

Caring for the Workforce

Participant ideas and resources from the NCWWI webinars Virtual Supervision; Well-Being; and Physical, Emotional, and Psychological Safety



Description: These webinars explored how to care for the workforce using [virtual supervision](#) and by attending to the workforce's [well-being](#) and [physical, emotional, and psychological safety](#). Webinar participants offered many good comments, ideas, and resources in the chat boxes. This document synthesizes and captures the chat log comments and ideas and shares them back to the field.

Benefits of Working From Home

- Save time and spend it differently
- Increase personal productivity
- Improve self-care
- In the future, open minds to possible work efficiencies and benefits of flexible work schedules

Find and Establish a Rhythm for Teleworking

- Establish a work schedule that allows for flexibility:
 - ✓ establish regular check-in times
 - ✓ set boundaries
 - ✓ make space to organize work to be most effective and productive
- Create blocks of time for both "deep work," which requires higher cognitive functions and "shallow work," like responding to emails, which is less intellectually taxing

Home-/Work-Life Balance

- Offer grace to your staff and yourself
- Be flexible with work hours
- Create inclusion strategies for children/pets
- Set a routine to start and end your day
- Schedule a standard break in your day
- Use five minutes between meetings to do something that recharges your body and mind
- Strive for work-life balance

Leverage Technology

- Share access to calendars across the team for coordination and to support transparency, accountability, and scheduling ease
- Use telephone calls and texting for basic communication
- Video conference using:
 - Zoom
 - Microsoft Teams
 - Go-To-Meeting
 - Skype for Business
 - WebEx
- Use apps to facilitate communication:
 - WhatsApp
 - Jabber
 - Google Meet
 - Google Hangout
 - GroupMe
 - Slack channels for teams
 - FaceTime
 - Kudoboard
 - Marco Polo
 - Private Facebook pages

Resiliency, Secondary Trauma, and Post-Traumatic Stress

- Establish virtual secondary trauma groups for workers
- Offer regular or daily meetings/check-ins on self-care to inspire work-life balance (e.g., “empower hours” to connect on everyone’s well-being)
- Consider appointing a resiliency coordinator who hosts virtual resiliency teams
- Send out a daily email to staff with resiliency tips
- Lead with empathy and focus on the totality of the person
- Extend grace to colleagues
- Start all conversations with a well-being check
- Resources:
 - "Ambiguous Loss" research and book by Pauline Boss <https://bit.ly/2Kv0VGe>
 - 1-888-NYC-Well or text WELL to 65173 for mental health and substance use support: <https://nycwell.cityofnewyork.us/en/>
 - How to recognize when someone is anxious or depressed: <https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/2020/03/how-do-i-know-someone-is-experiencing-anxiety-or-depression/>

Offer Inspiration and Appreciation

- Send positive daily quotes
- Text inspirational messages
- Mail care packages
- Send a handwritten note or card as a sign of caring and recognition of work
- Hold an alphabet gratitude roll call, one letter a day, where a supervisor texts staff and asks for a reply on what they are grateful for

- Hold spirit week through email
- Send out a weekly message on “Wellness Wednesdays”
- Share a gold star moment every day about what was accomplished during the day that the team is proud of (work-related or not)
- Provide a lot of praise and reassurance on the work being done each day in this situation
- Mail a card and packet of flower seeds to staff to give them something to look forward to

Make Connections

- Hold virtual coffee, lunch, or happy hours to foster personal-level connections
- Establish office hours for staff to enter a videoconferencing room at a specific time to connect or get a question answered
- Organize virtual hangouts that are not work-related
- Offer lunchtime Zoom Yoga
- Establish a “secret pal” through the mail to stay connected
- End the day with silly GIF's that describe feelings
- Hold weekly team meetings to follow up and provide any updates
- Offer venting time for staff to share their frustrations and feelings
- Encourage taking days off to decompress from the work
- Check in daily with staff in group chat
- Shift the feel of connectivity from “accountability tactic” to actual support by designing meetings to connect and focus on wellness, not work
- Have staff complete communication self-assessments or conflict style self-assessments and share them as a team
- Hold virtual morning team “huddles”

Build Creativity into Meetings

- Have a pet and/or kid parade to introduce either or both into the virtual space
- Offer a collaborative coloring session to color and visit
- Play a short, time-limited game (e.g., 20 questions, show and tell, Mad Libs, Scattergories)
- Wear your favorite hat to a meeting
- Share something once a week that was funny or trivial - everyone involved and no judgments

Encourage Self-Care

- Send reminders to practice self-care
- Support taking time off
- Encourage use of the Employee Assistant Program (EAP)
- Send emails during the day to encourage taking a break
- See self-care as a collective and shared responsibility, adhering to the group’s established norms
- Send daily self-care tips
- Set up a “count your steps” group challenge
- Encourage daily exercise

