

## Covid-19 Volunteer Safety – September 2021

### Summary

- **Covid-19 will have a significant and lasting impact on young people’s mental health with effects expected to continue up to 3 years post-Covid-19.**
- **Raise is here to support youth mental health throughout Covid-19 and beyond.**
- **Our mentoring programs can be delivered, face-to-face, online or a blend of face-to-face and online. This means that whatever Covid-19 restrictions are in place in your community, we’re able to continue our mentoring programs and keep our volunteers, employees and mentees safe.**
- **Raise is a COVIDSafe business and has active COVIDSafe policies and procedures in place that clearly set out safety protocols and procedures that must be in place to operate during the Covid-19 pandemic**
- **Raise new mentor training will be delivered virtually until further notice.**

### How is Covid-19 Impacting Australian Youth?

Covid-19 has been declared a global pandemic, and meets the criteria for being a natural disaster because of the potential for significant and lasting damage to mental health for children and the adults who support them (Walters, 2020; Dvorsky, Breaux & Becker, 2020). **We know from past disasters that many effects emerge up to 3 years post-disaster** (Walters, 2020). Immediate and longer-term responses are needed to mitigate the impact on our young people’s future.

It is estimated that **up to 15% of children will experience significant mental health symptoms** following exposure to an event such as Covid-19 (Cullen et al, 2000), with many more who struggle to readapt without reaching critical status. Covid-19 is a financial crisis as well as a health and wellbeing crisis. Those in disadvantaged households will be most impacted. ARACY suggest that the disruption to education may have long-lasting consequences for students from more disadvantaged backgrounds.

The social support that young people receive will make a big difference in how much they are impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. **Reducing risk and building up resilience processes is critical in responding to the crisis** (Zhou et al 2020; Dvorsky, Breaux & Becker, 2020; Coe & Enomoto, 2020, Shean, 2020). Young people need supportive caring and competent adults who can help alleviate feelings of anxiety and provide strategies such as supportive listening, counselling and building resilience (Shean, 2020). **This is where mentoring can play an important role.**

### How will 2022 programs be delivered?

While our preference is for face-to-face mentoring where it is safe to do so, Raise will be guided by our school partners on the preferred mode of delivery. We intend to offer two delivery modes in 2022:

1. **Face-to-face** (potentially blended with online) – delivery of programs face-to-face remains our preference, where possible. Raise will be guided by the relevant State Departments of

### The power of showing up

Education and Health with regards to the safe delivery of face-to-face mentoring in schools across each State. Where face-to-face mentoring is not possible, programs may move to online delivery for certain periods as they have in 2020 and 2021.

2. **Online only** – a limited number of programs will be delivered as online programs for the entire duration of the program, in line with school preference.

### How will you keep me safe?

Raise commits to a safe environment for its employees, mentors and mentees and has implemented a COVIDSafe Policy and procedures that set out the following key measures.

Raise will be guided by the relevant State Departments of Education and Health with regards to the delivery of face to face mentoring in schools across each State. Prior to working on site at a school, each Program Counsellor will undertake the COVID-19 infection control training provided by the Australian Government Department of Health.

The following safe work practice guidelines are adopted by all Program Counsellors running face to face programs.

1. **Personal protective equipment** - Hand sanitizer, Glen20, gloves and antibacterial wipes is provided to all Program Counsellors. Masks will be provided to Program Counsellors, if requested.
2. **Safety and hygiene practices on the school premises** - Program Counsellors and mentors will abide by the safety and hygiene measures implemented in their school. This will include:
  1. Signing into the school using the QR Code and/or Department of Education sign in sheet when arriving at the school
  2. Application of physical distancing rules within the school; and / or
  3. Adoption of safe work practices on arrival – washing hands on arrival or applying hand sanitizer, wearing a face mask, wiping down surfaces; and / or
  4. How to manage suspected illness and / or suspected or confirmed Covid-19 cases.
3. **Session Practice changes** – Weekly mentoring sessions may need to adapt to state-by-state COVID government restrictions as follows:
  - a. **Face to face sessions** - Mentors and mentees may need to wear masks and sit 1.5 metres apart from each other or as guided by the school. Outside spaces are encouraged, if the weather permits. There is no sharing of equipment (pens, pencils, games etc) and all games and activities have been adapted to abide by current regulations.
  - b. **Online sessions (mentees at school) – In the event that schools place restrictions on who can be on site (volunteers and external visitors)**, mentors and mentees may revert to meeting one-on-one via an online platform (Zoom, Teams etc) with break-out rooms supervised by the Program Counsellor. Sessions would revert to face-to-face when possible.
  - c. **Group online sessions (mentees at home)** – In the event of a hard lockdown or a school requiring students to learn from home, mentoring will move to online in a

group mode. Mentors and mentees will mentor in groups of 4 (2 mentors and 2 mentees) via an online platform (Zoom, Teams etc) with break-out rooms supervised by the Program Counsellor. Sessions would revert to one-on-one online or face-to-face when possible.

4. **Managing suspected illness** - Mentors will be advised that they are not to attend the session if they are feeling unwell. If a Program Counsellor is unwell, the backup Program Counsellor roster will be implemented. In the unlikely event that a mentor arrives at the school with a suspected illness, they will be asked to leave the school premises. To return to mentoring, the mentor will need to provide a medical certificate from a GP confirming that they are well.

Raise will be guided by the Safe Work Australia guidelines and the school's policy and procedures for dealing with and reporting suspected COVID19 cases. These will include protocols for reporting cases and contact tracing, communication within the school community, cleaning, and hygiene.

### Is mentor training delivered face-to-face?

When you join our mentoring movement, you will receive free comprehensive training. Raise mentor training consists of 6 online modules followed by group training. Group training sessions are interactive, practical and will prepare you to be the best youth mentor you can be.

Given the current uncertainty, **all group training will be delivered virtually via Zoom until further notice**. Virtual group training will be delivered as two shorter sessions with smaller groups of 8-10. Zoom is a very user-friendly platform and is compatible with a range of devices and browsers. Users can access the session with a link and a password and do not need a Zoom account.

If you mentor in a program that is delivered online or your program is temporarily moved to online sessions, you will be provided with an additional mentor orientation session on how the online mentor session is delivered and tips on how best to mentor in an online environment.