March 17, 2020

Dear Partners,

**RE: Coronavirus (COVID-19) Guidance for Providers**

Thank you for your patience as we have been thoughtfully navigating the current environment resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. We are all concerned about the coronavirus and its effects on the provision of services to children and families throughout Georgia. This correspondence provides guidance to providers in the governance of direct services during the COVID-19 pandemic. It’s necessary that the agency takes measures consistent with its core charge of ensuring the safety of children, while simultaneously taking efforts to reduce possible health risks to those children, their families and providers.

**General Guidelines for Support Services Providers**

**Counseling/Therapeutic services**
May be completed using telehealth services. Providers should make every effort to ensure that communication is secure and that HIPPA requirements are met for the privacy and confidentiality of family members. Telephone should be the last option. Providers must document that the service was not completed face to face in their case notes. The provider will continue to communicate with DFCS staff via the phone or email as required.

**Psychological, Neuro-Psychological, Psych-Sexual & Psychiatric Mental Health Evaluations**
May be completed using telehealth services. Providers should make every effort to ensure that communication is secure and that HIPPA requirements are met for the privacy and confidentiality of family members. The report must state why the evaluation was completed via telehealth. If not completed within the given timeframe the case note must also state, why and how each component was completed (testing & interviewing). The provider will continue to communicate with DFCS staff via the phone or email as required.

**Substance Abuse/Kinship/Parental Fitness/Domestic Violence/Bonding & Attachment/Trauma & CCFA Assessments**
Postponed 30 days as face to face contact & clinical observation is needed to effectively complete these types of assessments. Providers will document in reports & case notes.
explaining why the assessment was not completed within the required timeframe. The provider will continue to communicate with DFCS staff via the phone or email as required.

**Visitation services**
It is the Division’s recommendation that in-person court-ordered visitation be suspended and replaced with frequent video conferencing and/or phone calls to ensure children stay safe while remaining connected to their parents during this period. In order to remain compliant with judicial court orders, county DFCS offices have been asked to immediately work to get local juvenile court approval prior to this temporary practice change occurring.

**Hoteling/Supervision**
These services will continue with providers taking CDC and Department of Public Health precautions to keep the clients and their staff safe. Service Authorizations will be completed by DFCS staff to extend the services if deemed appropriate. The provider will continue to communicate with DFCS staff via the phone or email as required.

**In Home Visitation**
These services can be completed face to face after taking CDC and Department of Public Health precaution or may be completed using telehealth services. Providers should make every effort to ensure that communication is secure and that HIPPA requirements are met for the privacy and confidentiality of family members. Document in the case notes explaining why the services were not completed face to face.

**Transportation**
These services will continue with providers taking CDC and Department of Public Health precautions to keep the clients and their staff safe. The provider will continue to communicate with DFCS staff via the phone or email as required.

If you have additional questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact, the DFCS Contract Administration Unit.

**General Guidelines for Prevention and Community Support and Promoting Safe and Stable Families Providers**

Until further notice, where possible, providers should utilize virtual options to facilitate service delivery. This includes services such as individual counseling, collateral contacts, home visits conducted through programs other than evidence-based home visiting programs, etc. If applicable, please utilize telehealth technology to facilitate virtual contact with families and children receiving individualized direct services. We encourage utilizing telephonic communication in situations involving technological limitations.
If services cannot be provided through virtual or telephonic means (ex. center-based support groups, parent support groups, parenting classes, in-person trainings, etc.), then those services should be postponed or cancelled. Please refer to the CDC’s guidelines regarding social distancing, your agency’s protocol and/or your board or other governing body’s guidelines and recommendations for additional guidance on the provision of these types of services.

Specific guidance for state and federal programs are additionally outlined below:

**First Steps Program**
We understand that many hospitals have implemented restrictions on persons entering their facilities. Please email Jennifer Bell to inform us of facility or agency closures that precipitates changes or cancellations of your programming. The Technical Assistance Team at the Center for Family Research at the University of Georgia is currently developing programmatic guidance on completing daily First Steps activities in response to COVID-19 that we will share as soon as it is available.

**Evidenced-Based Home Visiting Programs**
Follow your agency’s protocol during this time for serving families. Please email Jennifer Bell for Prevention and Community Support, or Roger Hubbard and Deb Farrell for the Promoting Safe and Stables Families Program to inform us of your agency closures. When making home visits, consider virtual service delivery. PAT/HFA state leads, Paige Ferrell and Sara Jane Blackman, are available for technical assistance on the virtual service delivery guidance provided by the PAT/HFA National Models.

The Technical Assistance Team at the Center for Family Research at the University of Georgia is currently developing programmatic guidance on completing daily home visiting activities in response to COVID-19 that we will share as soon as it is available.

**Second Step**
Please follow guidance issued by the Committee for Children (CfC) for virtual implementation of the Social Emotional Early Learning lessons. CfC will continue to provide additional guidance to help schools with resources to teach and support Second Step during this time. We await specific guidance on the Bullying Prevention Unit and Child Protection Unit and will share as soon as we receive it. Please contact the Second Step Client Support Services Team at support@secondstep.org or your Program Specialist, Laura Griggs, with any additional questions or concerns regarding Second Step implementation.

**Title V Sexual Risk Avoidance Education (SRAE) Program and Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP)**
The Family and Youth Services Bureau is awaiting guidance from the Division of Grants Policy within Administration on Children and Families on how grantees should proceed in providing services, and if virtual platforms may be utilized to meet programming requirements. In the meantime, follow guidance from local officials, school district administrations and your agencies’ guidelines. Please email your Program Specialist,
Missy Thompson or Jessica Lloyd for the Title V SRAE Program, or Jovita Ramjisingh and Deborah Chosewood for PREP, to inform us of your agency closures.

**Further Information and Guidance:**

As this situation continues to develop and evolve, we will provide additional and clarifying guidance from the Division. Specifically, we will provide information how payments and contract deliverables will be addressed as a result of the potential inability to provide services during this period. We are also working closely with other state and federal entities and will communicate related updates as soon as new information becomes available.

If you have additional questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact your assigned Program Specialist within the Prevention and Community Support Section, or Roger Hubbard and Deb Farrell for the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program.

Thank you for your commitment and your dedication to servicing the children and families of our State during this unprecedented time.