- Distribute information on various self-care techniques, such as meditation, yoga, and grounding
- Discuss an "information diet" to manage what information is ingested throughout a day
- Make a monthly workout plan and check it off every day
- Play inspirational videos
- Play games with family or others over Houseparty
- Make and share humorous videos with family members and friends
- Go on a picnic with friends practicing physical distancing
- Host a virtual paint night
- Find ice breaker ideas: <https://www.owllabs.com/blog/ice-breakers>
- Reduce optional exposure to traumatic/frightening/exaggerated media
- Take a power nap
- Be mindful of how stress-inducing some Zoom and other check-ins can be since digital platforms can make everyone seem "front and center"
- Encourage incorporating Zumba or group exercise into daily routine
- Notice the yin and yang of mindfulness--balance the need to be and the need to do
- Check out Some Good News: <http://somegoodnews.com>
- Listen to Mayo Clinic Radio: <https://newsnetwork.mayoclinic.org/hubcap/mayo-clinic-radio/>

Support Workforce Development

Participate in online trainings that are relevant to the work or to career paths. The following link to resources that increase knowledge in child welfare, child welfare management, or self-care:

- [National Child Welfare Workforce Institute Online Learning](#)
- [National Child Welfare Workforce Institute National Webinar Series](#)
- [Child Welfare Information Gateway](#)
- [National Child Abuse Prevention Month](#)
- [National Foster Care Month](#)
- [National Adoption Month](#)
- [Child Welfare Information Gateway Learning Center](#)
- [Child Welfare Capacity Building Center for States](#)
- [Child Welfare Capacity Building Collaborative CapLEARN](#)
- [Child Welfare Capacity Building Center for Tribes](#)
- [Center for Adoption Support and Education National Training Initiative Web-Based Training](#)
- [Strengthening Families™ Protective Factors Framework training](#)
- [Center for Advanced Study in Child Welfare Continuing Education](#)
- [TBRI 101: A Self-Guided Course in Trust-Based Relationships](#)
- [The Science of Well-Being](#) Free Yale course on Happiness
- [PESI](#) free or deeply discounted clinical skills training

Manage Workloads

Communication

- Focus emails on updates, new processes and procedures, and success stories
- Check in more frequently with individual staff members not only about work tasks, but also about general well-being
- Focus on strengths and show gratitude for the work being accomplished during such stressful times

Clinical supervision and case reviews

- Meet with staff more frequently to achieve meaningful and in-depth case consultations
- Use mobile and web-based video conferencing for individual coaching and case consultation
- Conduct weekly group supervision to decrease isolation and seek ideas and input from other team members
- Conduct more thorough case record reviews and create feedback loops to improve practice
- Review individual cases with the team to seek different perspectives

Oversight and safety first

- Provide information about the families and homes staff are visiting through designated channels
- Offer flexibility to staff, while continuing to ensure adherence to policies and timeframes
- Discuss and validate the fears of staff
- Provide personal protective equipment for safety
- Encourage staff to be creative in preparing for face-to-face contacts to protect themselves, children, and families by:
 - Standing outside in the yard or on the porch to conduct face-to-face contacts
 - Standing outside a child's bedroom window (with parent's permission) to interview the child alone
 - Conducting health-safety assessments on all members of the household before going into the home
 - Limiting face-to-face visits to cases with extreme safety concerns
- Allow only healthy staff and not those with any pre-existing or compromising health conditions to make face-to-face visits

Personnel and performance issues

- Engage in the parallel process
 - Use appreciative inquiry and solution-focused questions
 - Model how workers should interact with families
 - Leverage staff's strengths to identify ways to improve performance
 - Help staff see the parallels in setting the same boundaries for themselves that they often ask families with whom they work to set
 - Identify barriers
 - Set clear expectations
 - Coach

Positives/looking to the future

Although there are challenges, there are also positives to this new virtual world child welfare professionals are finding themselves working in:

- Younger parents are responding better to virtual visits; agencies have demonstrated new ways to partner with families through virtual visits; and making virtual contacts has increased the number of contacts with families
- There are: new online services for families served by the child welfare system; virtual and online services addressing gaps in rural service areas; and an increasing number of telehealth sessions. These virtual services are particularly helpful for families with transportation issues.
- With the reduction in referrals of child maltreatment, agencies have the opportunity to “deep dive” into cases and determine what is needed to safely close cases

Unexpected Positives From the COVID-19 Pandemic

- Allowed us to refocus on what really matters
- Gave us the opportunity to utilize technology that many were hesitant to try in the workplace as it was a newer way of doing the work
- Grace (offered and accepted)
- Taking this difficult circumstance (COVID-19 pandemic) and turning it into a life/world changing opportunity to truly improve how we take care of ourselves, improve the system, improve outcomes for children and families, and make true positive change happen
- Carry the focus on self-care into "The After"