

PANDEMIC PODS

A SOCIAL SOLUTION TO COVID-19 ISOLATION

Are you thinking about starting or joining a pandemic pod to meet your needs for child care and/or early education? If your answer is **YES!** we have put together some helpful guidance for creating or participating in this type of pod. Keep reading to learn more about “podding”.

If participating in a pandemic pod interests you, use our **Family Risk Tool** determine your risk profile and risk tolerance, and connect with us on zoom for Q & A sessions and coaching. The first sessions are coming soon!

Click on one of these dates to register a Q & A session; after you register you'll receive a link to the session.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 13, 8:00PM - 9:00PM

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 15, 1:00PM - 2:00PM

IMPORTANT!

This information has been prepared by 5toONE for use by families who wish to participate in a pandemic pod for the purposes of early care and education. Participation in a pandemic pod does not take the place of high quality early care and education, however for families in high risk groups for complications from COVID-19 infection, podding is a way to support social connections and reduce the impact of isolation on early childhood development.



THE BASICS

WHAT IS A POD?

- a stable group of people who connect with each other to meet a range of needs and circumstances (e.g. child care or early education) and agree to abide by a common set of best practices in order to help keep all members of the pod safe and healthy
- a stable group of people who mutually adopt a gentle-person's agreement to hold themselves individually and as a group accountable to each other

WHAT ARE BEST PRACTICES?

- Recommendations made by a recognized authority that are based on scientifically sound evidence
- For a COVID-19 pod, a pod should include no more than 3 families and no more than 12 people

WHAT IS A GENTLE-PERSON'S AGREEMENT?

- A written set of expectations and behaviors that each of the podders agrees to uphold
- Is voluntary and relies on the honesty and integrity of each member
- Represents trust among the podders

HOW DO YOU WRITE UP A GENTLE-PERSON'S POD AGREEMENT?

- State the purpose for the pod (e.g. The purpose for our pod is to provide 15 hours of child care/week in one of our homes for 3 children)
- Specify the best practices, which meet the requirements specified above, that podders will agree to follow
- Acknowledge and respect the risk profiles of individual podders
- Spell out the expectations for:
 - the extent of contact with people who are not part of the pod (e.g. can you go to a public park, or interact with other friends in an outdoor setting?)
 - whether podders can travel and what the follow up procedures should be (e.g. 14-day self-quarantine after over-night travel to another region)
 - any behavior that the podders feel are important (e.g. sharing food brought from someone else's house, etc.)
- How costs will be shared (e.g. who pays for food for the children while they are in care? is anyone compensated for their time spent caring for children?)
- Parenting styles (how is discipline delivered? is snacking allowed? how much screen time? etc.)

SO... IS PODDING RIGHT FOR YOU?

SOME THINGS TO THINK ABOUT BEFORE FORMING OR ENTERING A POD

- What is your primary reason for creating/joining a pod? What needs would be met? How important is it to you to have those needs met? To what extent are you willing to compromise to be part of a pod?
- Know what the risks are and how risk is mitigated for yourself and others. What is your risk profile? What are the risk profiles of your family members? What is your tolerance for health risks? Are you willing to change your behavior to mitigate risk?
- What are your current safety practices? Which are non-negotiable? How willing are you to adopt additional practices based on the risk profiles of other podders?
- Understand the science of COVID-19 and actively keep up with new information. What do you know about COVID-19? Where do you go to get the facts? What sources do you use to keep up to date?
- Know the symptoms of COVID-19. How do you monitor yourself/your family members? What plans do you have in place if you notice symptoms consistent with COVID-19? Have you had a COVID-19 test?
- Are you willing to commit to being completely honest about your behavior? to keeping an agreement? to considering the impact of your behavior on others' health and wellbeing?

EVERYONE WHO JOINS A POD MUST GIVE THEIR CONSENT. WHAT DOES GIVING CONSENT MEAN?

Giving your consent to an agreement is a promise to collaborate in good faith and participate in an on-going dialogue with the people in your pod. Consent is more than a head nod or a handshake. Do you agree with the following ideas about consent?

- **Affirmative:** Everyone involved says “yes.” There is a clearly expressed agreement to participate, not just the absence of a “no.”
- **Competent:** Everyone has the unimpaired ability, knowledge, judgment, and skill to make the commitment.
- **Informed:** The decision to participate is based on a shared and accurate understanding of risk factors, risk tolerances, and other relevant facts. Each podder should proactively disclose risk factors.
- **Unpressured:** A “no” should be immediately accepted without undue persuasion, influence, or intimidation. Coercive or pressure tactics are expressly forbidden.
- **Specific:** Everyone is clear about the purpose of the pod, why they are together, and the boundaries of proposed activities.
- **Ongoing:** Consent must be active and can be withdrawn at any time. Podders check in frequently with each other, and especially about changes such as introduction of new people or activities.

THE NITTY-GRITTY

WARNING!

This part is long and detailed, with lots of questions to guide your thinking. These questions were inspired by the real-life experiences of families who have been podding for six months or more. Jot down your answers for reference. Be honest with yourself.

