



COVID-19 RESPONSE



Extension
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Human Development & Relationships

The Human Development & Relationships Institute provides the tools Wisconsinites need to thrive as well-rounded, capable individuals and families. We support families in caring for each other in ways that promote growth and understanding. Our programs promote aging-friendly communities, coach effective parents, and help families put technology, mindfulness, and financial awareness to use.

Extension faculty, researchers, staff, and educators with a Human Development & Relationships focus responded to the COVID-19 pandemic in a variety of ways to meet the needs of families and address issues associated with mental health, financial stress, positive parenting and community connectedness.

Addressing the emotional and social effects of isolation

The COVID-19 pandemic impacts the stress residents experienced due to significant disruptions of their social lives. For example, the pandemic limited the variety of options for activities that caregivers can provide, creating additional pressure on them while children are at home. Correctional facilities were closed, which prevented children of incarcerated residents from interacting with their families; this additionally increased stress for current caregivers such as grandparents. Additionally, the risk of social isolation for older residents dramatically increased. The pandemic also disrupted learning in schools and forced teachers, caregivers, and youth group leaders to switch their education to digital platforms. During this challenging and uncertain time, families worked to provide education to children at home and may not have had the tools or resources to keep them engaged in learning. The mental health of those seeking to support their communities - such as county employees, community organization employees, grass-roots community advocates, volunteers, engaged residents, and first responders - was negatively impacted. Strengthening the well-being and safety of those serving their communities is a crucial aspect of sustainable, effective, and human-centered emergency operations.

How Extension responded

Improving Family Resilience

COVID-19 has disrupted family routines. Families were forced to physically distance and some struggled through the loss of loved ones. Parents and caretakers have additional stresses of making sense of it all for children

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Focusing on isolation of older adults

Older adults are the most vulnerable to COVID-19. As the virus has spread, many older adults have had to adjust to distancing tactics without family members living nearby. Living alone can be more difficult and challenging for older adults. Extension responded with resources for home-bound seniors and a community-driven volunteer program. A Social Isolation and Loneliness resource guide template was created, and county-based educators filled in local contacts and shared with partner organizations, coalitions, health care facilities and program participants. Research-based information was added to home-delivered meals on topics such as caregiver support, healthy communication, managing stress, activities for healthy minds and bodies, building family resilience, and ways to remain connected during times of isolation. Additionally, a check-in call program was established for older adults living alone to help set up grocery, medical supplies, or medication deliveries.

and those they care for. Educators and staff continue to develop and implement programming that supports family strengthening and resilience across the life span.

Examples of this include:

Distributing research-based resources

- A resource called “Eight Practical Ways to Help Your Children Express Their Feelings” was created. This resource promotes positive youth mental health and family interactions as well as reduced family stress and likelihood of child maltreatment.
- A resource was created to provide six tips that parents could consider as they navigate the dynamics of co-parenting and the obstacles to co-parenting during physical distancing.
- Resources on Parenting the Preschooler were created for families of preschool students and shared widely with the public through Forest County Potawatomi media and news outlets.
- A social media campaign focused on mental health and mindfulness practices, shared weekly on various platforms. Additionally, tips for mental well-being and resources of where to find help were distributed through radio, print, and web channels.

Engaging families through online classes/webinars

- A collaboration between several county educators and state specialists to provide parenting education online free of charge included skills to help them parent in a positive way during the “Safer at Home” orders. Materials were shipped directly to the homes of each participant statewide. This was the largest of the Raising a Thinking Child classes offered in the project’s history. This cross-county statewide online approach improves access to programming and provides a rich learning environment with co-facilitators that share their individual teaching styles and perspectives.
- Educators worked with school district staff to transition parenting skills classes to an online format. Moving to an online format allowed the remaining four weeks of classes to be held. Participants were engaged through emails and text messages and materials were translated into Spanish.
- A webinar presentation was delivered on the topic of stress management to farmers, producers, and agri-businesses to address COVID-19 pandemic related stress/behavioral health. Participants reported learning the effects of stress, tools to

