Utilizing Technology:
How to Engage and Serve Families during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Adapting to change during a pandemic has its challenges. The NSTRC recognizes that in the face of changing information and new guidance, you have been working diligently to assist your families. The guidance below is designed to help you to connect and support your families in the best ways possible.

Prior to First SafeCare Session:

Connect with parent/caregiver and determine what modality will be utilized for SafeCare virtual sessions. Options include:

- videoconferencing using a desktop computer, laptop, or tablet;
- video chat using a smart device; or,
- telephone call.

Discuss the challenges and opportunities of the communication platform that is selected and what may be difficult about meeting in this unique way as opposed to a traditional home visit so that the parent can decide the best option.

Discuss special issues of privacy and confidentiality specific to tele-home visiting. Some families may feel more exposed, vulnerable, or sensitive to this format.

Obtain and document verbal consent to participate in virtual SafeCare sessions.

Setting Up SafeCare Sessions via Videoconference/Video Chat:

If the parent/caregiver is able to connect via videoconference or video chat, agencies should consider which videoconferencing platform will offer their clients the most privacy and security.

HIPAA-compliant video conferencing services include:

- Doxy.me
- Thera-LINK
- TheraNest
- SimplePractice
- Zoom for Healthcare
- VSee

Video conferencing is the preferred method as videos allow the Provider to maintain a visual component for the role-play delivery (modeling and practicing).

Providers are encouraged to:

- practice video conferencing internally before using with families;
- test their devices at least 24 hours before each visit to ensure all components are working properly;
- educate parents/caregivers to use the videoconferencing platform; and,
- establish a "back-up" mode of communication in case primary mode fails.

Should the Provider or family have tech difficulties at the time of virtual home visit, it is recommended that an alternative method to connect be identified and discussed (e.g., telephone call, texting).

Engaging Parents/Caregivers and Preparing Them for First Virtual Home Visit:

To increase the parent/caregiver's engagement with virtual SafeCare sessions and to promote the parent/caregiver's success with the tele-home visit:

- Familiarize yourself with current state and national COVID-19 response resources in order to provide comprehensive support.

- Ensure previously utilized resources and referral agencies are currently open and available.

- Check-in with the parent/caregiver before the virtual home visit. Ask if the family has any pressing needs. Respond immediately to the family's needs. For example, make any necessary referrals for food resources, assistance with job loss, and health issues.

- Discuss how parent/caregiver will access the parent materials (digitally/ drop-off front door delivery/ mail package via USPS). Ensure that parent/caregiver has necessary materials and understands what documents/resources will be needed at each session.

- Discuss with the parent/caregiver the best time to conduct the virtual home visit, the length of each session, and the frequency of the virtual sessions. If the parent/caregiver has difficulty attending an entire session in one sitting, consider splitting the session into two virtual visits.

You may also consider the following:
- Encourage the parent/caregiver to select a time when alternate childcare is available or when their child/ren are either sleeping or engaged in a quiet activity. Reminder: PCI and PII require a child to be present and awake.

- Encourage the parent/caregiver to find a quiet and private place in their home.

Provider Tips for Virtual SafeCare

Providers are encouraged to communicate with families using available private telecommunication and video conferencing tools.

The following are some virtual home visiting best practices:

- Set up the video conference in a location that minimizes distractions and promotes confidentiality. It is important to let families know that you are in a private place at the start of the visit.

- Remove additional distractions by disabling the alerts on your phone and/or computer. Remind family members that you are in conference and to refrain from entering the room. Remember that many devices pick up external noises that can be distracting during a video conference.

- Ensure that the background of your video conference is not too busy and distracting. Try to find a location that has a sterile background. Some platforms such as Zoom allow you to upload a background of your own.

- Be mindful of the angle of the camera, setting the device so the webcam is at eye level. This will increase your ability to make eye contact with the parent/caregiver.

- Pay attention to the room's lighting and reduce lighting behind you so that it allows the parent/caregiver to see you clearly. For instance, do not sit in front of a window as it will place a shadow over your face.

- To promote sound clarity and reduce background noise, consider using headphones with a mic.

- Start visits on time and dress as you would for a normal in-person SafeCare session.

> **Crucial First Minute of Videoconference/Video Chat:**
> - Provider will aim for a professional and confident tone, in addition to being warm and open.
> - Provider will start the call with some pre-education – let the parent/caregiver know what to expect during the virtual home visit.

Wrapping up the Virtual Home Visit:

- **Provider should check how the visit went logistically** for the parent/caregiver and ask parent/caregiver if the visit was meaningful to them.
- If there were logistical challenges with the virtual home visit, the Provider should find and communicate solutions before the next session.

Maintaining Engagement between Virtual Home Visits:

- Promptly follow up your virtual home visit with requested and/or promised resources via email.

- It is recommended that Providers check in with family between visits. Texts, calls, and emails enhance your services by providing additional support to the family and help keep families engaged.

- Providers can offer additional resources to parents/caregivers between visits. One idea is to discuss family routine, specifically:

  How is it working for them?

  What adjustments have they made?

  Provider can share ideas for family schedules including templates provided by NSTRC.

Additional resources for virtual home visits:

Child Trends brief on COVID-19 and home visiting

Rapid Response: Virtual Home Visiting

NCCD