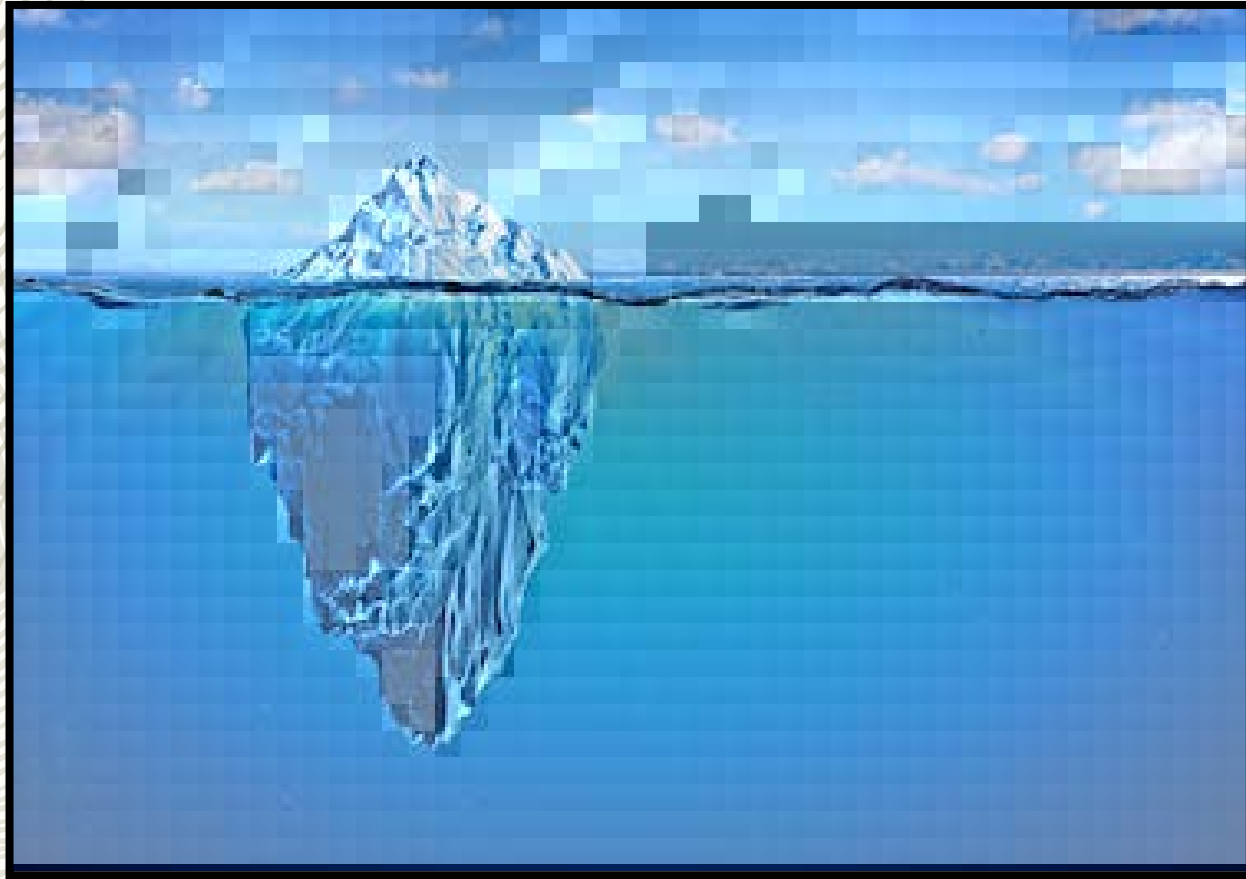
# Impact of Schools Closure

We investigated the impact of school closures on the reports made by school personnel and received by the Director of Youth Protection of CIUSSS Centre-Sud in Montreal, by comparing reports received during the pandemic period (spring 2020) with those received one year prior, void of any exceptional contexts (spring 2019).