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Providing parental support and tools through social media

Extension researchers and educators reached parents across the state through social media videos, providing remote education and support about topics related to family stressors during the pandemic. New Facebook videos were added to an ongoing, previously existing series called Parenting Behind the Behavior. The new series supported family needs during the pandemic including creating a simple routine, stress management for kids and teens, co-parenting during the pandemic, finding joy in the ordinary (despite unprecedented circumstances), and giving children ways to contribute to at-home family life. The videos reached thousands of parents and caregivers promoting positive parenting ideas and appropriate expectations of children. As families experience greater stress due to the pandemic, support for positive, child-centered parenting helps minimize harmful parenting practices, and improve child well-being.

manage stress, and feeling more confident in their abilities to support farmers during challenging times.

Engaging families through online gatherings

- A monthly education/support group for family caregivers was held for participants to share and learn about University resources to lower stress levels and increase their ability to continue caring for their care recipient. This event, held in partnership with the Aging and Disability Resource Center, was moved to a telepresence during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- An online parenting connection is offered weekly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic for families with school-aged children, to support them through educating children while managing job loss or working from home.

Increasing social connectedness

As we transition to working remotely and other pandemic restrictions, we find our lives disrupted in a way that feels particularly alienating at this unfamiliar and uncertain time. As coronavirus spreads, many older adults and their families have had to adjust to distancing tactics. Additionally, many do not have family members living nearby. Living alone can be more difficult and challenging for older adults.

How Extension responded

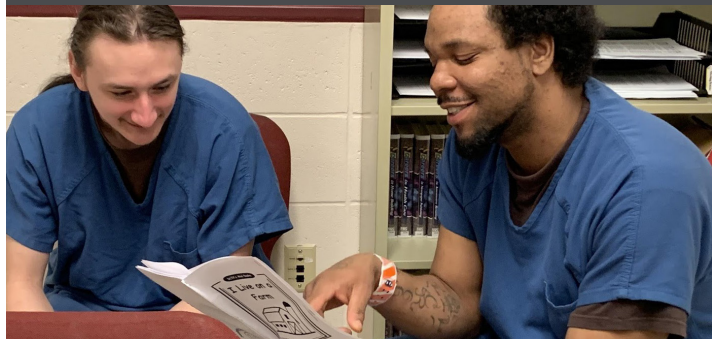
The Human Development & Relationships Institute (HDRI) continues to work to emphasize the vital importance of human connection at a time when “physical distancing” has become the norm. It is more critical than ever that we find ways to maintain connections and remain resilient in our efforts to support and care for each other from infancy to later life. Much of HDRI’s work in this area is with older adults and justice-involved families.

Examples of this include:

- Online and printed resources were created for home-bound seniors to learn about healthy communication, managing stress, activities for healthy minds and bodies, and other techniques to remain connected and healthy during times of isolation.
- A community-driven volunteer program was created for older adults living alone to provide essential support and services while sheltering at home. Older adults represent the most vulnerable group to COVID-19. Family caregiver groups, caregiver connect, and coalition meetings are also held virtually to support our families each month.
- Online tip sheets for partners and residents presented actionable tips for coping with physical distancing and COVID-19 to improve coping and resilience. Topics addressed living alone, families/friends of those living alone, family caregivers, and grief. These resources were distributed via social media, local news, hospital newsletters, and radio.
- Extension supported Lincoln County’s Healthy Minds Coalition in a campaign to address isolation and disconnection, particularly among senior populations. Using online advertisements, younger residents were encouraged to reach out to senior populations through phone calls, sending a card, and offering to help with grocery shopping. Radio

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Supporting justice-involved families through literacy



