BEST PRACTICES FOR TECHNOLOGY USE

PRIVACY AND SECURITY

Workers are at increased risk of privacy issues when using their own devices and when working remotely. Help them reduce risk by sharing ways to maintain privacy in the field, If you don't support good decision-making, workers may find the easiest way to get the work done, and it may not be the most secure way.

Those working from home may need training reminders about issues like:

- how to use anonymized phone numbers or text messages to connect with parents
- the best kind of software to use for web conferencing
- best practices for using public networks, such as from the parking lot of a coffee shop
- how to manage privacy of their devices when multiple members of the house use the devices
- how to connect to cloud-based storage, emails, or case management systems
- maintaining privacy when talking to or about clients when other people are home
- managing paper or electronic files from home
- best practices for remote supervision and case staffing
- best ways to facilitate exchange of client paperwork, such as signed releases of information

Our workforce is under increased stress just like the rest of America; they are worried about health risks, kids at home, and increased risks on caseloads. New learning about tech is tough in these circumstances. Make sure workers have access to IT and other support. Demonstrate care for their safety, and be proactive in providing best options so they don't have to learn new tools alone.

TOOLS FOR THE JOB

Agencies should provide recommendations about what technology may be appropriate for routine casework tasks. Sometimes the most secure options are difficult for families to access, which is why HHS announced relaxed oversight of HIPAA standards during this crisis. Remind people that the phone is always an option!

- **Video meetings:** Google Meet, Zoom, Jitsi, Facetime, and Skype are more user-friendly than more secure tools like Doxy.me and easier to use than agency tools like WebEx and Skype for Business.

- **Casenotes:** Tablets and smartphones are frustrating for long documents. If laptops are not accessible, consider a phone-based medical dictation service like CloudDictation.com or TranscribeMe! where workers can phone in their notes.

- **Phone calls:** Workers who do not have an agency phone can sign up for a free number through Google Voice and have it transferred to their cell or home phone with a unique ringtone.

- **Text messages:** Web and phone apps like Remind, Spruce, and Signal allow registrants to text to regular numbers without sharing theirs.

Consider using funds for tablets for parents/ foster families to improve their access to visitation and caseworker contact to improve equity.

SUPPORTING WORKERS

Workers may not have devices, may have limited data plans, or may not have storage space on their phones. They may share devices with other people, including kids who are home-schooled right now. They may have partners who also work from home. They may not want to use their devices due to risk or personal privacy. And they might be uncomfortable with tools like security settings or video calls.

Consider ways to provide multiple kinds of support:

- Are loaner devices available, including internet hotspots? Can they be purchased with emergency funding?
- Are IT services friendly and approachable? Do workers know how to get help when needed?
- Can the agency publish or point to very short documents, videos, or webinars that walk workers through how-to processes?
- Can one resource web page be maintained that provides resources related to the use of tech during COVID-19? (This helps avoid email overload!)
- Check out the NCWWI webinar series on supporting the virtual workforce.

Because guidelines about best practices and policy are trickling out over time, many are doing the best they can with the tools they have. They may have already done things we would advise against, such as becoming friends on social media with clients or giving out personal contact information in order to ease communication. Are workers clear about what they should do if they've made an accidental tech-related mistake and how to correct it? Normalize conversations about tech concerns during supervision, including those that involve mistakes. We are all likely to make some tech mistakes during these complex times.
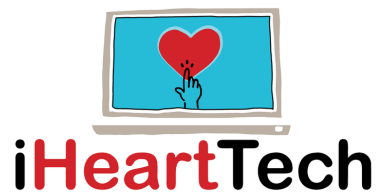
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