



# EarlyON and Indigenous-Led Program Virtual and Remote Service Guidelines

Updated: December 2020



This document provides guidelines for EarlyON and Indigenous-Led Program Partners who wish to deliver accessible, responsive virtual and remote services during the COVID-19 centre closure period. It includes policy, operational and business practice requirements intended to complement the EarlyON Child and Family Centres Operating and Business Practice Guidelines.

## Contents

Definitions..... 2

Service Requirements ..... 3

    a) Incorporation of the Three Mandatory Core Services..... 3

    b) Inclusive and Equity-Based Approach..... 4

    c) Publicly Available Information on Services Provided..... 4

    d) Open and Free Access to Services..... 5

    e) Community-Informed Programming and Delivery ..... 5

    f) Organization-led Staffing Decisions ..... 5

    g) Alignment with Typical Days of Operation ..... 5

Number of Service Hours..... 6

Questions for Reflection ..... 6

## Definitions

Virtual and remote services are defined as being provided online, over the telephone or through contactless drop-off of supplies and resources. They are provided to respond to the needs of young children and families during the COVID-19 response period and in alignment with the EarlyON core service requirements.

Contactless drop-off services must adhere to Toronto Public Health guidelines including the use of masks, maintaining physical distance of at least 6 feet/2 metres, frequent handwashing, and not entering private residences.

Virtual and remote services need to include a balance of the following types of service:

### Group Support Services:

- Interactive child-focused sessions: Interactive sessions held virtually through an online platform. Children and parents/caregivers log-in to a virtual meeting and can participate in guided activities (e.g., circle time, storytelling, arts or fitness activities).
- Recorded child-focused sessions: Videos developed by EarlyON program staff that are pre-recorded or live streamed and available for the public to watch online.
- Facilitated parent/caregiver discussions: These are virtual meetings held for parents and/or caregivers to discuss topics related to their children aged 0-6 years old.

**Individualized Support Services:** Scheduled teleconferences/videoconferences and phone calls with parents/caregivers. These services could be used to connect families with needed resources, support

system navigation, have conversations about a child's development/parenting, etc. Organizations may also provide tech support to enable a family to participate in virtual programs.

**Remote COVID-19 Response Services:** The provision of time-limited supports such as material/resource preparation and drop-off (e.g., craft kits, food hampers, and pandemic-related supplies such as masks), sharing COVID-19 prevention and response messaging, and outreach and support to families disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.

### Service Requirements

All EarlyON virtual and remote services must meet the following requirements:

- a) Incorporation of the three mandatory core services
- b) Inclusive and equity-based approach
- c) Publicly available information on services provided
- d) Open and free access to services
- e) Community-informed programming and delivery
- f) Organization-led staffing decisions
- g) Alignment with typical days of operation

Organizations that provide services through sub-contracted agencies are responsible for ensuring their organization and sub-contracted agencies comply with the service requirements.

#### a) Incorporation of the Three Mandatory Core Services

All three (3) mandatory core services should be incorporated into all programming, including: engaging parents and caregivers, supporting early learning and development, and making connections for families. Organizations are encouraged to think about the services they provided in-person and to think of innovative ways those services could be provided virtually or remotely.

**Additionally, organizations are expected to deliver the EarlyON core services thinking about the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.** Organizations can support families by providing opportunities to discuss the impacts of COVID-19, including social isolation and mental health. They can strengthen and build connections with community agencies to connect families with the supports they need. Organizations can provide information and resources related to housing, employment, grief, mental health and wellness, and food security, as well as maintain regular communications with families on available community services and COVID-19 prevention messaging.

Engaging Parents and Caregivers	Supporting Early Learning and Development	Making Connections for Families
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inviting conversations and information sharing about child development, parenting, nutrition, play and inquiry-based learning, and other topics that support their role;</li> <li>• Collaborate with responsive support programs to enhance parent and caregiver well-being, enrich adult-child interactions and to support them in their role(s);</li> <li>• Providing targeted outreach opportunities designed for parents and caregivers who could benefit from Child and Family Centre programs and services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drop-in programs and other programs and services that build responsive adult-child relationships and encourage children's exploration and promote play and inquiry.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responding to a parent/caregiver concern about their child's development through conversations and observations - Sharing information and facilitating connections with specialized community service as appropriate.</li> <li>• Ensuring Child and Family Centre staff have relationships with community partners and an in-depth knowledge of their community resources.</li> <li>• Providing Information about programs and services available for the whole family beyond the early years.</li> </ul>

b) [Inclusive and Equity-Based Approach](#)

The impacts of COVID-19 have exposed and deepened inequities experienced by Indigenous, Black, and other equity-seeking communities. In turn, Toronto Children's Services encourages EarlyON Service Providers to consider the ways in which they can contribute to minimizing the social and economic impacts on communities made vulnerable by systemic barriers.

EarlyON virtual and remote services should actively promote and use an inclusive and equity-based approach. Online programming should reflect the experiences, voices and strengths of children and families with diverse cultures, identities and abilities. It should enable participants of various developmental stages and diverse learning styles to participate to the greatest extent possible. Participants should have the opportunity to learn more about and to celebrate multiple communities and worldviews.