While all families are impacted by COVID-19, the burdens on those who are justice-involved are enormous. Minority families in particular have been the hardest hit. They also represent disproportionate numbers in the criminal justice system. What were already elevated levels of stress, trauma, and anxiety are now at toxic levels among many justice-involved families. Children in these families are at risk of setbacks in learning with disruptions in formal schooling. As COVID-19 emerged, The Literacy Link team used survey assessments to create resources around reading materials, in-home activities, and COVID-19 information for young audiences. Literacy Family Kits are sent to caregivers and children including books and letters from the parent in jail, writing materials, a letter template, and a stamped addressed envelope for writing a letter back to the parent. Caregivers are given information designed for justice-involved families about local resources, tip sheets, and family activity ideas. Resources were also created to educate caregivers on remote connectedness. Topics include maintaining contact through letter writing and phone calls, managing stress, staying positive, and explaining COVID-19 to a child.

ads were used to encourage senior populations to reach out to younger residents for the assistance they may be needing.

Addressing new and intensified financial stresses for business, individuals, and organizations

The COVID-19 pandemic directly affects local, state, national, and international economies, putting new and intensified financial strains on households and businesses. Financial stress for small businesses and nonprofits across all sectors has increased from the outbreak, and entrepreneurs as well as non-profit boards are scrambling to secure potential financial relief to stay afloat. Similarly, individuals and families are affected financially, as seen through a massive spike in unemployment claims. Many residents were already financially vulnerable before, and due to the pandemic, financial assistance programs rapidly changed around them. Additionally, as a result of COVID-19, free tax assistance sites were closed, leaving many low-income families with the issue of finding alternative resources for preparing their taxes. Tax refunds suddenly became critical for families who were experiencing a drop in household income due to large-scale job loss.

How Extension responded

HDRI is poised to be able to provide programming that can help support our clientele's financial decision making and management across all demographics and cultures.

Examples of this include:

- A social media campaign aimed at families and individuals providing research-based resources on assistance for loss of employment and financial hardships created by the pandemic. This was especially crucial at a time when financial assistance programs were rapidly changing.
- Informational materials and links for drug court participants to learn about access to financial resources. Extension provided information on tax filing, how to verify that the IRS had the correct bank information for depositing the COVID-19 Emergency Impact Payment, Social Security benefit recipient access to payment, unemployment filing, and more.
- Outreach to parents of a tribal early childhood center to provide reliable information on budgeting and financial counseling to help families cope with financial setbacks during the COVID-19 pandemic. Extension offered budgeting information to reach approximately 120 families along with information on free financial counseling for families.
- A virtual class for adults in the criminal justice system in which participants learned about and developed spending plans and financial goals during the financial uncertainty of COVID-19.

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Customized and creative financial resources to meet emerging needs

HDRI educators, researchers, and staff created new resources to meet the sudden, significant financial impacts COVID-19 brought upon the state. New online guidance was created and new, multilingual resources included how to apply for unemployment insurance, food assistance, health care coverage, and small business loans. Governmental programs, laws, and policies are monitored daily to update this website with new and revised information. Users have been reached through traditional media and social engagement as well as partner referrals through groups such as libraries. Financial-focused Extension educators also created the UW Mindful Money Moments video series. The Facebook and YouTube videos included how to deal with a drop in income, paying student loans, and applying for unemployment benefits. Multilingual, virtual financial coaching was also offered for individuals to create and/or modify their spending plan, set financial goals, and locate resources. In some counties this coaching includes both phone conversations and social media mini lessons for individuals from marginalized communities. Financial coaching is serving drug court and other established county partners, and now is also giving social service providers a place to refer newly out-of-work community members. Extension also provided COVID-informed tax counseling, plans on how to use relief payments, and how to provide Rent Smart curriculum to address affordable housing challenges.

Supporting communities and organizations in coordinating their response efforts

Communities rely on strong collaboration and coordination between local government, organizations, and residents for support structures and emergency responses. The COVID-19 pandemic had a dual effect on local coordination: It disrupted communication channels and collaborative spaces, and it intensified the need for collaboration between a variety of organizations and institutions. .

