



## Media Statement

April, 2020

The impact of Covid-19 on children with disabilities, along with their families, is not recognized in the current media coverage of the pandemic.

The Australian Association of Special Education (AASE) supports the efforts from other organisations that highlight the specific risks for people with disability (The Centre of Research excellence in Disability and Health <https://credh.org.au/news-events/covid-19-and-people-with-disabilities/>). In addition, AASE supports efforts to increase Australia's workforce capacity to support individuals with disability and their families.

Attending a school provides a predictable series of routines for young people. This is particularly important for students with complex needs, who struggle to understand personal anxiety and frequently use non-verbal ways to express their thoughts and feelings. Similarly, some families typically experience high levels of stress during non-school periods, such as school holidays.

Some young people with disability will require significant support to comprehend and apply the rules of social distancing. Self-protective behaviours can be taught by educators, and encouraged by others, but generalizing these behaviours will often take time. Australian evidence indicates that people with intellectual disabilities already experience health inequalities and a higher risk for life-threatening illness (UNSW [https://3dn.unsw.edu.au/sites/default/files/ddn/page/Position%20Statement%20COVID-19%20and%20People%20with%20ID%20or%20DD\\_Final.pdf](https://3dn.unsw.edu.au/sites/default/files/ddn/page/Position%20Statement%20COVID-19%20and%20People%20with%20ID%20or%20DD_Final.pdf)).

For children with disability, AASE expresses its concern regarding the heightened risk of marginalization and possible stigmatization, in addition to the immediate health risks.

AASE supports:

- School education sectors to provide schools with specific materials that focus on teaching/supporting healthy social behaviours.
- That schools are given licenses by their respective sectors to access on-line resources that use evidence-based curriculum resources, and that can be shared with families.
- A continued focus on the rights of students with disabilities, as per the Disability Standards for Education, whether their education continues in classrooms or now occurs through on-line delivery.
- Health authorities are supported to proactively give advice to families on healthy behaviour in home environments, consistent with the materials delivered by schools.
- External agencies that deliver services to families should be giving advice consistent with the approaches of educators that use evidence-based approaches.

**For further information, contact Peter Walker, National President, Australian Association of Special Education (0417 204 365) <http://aase.edu.au>.**