PURPOSE AND EXPECTATIONS

- What is your purpose for forming a pod? Will all families join the pod for the same purpose? What are your expectations about the being part of this pod?
- How permanent is this pod? Is there an ending built in or will it continue indefinitely? Will you reevaluate the need for the pod after a certain date or when pandemic-related conditions change?

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CARE AND EDUCATION PODS

- Will the children always go to one home or will pod families take turns having children in their homes? What is the schedule (days of the week, times of day)? What is the backup plan if a host family has to cancel? Will a non-pod babysitter ever provide care? Under what circumstances?
- How is discipline handled? [Note: We recommend exploring Conscious Discipline as an approach that could be implemented across households.]
- How will meals and snacks be handled? Will children need to bring food and supplies with them every day or will they be able to leave educational and personal supplies at the host home(s)?
- Are there any financial considerations? How will snacks and meals be paid for? If families are not taking turns and there is only one caregiver/educator, will that person be compensated? If a sitter is hired to supervise children, how much will they be paid and who will be responsible for paying them?
- What other considerations should be addressed, e.g. any special needs or accommodations?

HEALTH AND SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

- Report or permission? Will members be expected to report on risks afterward or ask permission from the group beforehand? For example: a family wants to travel by car on a camping trip. Do they go on their trip and then report back to group about any possible COVID-19 exposure; or do they ask the group for permission to take the trip? What if the family is going to fly to another city for a vacation? What if they are flying because of a family emergency?
- What social risk management protocols are expected? Is it okay to meet non-pod members outdoors only and maintain social distancing? How about indoor meet-ups? When are masks worn? Are there places or activities that members agree to avoid completely?
- What environmental risks are acceptable? Can members go to public places like beaches, which may be crowded? How about shopping for groceries? What are the expectations for how pod members will limit exposure, e.g. wearing masks any time they are in public spaces, using disposable gloves to pump gas, etc.
- What testing protocols will be used, if any? Some schools, offices, and public facilities require a temperature check and a questionnaire about symptoms and exposure before entry. Will the pod require something like that? Will record-keeping be required in case of contact tracing?
- What happens when a member returns to the pod after an absence (e.g. takes a vacation) or a lapse in protocol? Is there a quarantine period? Does the member need to be tested for COVID-19?

MANAGING CONFLICT

- How will the pod manage difficult conversations and conflict? Conflict is a fact of life so having a plan for how to resolve disagreements among pod members helps take the pressure off when conflict happens. Thinking back on the previous section about what it means to consent, recall that consent implies an on-going dialogue. Dialogue gives everyone a chance to present their thinking without blame or censure.
- Nine times out of ten, dialoguing creates the conditions for successful problem-solving. In that one-in-ten chance that a consensus doesn't happen, what is the next step? Is there a trusted mediator who could be available to help? Agreeing in advance that if consensus isn't possible then the pod will seek outside help recognizes that conflict can be managed and provides a pathway to resolution.

BROKEN PROMISES

- What happens when a member doesn't meet expectations the pod has put in place? Thinking about yourself, how do you respond to a broken promise? Do you try to understand and do the best you can to repair the relationship? Or do you end the relationship and move on? How you feel about broken promises matters, because it's inevitable that pod members will break protocol. Being honest with yourself is the first step in being honest with others.
- Creating an environment where it's safe for a pod member to share a lapse in protocol protects everyone. A pod that handles lapses, regardless of whether accidental or intentional, in a positive and supportive way builds trust among its members and actually reduces the likelihood of future lapses.
- Refer back to the last point under Health and Safety Considerations. What does a member need to do to return to the group? Depending on the lapse, it may be necessary for the member(s) involved to self-quarantine or take other steps to mitigate risk to the rest of the pod.

WHO'S NOT IN YOUR POD?

- Forming a pod means that some people are in and others are not. However, your relationships don't end with people outside the pod. Help people outside your pod understand that the purpose of podding is to manage risk and explain the purpose of your pod (e.g. providing child care or home-based education).
- Pods can connect with each other in ways that benefit all the podders, and still provide the necessary level of risk management.



[A] pod shouldn't merely be a container for its members, but a facilitator of social connection and help for people outside of the pod. In the face of sickness and death, we need each other. It's not isolation that will save us—but rather compassion, communication, and cooperation.

- Greater Good Magazine



GETTING STARTED

Use the Family Risk Tool to create your risk profile and determine your risk tolerance

Sign up for a 5toONE Q & A session

Share this information with family, friends, and/or neighbor who might be interested in podding up with you

The guidance provided in this document is based on evidence-based recommendations referenced in the article "How to Form a Pandemic Pod" published by The Great Good Science Center at the University of California-Berkeley; on interviews with parents who have participated in early care and learning pods; and on expert advice from local health officials. We welcome your input as you navigate the murky waters of pandemic podding. Reach us at info@5toone.org. For technical assistance in setting up and/or maintaining a pandemic pod for early care and education contact mcsmith@tbaisd.org

