Who to ask for help?

You are not alone. If you need support, talk to your colleagues, your manager, a supervisor, or a Subject Matter Expert.

Resources to help you

Australian Red Cross COVID-19 Pandemic

Department of Health Coronavirus (COVID-19) health alert

Services Australia Social and Health Payments and Services

Beyond Blue Coronavirus Mental Wellbeing Support

Australian Institute of Family Studies Coronavirus Response: Resources for families

SNAICC COVID-19 resources for children, families, communities and resources

Rainbow Health Victoria LGBTIQ Inclusion for COVID-19 Remote Services

NASW 8 Ethical Considerations for Social Workers

Remote casework practice in the context of COVID-19

To minimise risk and reduce the spread of COVID-19 we are increasingly providing casework services remotely to reduce face-to-face contact where possible. This is not a new way of working for many service providers. But for others, this will require changes to the way we work. Remote casework should not be seen as a lesser service, but it may require us to think differently about how to best meet client needs.

The fundamentals of practice when working remotely remain the same:
- We remain **client focused** with the client at the centre of our work.
- We consider the client **holistically** and assess and respond to their most pressing needs.
- We utilise a **strengths based approach** and continue to build on and highlight the strengths demonstrated by our clients and their natural support networks.
- We work **collaboratively** with other services to ensure coordinated service provision.
- We **identify risk**, report and respond to concerns as they arise.
- We **do no harm** at all times.

Get set up

Make sure you have access to the technology you require to undertake your role remotely. Remote work benefits from technology such as video conferencing, as it gives the worker and client opportunity to see visual cues similar to face-to-face contact. Video is particularly useful for complex or sensitive conversations. It can provide a stronger sense of connection than written communication or phones calls. This can be done through FaceTime, WhatsApp, or Skype. Have a discussion with your client about what works best for them. You may need to talk the client through how to use technology safely to ensure their privacy and confidentiality. Check with your manager and IT team to ensure that you are using safe mechanisms for communication with the required data security, and protecting your information through the use of work specific devices and contact details.

Prepare your clients

To set this way of working up it is essential that service providers contact current clients and explain contact will be remote, except in limited circumstances. It's important for clients to know these measures are being taken to reduce the risk of virus transmission for both staff and clients.

Discussions should highlight that this doesn't mean that you are ceasing services, but will continue to provide support through remote avenues such as phone calls, text, FaceTime or Skype. Talk about access to modes of communication and agree on how you will continue to communicate. Explore together what method and frequency works best, as well as the ideal time of day. Be creative and flexible about how you maintain contact, exploring different apps and methods that will work best for you and your client, but discuss with your manager and your IT team before using any particular method to ensure you are considering data security and confidentiality. For example, text messaging may work best for scheduling the next catch up, but should not be used to discuss confidential matters.

Plan every contact

Before contacting a client remotely, it is important to prepare for the conversation. Read the client's file including recent case notes, any needs assessment and/or current case plan. Are there safeguarding concerns or other risk factors that may be exacerbated at a time like this, such as a history of family and domestic violence, drug and alcohol issues, mental health issues or child protection concerns? Are there any other key services working with the client? Are these services still available to provide support? Note the key priorities, so that you can focus your discussion and support progress. Be led by the client, ensuring you hear and respond to your client's most pressing needs and priorities.

Remain flexible

In the context of COVID-19, things are changing on a daily basis. What may have been a need previously may have been replaced by more pressing needs if a family member has fallen ill or the family has been impacted by other issues. Be mindful that available supports may no longer be accessible, and new ones may need to be considered and put in place. It is vital that you maintain the ability be flexible, and respond to these emerging needs.

Client Safety

When talking with your client, don't assume that they are in a safe space and freely able to speak. Carefully check in with your client at the start of each conversation asking safe questions. Be aware others may be able to listen to your conversation.

This is particularly important at a time like this, where social distancing and self-isolation may be bringing people together in households that are not always safe. It is important to be alert to the increased risk of family and domestic violence, child abuse and other safeguarding concerns.

Start conversations with questions like: "Is now a good time to talk? Is anyone else there and able to hear our conversation? Do you want to call me back when you are alone? Is it better if I call you or you call me? When is a good time for me to call?"

If you have a safeguarding concern, don't ignore it. Talk to your manager and follow the reporting guidelines for your organisation and mandatory reporting requirements for your jurisdiction.

Reflective practice

A key challenge of working remotely is the physical barriers to connecting with managers and colleagues, and engaging in critical reflection and reflective practice. You may find there are less opportunities for informal discussions and communication.

Good team communication, reflective practice and case discussion are critical to effective practice and continuous learning. Be intentional and formalise discussions with your team and your manager through regular scheduled supervision that includes case reviews. Set up regular team meetings to present your cases, seek out opportunities for peer review, and participate in organisational practice sessions. Daily check-ins with your manager and/or team may help everyone stay connected, informed and supported.

Act on safeguarding concerns

If you have a concern for someone, don't ignore it. At times like this - where people are social distancing and self-isolating, and having less contact with external supports - there is an increased risk serious issues such as family and domestic violence, child protection and adult safeguarding concerns will go unnoticed. If in doubt make a report. Make sure you are clear on your reporting obligations, your organisation's reporting processes and the mechanisms for reporting safeguarding concerns in your jurisdiction. For support with this, talk to your manager..