



澳門防止虐待兒童會  
Associação de Luta Contra os Maus Tratos às  
Crianças de Macau  
Against Child Abuse (Macau) Association

護兒中心  
Centro de Protecção das Crianças  
Child Protection Centre



# If you SEE something, SAY something!

Over recent years, in light of the emergence and ongoing recurrence of the global pandemic, people's lifestyles have incurred a great transformation. At the height of the pandemic, the Macau government implemented all types of administrative controls in order to protect its citizens to the maximum possible extent. These included stopping work activities, closing schools, restricting access to different types of public venues and limiting social gatherings as

far as possible. Children had to take classes online from home and many adults had to also work from home, changing the day-to-day lifestyle habits and social interactions of much of the population. It is inevitable that these changes to the social environment could lead to other problems arising in the home. According to our Centre's helpline consultants, these issues manifested mainly in the following ways:

1

Frustrations arising between adults and children being at home together for long periods, including parents being unable to help their children with their school work and children refusing to abide by household rules;

2

Emotional distress as a result of economic factors from facing unemployment or a reduced income, causing arguments or other types of violent behaviour between parents and children;

3

Many of Macau's double income households rely on non-Macau resident employees or relatives to provide childcare, causing difficulties in childcare arrangements during periods of border closures and travel restrictions;

4

During the pandemic, children had to attend online classes and children have come to use electronic devices as a major means of entertainment. This amount of dependence on electronic devices for long periods caused conflicts between adults and children. Furthermore, some criminals took advantage of children being online for long periods by sending inappropriate messages and invitations to minors.

5

With the generally tense social environment and people worried about the development of the pandemic, living arrangements, the economy, schooling and further education, citizens are expressing their increasing concerns for the mental health of individuals and children.

All of the above situations can put children at risk from abuse and also affect whether a child is able to receive the best care and a safe environment for growth. With children not attending school during the pandemic, we lost a safety net that could identify and discover potential crisis cases at an early stage. At this time, the

role of neighbours became even more important than usual, and many of the suspected child abuse cases that we discovered were reported anonymously over the phone from concerned neighbours. For this reason, raising public awareness of child protection will be highly effective in reducing the occurrence of child abuse incidents.

**The following highlights ways in which the Centre has worked since the pandemic to reduce child abuse; from extensive hotline publicity to various means of online interventions to improve the protection factor of children:**

## Hotline publicity

The Centre has created different types of publicity products to promote its hotline services, including masks and disinfection products printed with promotional material, that were distributed to shops and residential buildings in various districts. These items were aimed at shop owners and building management officers, to provide information about domestic violence laws and support helplines, to increase awareness about domestic violence and to seek their help in distributing the materials to customers and building residents.



## Children's online groups

At the height of the pandemic, children were unable to attend school and had to stay at home, going for long periods without social interaction with their peers. The Centre's social workers immediately adjusted and responded to this situation to ensure that services were provided even under extreme pandemic conditions. Therefore, many types of children's online groups were set up (such as children's picture book reading, interactive games and gross motor skills activities, etc.) to allow children to maintain a form of social interaction and to help alleviate their loneliness caused by social isolation and at the same time, to provide caregivers with a bit of breathing space.

## Children's confidential hotline

Set up to provide children with a channel to express their emotions, to help them voice their stress, to offer psychological support and in instances where necessary, to provide intervention services.



## Community and online publicity and education on caring for family mental health

Affected by the pandemic, many families faced life struggles and economic stress. Family relationships became tense and conflicts arose. Some citizens have found their mental health negatively impacted by the changes brought about by the pandemic. Faced with these challenges, the Centre has made calls to concerned family members, increased its online publicity and education and called on neighbours to pay attention to suspected cases of child abuse and to report any concerns to ensure that families would receive timely support and to reduce risk factors.

## Continuous and systematic parent education

Even as the impact of the pandemic is gradually passing and life has returned to normal on the whole, lasting effects of the pandemic remain, particularly in terms of mental health, the economy and family relationships, etc. where certain levels of stress and tensions still exist. Therefore, it is of vital importance to provide continuous and systematic parent education. Strengthened parental discipline skills and techniques to regulate emotions help support parents in raising their children and to reduce conflict and violence in the home.

## Professional lectures

In order to strengthen child protection safety nets, the Centre enhances competencies in staff related to child services (e.g., nursery nurses, school staff, tutorial center staff, etc.) by organising different training sessions aimed at understanding how to identify child abuse, which also involves mutual monitoring between such types of employees, so as to be able to detect and intervene as early as possible and to handle incidents of child abuse in an appropriate manner.



## Summary

Post pandemic, the Centre will continue to use all sorts of methods to publicise its hotline to ensure that families in need are able to access related resources. In regard to overdependence on electronic devices among children, the Centre will be working with other service units to promote more activities and plans to cultivate children's and youth digital network literacy. Of course, parent education

remains indispensable. Concerning the rise in online sexual abuse, in addition to the preventative education work carried out by social services, cooperation and regular meetings with police units are also strategies in place to prevent crime. Child protective work requires sustained focus and depends upon all sectors of the community and the public for their continued and concerted efforts.

