

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **New (free) 24/7 mental health and wellness supports announced for CAS-involved children, youth, and their caregivers**

Struggling families across the province now have additional mental health resources to support them in the pandemic. Family Service Ontario (FSO), with funding from the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS), launched the COVID-19 Support Program this week.

The new program, which is being rolled out at the community level by FSO's member agencies, includes telephone-based counselling in English and French via a 24/7 toll-free number; and a series of free virtual *Parenting in a Pandemic* workshops hosted on the Zoom platform.

"All individuals and families are being challenged by this pandemic," said FSO Chief Executive Officer Susan Wells, whose membership includes 45 mental health and wellness not-for-profit service providers across the province. "Those who were engaged with a Children's Aid Society (CAS) or Family and Children's Services before or during the last year are especially vulnerable to relationship breakdown and the ongoing impact of trauma. This program has been designed to increase parenting skills and personal resilience, while addressing specific concerns as they arise."

The bilingual services are available to children/youth in CAS or kin care; foster and kin care parents; and families who are currently working with or referred by CAS. There is no cost to eligible children, youth, adults, couples or families for service, but CAS referrals are required.

Through the new dedicated telephone line, children, youth and their caregivers have 24/7 access to a registered professional, experienced in individual, couples and family counselling. The toll-free number for English counselling is 1-877-451-1055 (or text for information at 1-888-458-8573). For French services, the toll-free number is 1-866-553-3336, option 2.



Descriptions and registration information for Parenting in a Pandemic virtual workshops are available online at <https://cfssc.ca/services/group-counselling> (English) and <https://familyservicesottawa.org/parenting-courses-for-families-involved-with-cas/> (French).

“FSO is grateful to our funding and community partners for their assistance in rolling out this new program so quickly,” Wells added. “Anyone interested in contacting their local FSO agency, can find contact information on our website.” Links to FSO agencies can be found at <http://familyserviceontario.org/members/>.

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**Media inquires**

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