# Children Suffering is Even More Invisible

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# The Indirect Impacts of Public Health Measures

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- Most policies to prevent the spread of the virus have not given high priority to the needs of children and youth.
- “The irony is public health measures aimed at preventing one disease can exclude and undo preventive efforts to intervene proactively in the lives of many vulnerable children and young people globally. The indirect impacts and unintended consequences of pandemic responses are potentially most damaging. These include delayed acute presentations, foregone treatment for chronic health conditions and increased burden of mental health conditions.”



# Building Resilience with Concrete Actions

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# The Clinical Tool

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- With the growing concerns about the economic impact of the pandemic on vulnerable families, a clinical tool was created to assist workers responding to these families.
- A team of researchers from the University of Toronto, with colleagues from Québec and the U.S., and five Ontario child welfare agencies formed a partnership to design and implement the tool.

# Tool Development

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- Tool development involved three sequential stages:
  1. Tool Format – the tool is formatted as an easy-to-use online checklist, in order to aid critical decision-making and provide a road map for systematic thinking.
  2. Secondary Data Analyses – conducted univariate and bivariate analyses using data from the OIS-2018 to examine economic hardship concerns among families.
  3. Face Validity – using the modified Delphi method, the research team refined the tool and established face validity.

# The Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (OIS – 2018)

- Determine rates of investigated and substantiated child maltreatment.
- Collects data on forms and severity of maltreatment, the characteristics of children and families, and service dispositions.
- Multi-stage sampling design:



# Secondary Analyses of OIS-2018 Data

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- The OIS-2018 measures economic hardship by asking investigating workers about:
  - Whether the household had run out of money for: food, housing, utilities, transportation, telephone/cellphone service.
  - Household income source (full-time, part-time work, etc.)
  - Other economic concerns such as home overcrowding and the number of moves in the past 12 months.
- Secondary analyses were conducted to determine the number of families that had dealt with economic hardship and their characteristics, and to identify the most important hardship related questions for inclusion in the tool.

# Clinical Checklists for Children & Youth Workers

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- **Clinical checklists were created to facilitate workers' conversations with families involved with the youth services during the COVID-19 pandemic.**
- The clinical checklists are short and easy to fill out (in a few minutes) and were tested in the field and are based on tangible experience.
- 2 checklists: In-Home Health and Mental Health
- 23 items in total
- Yes/No
- Online



# Clinical Checklists for Children & Youth Workers

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- They are designed to help convey four principles to reduce toxic stress related to the pandemic: respect, information, connection, and hope.
- They do not replace existing clinical knowledge.
- Each checklist is accompanied by online resources and tools in order to have quick reference to current practices and protocols related to the pandemic. The lists are updated as these practices and child services responses evolve with the pandemic.
- Publication: . [doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2020.104706](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2020.104706)



# Health checklist Q1 to Q5

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<b>1. Does the family have enough food, medication and supplies for one week (including diapers, formula baby food, and hygiene supplies)?</b>	No
<b>2. Overall, is there money for utilities, food, and housing?</b>	No
<b>3. Has anyone in the household had any COVID-19 symptoms or is at increased risk of contracting the disease?</b>	Yes
<b>4. Is anyone in the household experiencing other health issues that require care?</b>	Yes
<b>5. Are members of the family experiencing delayed or interrupted scheduling of routine vaccination because of the pandemic?</b>	Yes

# Health checklist Q6 to Q11

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<b>6. Is the family understanding the importance of physical distancing, including during time spent outside the home?</b>	No
<b>7. Are disinfectants and soap available and regularly used in the household? YES</b>	No
<b>8. Does the family require assistance with making a plan for adequate supervision of children in cases where caregivers would need to leave children unattended (errands, medical care)?</b>	Yes
<b>9. Does the family have internet and cellular connection at home as well as devices needed to access the connection?</b>	Yes/ No
<b>10. Is the caregiver at work, inside or outside the home?</b>	Yes
<b>11. Is the family impacted by childcare/school closures?</b>	Yes

