To keep staff and students safe and minimize the spread of COVID-19, many schools around the world have closed their doors. For children, this abrupt disruption to routine can feel confusing and scary. Translated into six languages, this social story answers the question, “Why Can't I Go to School?” in simple and reassuring terms.

Conscious Discipline Certified Instructor Abbi Kruse developed this resource for students at her early learning center The Playing Field, which serves children experiencing homelessness alongside children from more advantaged backgrounds in Madison, Wisconsin. Predictability and routine feel safe and are especially important for children in uncertain living situations and children who have experienced trauma. Sudden change is scary and leaves children feeling anxious. Anxiety is soothed with information, so it’s helpful to answer children’s questions and explain why their usual routines have changed.

Children experiencing homelessness may wonder why they can’t go to school, why they can’t play with their friends, and why some of the places they like to go are closed. This simple social story gives you the reassuring language and age-appropriate information to answer these questions in a way that young children will understand.

What Are Social Stories?
Social stories are visual reminders typically used to teach children appropriate behavior. These behaviors can be related to procedures, like how to stay safe on the school bus or successfully follow a bedtime routine. They can also teach social behaviors, like how to manage anxiety when a parent goes to work or how to express frustration in a healthy manner. Social stories help children make sense of their own feelings and the world around them.

How to Use Social Stories
When a child is missing a skill or struggling to navigate a situation, social stories can help. If possible, it’s especially powerful to include pictures of the child or children in action throughout the story.

Read social stories often to ensure children understand the message. Pause after each page to ask or answer questions, and even roleplay if it’s helpful.

Remember, too, that reading a story can always represent a precious moment of connection. Be present as you read the story with your child, enjoying your time together. Connection translates into increased cooperation, willingness, and impulse control. During these unprecedented times, connection with our loved ones is more valuable than ever.

To learn more about social stories, read the article Teaching Missing Skills: The Power of Social Stories.
My School Is Closed Right Now

Created by Abbi Kruse & The Playing Field, Madison, WI
My school is closed until all my friends and my teachers are healthy again.
A lot of my friends are in their homes, but my family doesn’t have a home right now.
There are other families like mine who are also hoping to find a home soon.
Our families make sure we have something to eat and find places for us to sleep each night.
We might stay with our friends or with other families. We might snuggle up in the car. We might even stay at a hotel.
We might stay at a shelter with many other families.
Until everyone is healthy, we aren’t supposed to get too close to each other. That means we can’t play.
And some of the places we like to go are closed just like school is closed.
When everyone is healthy, we can get close to each other. We can play again.
When everyone is healthy, the places we like to go will be open again.
When everyone is healthy, we can go back to school.
My grown-ups love me and they want to keep me safe.
I am glad we are together as a family.