

Behavioral Health Services (BHS) - Provider Information Notice

To:	BHS Contracted Children, Youth & Families (CYF) Service Providers	May 21, 2020
From:	Behavioral Health Services - CYF	
CC:	HHSA – Child Welfare Services San Diego County – Probation San Diego County Office of Education	
Topic(s):	Provider Memo, Service Delivery, COVID-19	
Title	Serving Children, Youth, and Families During COVID-19	

Due to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), schools have closed campuses and shifted to remote learning. This requires changes, not only for how students and schools work together but also for how providers and schools work together as well. It is critical for CYF providers who interface with schools to maintain or reestablish contact in support of service delivery, with a focus on referral pathways.

Referral Pathways – Inclusive of SchoolLink Providers

- Review referral pathway and, if changed due to COVID-19, ensure that modification is available to the community and the contract COR to ensure school lists are updated.
- Reach out to each designated school (SchoolLink providers).
- Reestablish annual school meeting to address the following:
 - Modification and change of referral pathways, if necessary,
 - Review of SchoolLink referral processes and maintenance,
 - Confirmation of key contacts, and
 - Highlight of how services are currently being offered (ex. telehealth, telephone, in person, etc.)

Increased stressors for parents and guardians during COVID-19 combined with a potential rise in the prevalence of unhealthy behaviors, and more time with children may lead to child abuse.¹

Child Welfare Services (CWS) Hotline Updates

- CWS has been reporting a decrease in calls to the child abuse reporting Hotline.
- The use of telehealth services is allowing behavioral health providers to continue screening children for areas of risk, reporting suspected child abuse, and providing necessary services.
- Behavioral health providers may be one of the few individuals in contact with children and youth during this time of physical isolation. Regular contact with providers is important, as these may be the only opportunities available for the youth/children to ask for help.

Resources to Support Victims of Child Abuse

- [Intimate Partner Violence and Child Abuse Considerations During COVID-19](#) resource document produced by SAMHSA.
- The County Child Abuse Hotline, available at 858-560-2191, continues to be the reporting resource for suspicion of physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, and domestic violence.

Living through the uncertainties of COVID-19, as well as social isolation, may increase the risk for a variety of mental health issues, including suicide.

Suicide Assessment/Screening

- Research indicates that the perception of feeling cared for and connected is a powerful tool to prevent suicide. Screening for suicide and engaging youth and families to build this perception can be accomplished via telehealth.
- Options for structured brief suicide screening tools include the Columbia-Suicide Severity Rating Scale ([C-SSRS](#))

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and the Ask Suicide-Screening Questions ([ASQ](#)) Toolkit. These are available online for pediatric populations and can be considered for regular use.

- Brief screening tools are typically used in primary care, emergency departments, etc., where positive screens prompt a mental health evaluation. A comprehensive assessment should include engaging family members and other sources of support.
- Suicide means reduction should be routine – ask about weapons in the home and recommend that medications (over the counter and prescription) be secured. Remember, a high percentage of deaths by suicide in youth are by hanging. The Suicide Prevention Resource Center website has links to additional [means reduction information](#).

Providers are encouraged to reach out to their COR for any issues or inquiries, and for help connecting to any of the numerous resources available to those assisting CYF clients.

Additional Resources

- Available Emergency Services
 - Psychiatric Emergency Response Teams (PERT) can be activated through a call to 9-1-1 or directly to the police.
 - The Emergency Screening Unit (ESU) remains open for service, call 619-876-4502 to provide clinical information should a youth be referred for evaluation.
 - Inpatient services are available and primarily accessed through the ESU.
- Teen Guide to Mental Health and Wellness (resource for teens)
 - [English Version](#)
 - [Spanish Version](#)
- [Behavioral Health Services COVID-19 Mental Health webpage](#)
- [San Diego County Office of Education website](#)

Please contact your COR with any questions. More information on COVID-19 can be found on the [County of San Diego COVID-19 webpage](#), resources and communications specific to BHS providers can be found on the [COVID-19 BHS Provider Resources webpage](#).

¹ <https://www.apa.org/topics/covid-19/domestic-violence-child-abuse>