# Mental health checklist Q1 to Q5

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<b>1. Has the psychological wellbeing of children, youth and caregivers declined because of the stress of being confined or COVID-19 anxiety?</b>	Yes
<b>2. Are the children and youth in the home displaying challenging behaviors due to the impact of confinement or COVID-19 anxiety?</b>	Yes
<b>3. Are caregivers overwhelmed because of the stress of being confined or COVID-19 anxiety?</b>	Yes
<b>4. Are conflicts and tensions increasing between the adults in the family due to the COVID-19 crisis?</b>	Yes
<b>5. Are the teenagers and adults in the family presenting with alcohol and drug abuse that is of concern for them and/or other children in the home?</b>	Yes

# Mental health checklist Q6 TO Q10

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<b>6. Is the family noting a loss of routines that impacts the family members' wellbeing?</b>	Yes
<b>7. Is the family having difficulty planning time for fun during the day?</b>	Yes
<b>8. Is the family experiencing social isolation and lack of connectedness?</b>	Yes
<b>9. Is the family's neighbourhood (high density housing or rural or remote area) exacerbating caregiver's stress?</b>	Yes
<b>10. Is the family able to maintain physical distancing practices given religious/cultural and community activities?</b>	No

# Specific Resources for Indigenous families

<b>Question 12 – Health</b>	<b>Question 11 – Mental Health</b>
<p>Web page of the Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador (AFNQL) on COVID-19 (<a href="#">ENG</a>)</p> <p>COVID19 – Information for indigenous communities (<a href="#">ENG</a>)</p> <p>Inter-School Games of the First Nations Education Council (<a href="#">ENG</a>)</p> <p>Adapting to Telework and Getting Organized (First Nations) (<a href="#">ENG</a>)</p> <p>Daily Routine for Children (<a href="#">ENG</a>)</p> <p>Adapting to Telework and Getting Organized (First Nations) (<a href="#">ENG</a>)</p> <p>Daily Routine for Children (First Nations) (<a href="#">ENG</a>)</p>	<p>Ekuen pua &amp; friends - Resilience anthem in the Innu tongue (<a href="#">IN</a>)</p> <p>24/7 First Nations and Inuit Hope for Wellness: 1 855-242-3310</p> <p>Traditional Indigenous Kinship Practices at Home: Being Child-Centered During the Pandemic (<a href="#">ENG</a>)</p> <p>Decolonizing Community Care in Response to COVID-19 (<a href="#">ENG</a>)</p> <p>COVID-19 concerns, closures have families and communities heading out on the land (<a href="#">ENG</a>)</p> <p>Talking to children about Covid-19 (<a href="#">ENG</a>)</p> <p>Talking to young kids about Covid-19, an illustrated poster (<a href="#">ENG</a>)</p>

# Intimate Partner Violence Checklist Q1-7

<b>1. Did you discuss how the IPV in the home might change because of COVID-19 due to stress/anxiety of self-isolation or social distancing? For example, has the partner/offender work situation changed?</b>	Yes
<b>2. Did you discuss how COVID-19 will impact safety in the home where the IPV has occurred? For example, does the non-offending parent and children have access to internet (e.g. without perpetrator's knowledge)?</b>	Yes
<b>3. How have you engaged Dad or the offending parent?</b>	Yes
<b>4. Did you discuss the impact of social isolation and strategize about how to get the family more connected to supports?</b>	Yes
<b>5. Did you discuss what to do if violence in the home gets worse?</b>	Yes
<b>6. Did you have a conversation about a new safety plan? For example, is shelter still an option or does the family feel differently about calling the police during COVID?</b>	Yes
<b>7. Have you asked about practices that could protect or endanger children during a pandemic (where to hide or where to go if violence occurs)?</b>	Yes

A decorative graphic of a feather, rendered in a light beige or tan color, positioned on the left side of the slide. The feather has a central rachis with numerous barbs extending outwards, creating a fan-like shape. It is oriented vertically, pointing downwards.