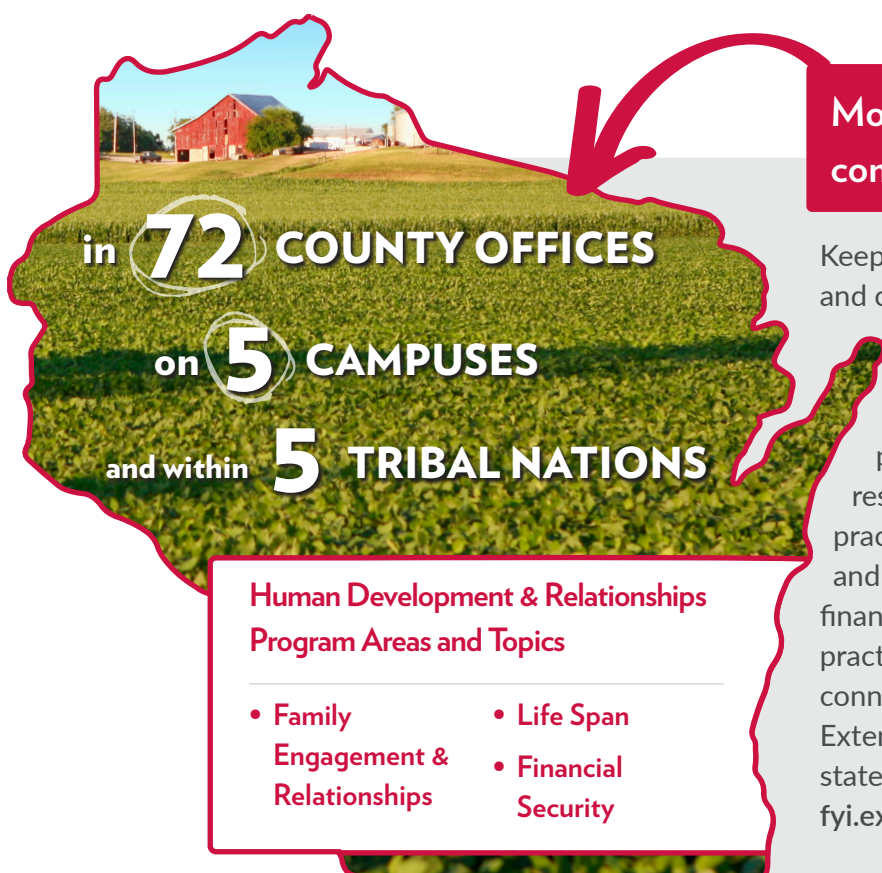
How Extension responded

HDRI educators, researchers, and staff connected communities with the resources they needed. Critical pathways were created to link people across Wisconsin to information, guidance, and tools to respond to COVID-19 and its effects.

Examples of this include:

- A weekly Zoom meeting for community partners in which participants connect and share tips and resources on stress management, telecommuting, and self-care during the pandemic.

- Web resources merged Extension tools and local guidance. A web page for Eau Claire County gave residents access to a variety of information in one place to meet needs that come up during this pandemic. Additionally, a web portal for Kewaunee County compiled local resources on nutrition, health, finances, caregiving, parenting, and mental health so that residents can access them in a one-stop location.
- Educators designed social media posts focused on renting, utility payments, and COVID-19 state policies to assist families experiencing large drops in income as well as providing posts on childcare for essential workers, co-parents, and IRS stimulus checks. These posts were adapted and sent as an email bulletin for partners.
- Partner surveys to collect data on programs across the state that are addressing social isolation and loneliness. This outreach explores how they are operating during the pandemic and how will they continue into the future. Best practices and lessons learned will be compiled and shared to help other agencies respond to COVID-19.



More ways we're helping businesses, communities, youth, and families

Keeping a focus on our values to transform lives and communities, UW-Madison Extension is leading businesses, communities, youth, and families in the response to the COVID-19 outbreak. We are uniquely positioned across the state to link university research to those in need of guidance and practical resources. Extension staff in counties and tribal nations are making connections to financial aid and instruction, providing best practices for emerging needs, and reinforcing connections for healthy communities. To see how Extension responded to COVID-19 across the state and across program areas, visit fyi.extension.wisc.edu/covid19/impacts. 