

MAKING THE VIRTUAL SHIFT

Child welfare has felt the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in almost every facet. With the frequent and rapid changes occurring during this global health crisis, it is critical that child welfare professionals remain resilient and flexible. One huge area of rapid change is utilizing virtual platforms to complete our daily tasks, interact with colleagues, and most importantly, serve our children and families. During this challenging time, it is vital that child welfare professionals embrace telehealth and rapidly become competent in the use of technology.

Considerations for Implementing Virtual Services

The following are a few factors to keep in mind while making the transition from face to face contact to virtual communication.

HIPPA Compliance

Whether your agency has purchased an on-line case management program or they use publicly available technology, discuss with your agency how these programs can be utilized while still being HIPPA compliant. Ensuring privacy and confidentiality is even more important when using technology to provide services to our families.

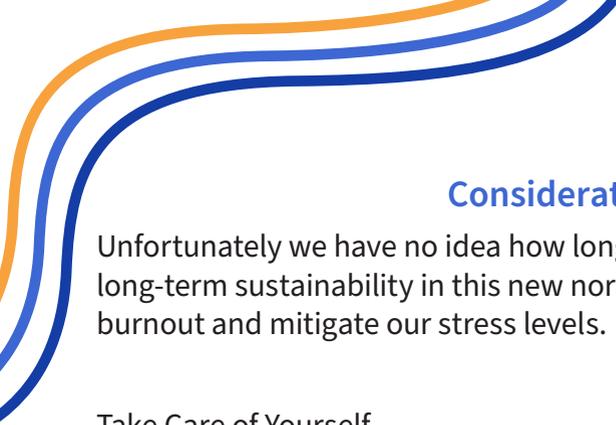
Consent

Virtual services are a new service so even if you have been working with your family for some time, explain the transition from face to face to virtual services and elicit their consent. Discuss with your agency if verbal agreement will suffice or if you want to obtain a written consent form from your family. If your session will be recorded, ensure consent for that as well.

Documentation

Documenting the details of your virtual contact is just as important as documenting your in-person contacts. Make sure to include your exchanges, what you discussed and worked on as well as what you observed.





Considerations for Professional Stability

Unfortunately we have no idea how long this medical crisis will last and so we must prepare for long-term sustainability in this new norm. The following are ideas to consider to prevent professional burnout and mitigate our stress levels.

Take Care of Yourself

Self-care isn't selfish, it's vital. We were already doing difficult and emotionally draining work, now we are adjusting to rapid changes, both profession and personal, and trying our best to take everything in stride. Try new self-care activities. Create a fixed routine that includes self-care every day. Even 5 minutes of self-care every day can make a difference in our overall mental wellbeing.

Keep Good Boundaries

Boundaries have always been important in child welfare work and that has not changed. Continue to set and keep good boundaries with the people you serve. Even though we are currently in a crisis and want to be helpful, it's healthy to have boundaries with co-workers and supervisors. It's OK to say no sometimes. It's important to voice your opinion and talk through crucial issues.

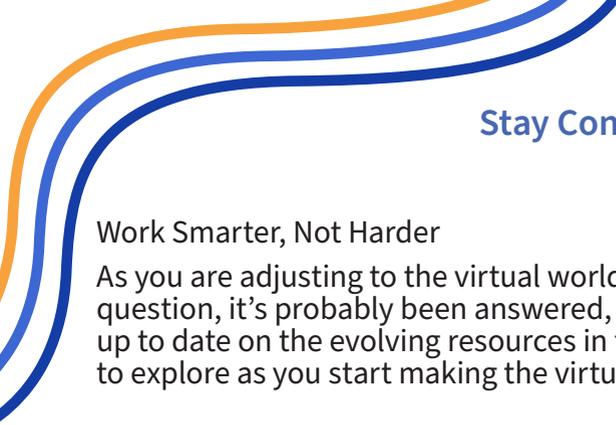
Take Breaks and Have an Off Button

Technology is great, but it can also be a burden. Just because you are home and reachable through technology 24/7, doesn't mean you should be. Take your lunch break every day. Eat your lunch and then go for a walk or read a book for fun. Don't sit in front of your computer screen answering emails while you shove food in your mouth. You don't have to be available 24/7 to anyone who needs you. At the end of your work day, close your computer and disconnect from your work.

Stay Connected to Colleagues and Continue to Consult

We are physically alone during the day in our homes, but we still have colleagues and supervisors to reach out to. Don't accidentally isolate yourself socially and emotionally. Continue to consult with co-workers and mentors about difficult or unusual cases. This has always been an important aspect to child welfare work and working from home does not change that.





Stay Connected To Online Resources

Work Smarter, Not Harder

As you are adjusting to the virtual world, tap into the plethora of existing resources. If you have a question, it's probably been answered, you just have to find it. Take time to regularly review and stay up to date on the evolving resources in the child welfare world. Below are some helpful guides for you to explore as you start making the virtual shift.

[National Association of Social Work \(NASW\) Telehealth Guidance](#)

[National Association of Social Work \(NASW\) Technology in Social Work Practice](#)

[American Psychological Association \(APA\) Ethical Guidance for the COVID-19 Era](#)

[National Council on Crime & Delinquency \(NCCD\) Children's Research Center COVID-19 Resources for Child Welfare](#)