# The Clinical Tool

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# Child welfare engagement with families during a pandemic

These checklists were developed to facilitate worker conversations with families involved with child protection and social services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Clear and easy checklists can aid in critical decision-making and lower the possibility of making mistakes by providing a road map for systematic thinking particularly during this stressful and unprecedented situation. Checklists that aid in facilitating systematic thinking have four qualities:

1. Delineate a clear break in the process
2. Are quick and easy to complete (under 60 seconds usually with between 5-9 critical items)
3. Supplement existing knowledge and expertise
4. Are field tested and based on actual experience. They are intended to help convey four trauma-informed principles: respect, information, connection, and hope

## Checklists

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[General Mental Health Checklist](#)



[In Home Health Checklist](#)



[Adolescent Clinical Checklist](#)



[Caregiver Alcohol and Substance Abuse Checklist](#)



[Case Worker Checklist](#)



[Child In Care Checklist](#)





## IN HOME HEALTH CHECKLIST

1. Does the family have enough food, medication and supplies for one week (including diapers, formula/baby food, and hygiene supplies)?

Yes	No	Notes
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="text"/>

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2. Overall, is there money for utilities, food and housing?

Yes	No	Notes
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="text"/>

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3. Has anyone in the household had any COVID-19 symptoms or is at increased risk of contracting the disease?

Yes	No	Notes
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="text"/>



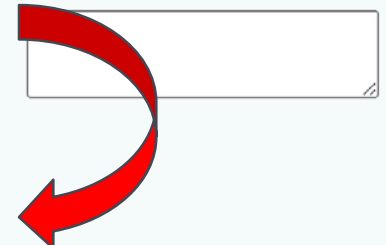
# IN HOME HEALTH CHECKLIST

1. Does the family have enough food, medication and supplies for one week (including diapers, formula/baby food, and hygiene supplies)?

Yes	No	Notes
<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="text"/>

*Follow these links to learn tips to discuss the issue with the family and find solutions, including foodbanks:*

- Be prepared for COVID-19 ( [ENG](#) )
- For supports in your community, including food banks, please see: ( <https://211ontario.ca/> )
- Canada's COVID-19 Economic Response Plan ( [ENG](#) )
- Emergency benefits for Canadians in the context of COVID-19. This document is being updated on an ongoing basis. ( [ENG](#) )



2. Overall, is there money for utilities, food and housing?

Yes	No	Notes
<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="text"/>

*Follow these links to learn tips to discuss the issue with the family and find solutions including budget resources and renters' rights programs:*

- Canada's COVID-19 Economic Response Plan ( [ENG](#) )
- Emergency benefits for Canadians in the context of COVID-19. This document is being updated on an ongoing basis. ( [ENG](#) )
- For supports in your community, including food banks, please see: ( <https://211ontario.ca/> )



# Status of Implementation

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- The developed tool will continue to have a critical utility as the economic and social impacts of the pandemic continue to affect families
- The research team will continue to provide online training sessions with interested agencies, and future implementation will be directed by agencies to ensure it is most appropriate to their needs
- At this time, the tool has been disseminated within Ontario and to several jurisdictions outside of Ontario
- In Quebec, the Ministry of Health and Social Services is piloting a mandatory use of the tool and research teams from the U.S. are also in conversation with local governments and agencies to implement the tool

# Initial Feedback

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- The tool has been endorsed by the Ministry of Health and Social Services in Quebec and the Ministry of Social Development in New Brunswick
- A worker survey has been added to the online platform to collect feedback from workers using the tool
  - *A five-item survey asks workers to rate the helpfulness of the questions and resources*
  - *These data can inform future modifications*
- Members of the team will continually review and update the linked resources to ensure their relevancy

# Link to checklists

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<https://covid-19-child-welfare-engagement-checklists.utoronto.ca/home>



Merci!  
Thank you!

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