

ND Child Welfare Supervision

May 2020

While the state of North Dakota was in the midst of transitioning from Counties to Human Service Zones, we knew that supervision, and how we supervised others remotely, would be a change. No one, however, anticipated that we would be supervising remotely during a pandemic. This has left many workers and supervisors scrambling to deal with the unknown. Supervisors and Directors are now navigating a new course, developing new strategies and trying to do so under conditions that will likely not be replaced anytime soon. There are many unknowns, and while many were already supervising employees remotely prior to the pandemic, this is not the same when working under pandemic conditions. COVID 19 has been a game changer of sorts, and has turned the workforce on its head.

Supervision during COVID-19 needs to be different. Not only do we still need to have expectations of our workforce, there are more demands now than ever. There is anxiety about their own safety, safety of the children and families they serve, meeting the needs of their own children and families as they contend with the pandemic, as well as the loss of continuity and support as they navigate uncertain times with policies that seem to change daily.

Getting through this pandemic will not be easy. Will it be worth it? Absolutely! In addition, with some additional support for yourself and your workforce, your department may just come out of this more productive and closer than ever.



Supervising Virtually during COVID 19



Supervising Virtually in Child Welfare- Things Supervisors Can do Right Now

The National Child Welfare Workforce Institute has been holding weekly webinars on Zoom and Facebook Live weekly since the start of the pandemic offering assistance and support to the child welfare workforce. The webinars can be accessed by clicking [here](#). Below is some tips that supervisors should be aware of right now as well as resources shared by NCWWI in the Webinar: *Virtual Supervision*

1. Remember: "Thought and Feeling" before "Task": Ask, listen, and acknowledge; Create psychological safety; Allow staff to vent, not complaining; once you check in, then attend to tasks, and "to do" list. **2. Be a Model:** "Be the change" – your team is watching you; Your attitude matters- the attitude of the team often mirrors that of the leader **3. Set Clear expectations:** Determine what is hardest, then talk about how it will be done; Communication should be frequent- more frequent than you ever imagined necessary. **4. Check in regularly:** You need to check in more often than you think; Even if you don't have new directives or updates, stay in touch. If you are not filling the information void for your team, they will fill it themselves and, in all likelihood, with something that is not accurate or positive; Be a resource; Offer help; Adjusts expectations – It is better to "check in" than to "check up on." **5. Be Supportive:** Be empathetic and understanding; Listen; Provide encouragement and positive feedback **6. Provide Room for Grace:** Forgiveness goes a long way, remember this has been hard for almost everyone; Be patient- with your staff with and with yourself; Understand that we all are adapting the best that we can!

****Remind your staff of the mission! That what they do matters!**

Five Remote Leadership Strategies

1. Structure Your Day: Set a routine, schedule formal check in's, staff meetings and frequent breaks. Most importantly, remember to protect off-work time. Working from home does not mean you are to be on the clock 24/7 and your employees should not be either.

2. Organize Communication: Use team communication tools to manage information that tend to be changing daily. Use video calls to manage complicated policies and issues, this allows everyone to hear the information at the same time and the opportunity to ask questions that everyone may have. This also created cohesiveness between employees as well as with the supervisor.

3. Manage by Results: The most valuable aspect is that the job is being done correctly and that children and families are safe. While we are asking our families to be flexible so must we as workers and supervisors in regards to when and how we get the work done.

4. Build Trust: Nurture a common purpose: make sure remote workers know you are there for support. Make public shout outs to show appreciation and praise.

5. Foster Team Spirit: It is easy to feel isolated and detached during this time, encourage humor, connect with your team by hosting virtual meetings; pair team members to be "work buddies" that check in regularly with each other and can provide mentorship.

When you have to lead through rapid change or stressful circumstances, you often do not know what the day will bring, but as a leader, you always choose how you'll how up. Your team needs you to be clear, calm, focused and connected.

Let's Grow Leaders: Lead Through rapid change with calm and clarity

Additional Resources for Supervisors:

More questions about how North Dakota is addressing the needs of children and families during COVID-19? The state website has been posting updates for each program online, trying to answer the many questions that workers and supervisors across the state have. Click: [North Dakota Children and Family Services Q & A](#)

Child Welfare Can Address Burnout. Click on this link to see what you can do as a supervisor to address this for your workers: [Address Burnout](#)

Taking care of ourselves and making sure workers are doing the same is critical right now. Looking for some new Self Care Resources- click on: [Taking care of yourself in COVID -19](#)

References: Let's Grow Leaders "Lead through rapid change with calm and clarity" Karin Hurt & David Dye Posted March 12, 2020; Training Industry, "Five Remote Leadership Strategies" psted April 10, 2020; National Child Welfare Workforce institute Webinar: Supporting the Virtual Workforce: Virtual Supervision, April 8, 2020

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