Engagement with families and caregivers should be used to inform how best to provide inclusive and responsive programming. This could mean offering group programming focused on community-specific needs (e.g., communities experiencing racial trauma, children with extra support needs) or providing diverse programs for children across the developmental spectrum (prenatal to 6). Virtual and remote services can target population groups to ensure the specific needs of vulnerable communities, particularly those disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, are being met.

c) [Publicly Available Information on Services Provided](#)

To support easy and equitable access to services, organizations are expected to have clear, publicly available information about:

- What virtual and remote EarlyON services are available;
- How children and families can access them;
- When services are offered;
- Information on how participants can provide suggestions and feedback; and

- Information on resources available to families during the COVID-19 response period.

This information should be posted on the organization's website or social media pages, as well as on a poster or sign at the Centre if feasible.

#### d) Open and Free Access to Services

EarlyON services must be openly accessible to interested community members, not only pre-existing program participants, and offered free of charge. Organizations should consider that families have different levels of comfort using technology and/or may not have internet access, therefore it is important to offer alternative ways of connecting families to relevant resources and using a variety of contact methods (telephone, e-mail, chat).

All organizations are expected to develop their own policies and practices to comply with privacy legislation and rules related to the use of copyrighted material, including the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA)*, the *Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA)*, and the *Child Care and Early Years Act* and to communicate these policies to families. Organizations may also want to consider seeking their own legal advice related to the use of copyrighted material.

Organizations should also conduct outreach to reach new families, particularly those that may be in greater need of support during this challenging time (e.g., vulnerable communities, new parents, families experiencing grief or trauma).

#### e) Community-Informed Programming and Delivery

Most EarlyON programs have been designed as in-person services. In this new environment, there is a need for organizations to re-engage with their communities to identify their current needs. This includes engaging families on:

- The types of supports parents/caregivers and children would benefit from;
- Specific themes, activities, discussions to focus on;
- Preferred formats for parents/caregivers and children to access services; and
- Optimal times for parents/caregivers and children to access services.

#### f) Organization-led Staffing Decisions

Organizations are responsible for determining how decisions will be made around staff roles. It is expected that all paid staff are involved in part of the planning, development, delivery or post-delivery work related to virtual and remote service delivery and work the same number of hours as identified in the 2020 budget submission.

#### g) Alignment with Typical Days of Operation

EarlyON and Indigenous-led program partners are expected to offer virtual and remote services with a regular and predictable schedule. Centres are expected to operate on the same days identified in their 2020 budget submission, including weekends.

Decisions around hours of service should be driven by the goal of meeting community needs. Recognizing virtual/remote service needs may be different, organizations will be provided with the flexibility to adjust hours and days of delivery with approval from Toronto Children's Services.

## Number of Service Hours

When providing virtual and remote services, **organizations must provide at least 80% of the number of the total approved service hours from their 2020 EarlyON budget submission.** The remaining 20% of time can be allocated to planning and preparation activities.

As organizations have augmented their capacity to meet the needs of families remotely, increasing service becomes an important response to the evolving and complex needs of families during these unprecedented times. In this updated version of the guidelines, more activities are counted as eligible service hours and organizations are encouraged to consider expanding their services to meet the growing and critical needs of families during this time.

## Questions for Reflection

When planning for virtual and remote services, organizations should continue to strive towards meeting the EarlyON sector goals. For instance, organizations are encouraged to ask themselves the following questions for reflection in their planning process.

### Increased Access

- Are new families connecting with my organization? Would they know how and feel comfortable reaching out?
- How will we reach out and address the systemic barriers faced by Black, Indigenous, and equity-seeking communities when accessing virtual programs?
- How is my organization reaching out to vulnerable and isolated families?
- Are my virtual programs and advertisements welcoming for all families?
- Does the information publicly available on my website or social media pages support easy access to the EarlyON services I am currently providing? How many times would someone have to click to find the information? Would families have to scroll through many posts to find out about my services?
- Do the hours of service for virtual programming meet the needs of families?
- Would families accessing other early childhood and family services easily be made aware of EarlyON services we are providing?
- What strategies can my organization implement to offer a safe online space and reassure families about participating in the virtual services offered?
- What kind of information or supports do families and children need to help to be comfortable participating in virtual services?
- Are we using a variety of strategies to facilitate access from a diverse group of families?

### Greater Equity

- To what extent are efforts being made to support access to services for vulnerable families and/or those with unequal access to technology/resources at home?
- Do our virtual services provide programming for children with extra support needs?
- Does the content of the virtual services consider the diversity of our community (e.g. culturally diverse content)? Would all families be able to participate? Would the diverse needs of families be addressed through our services and supports?
- If resources and materials are required to participate, would all families be able to afford and find those resources/materials easily? If not, how can those families be supported?

- Do all families see themselves in visual materials?
- Are we providing additional supports, resources, and assistance to families impacted by COVID 19?

#### Higher Quality

- Are there opportunities for families to provide feedback on the services provided?
- How can my organization work on continuously improving our service offerings?
- Are we collecting data on viewership, attendance and duration? Which online content has received the most positive feedback (e.g. number of likes/shares)?
- Are we making evidence-based decisions regarding our provision of virtual services?
- Are we soliciting information from families to ensure services are meeting their needs?
- Are we partnering or collaborating with community agencies or groups to meet the needs of families during COVID 19?
- Are we aware of existing community resources available to families and children during the pandemic?