

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

OPWDD understands how challenging and disruptive the temporary suspension of day services, home visits, community outings and other outdoor activities has been for the people we support and their families during the COVID-19 global pandemic response, but probably most unsettling is the inability to visit your child or other family member. OPWDD provided guidance to our residential provider partners back in March which directs them to make every attempt to provide families with opportunities to maintain contact with their loved ones. Below are just a few of the best practices we encourage all residential providers to engage in to allow more meaningful contact during this unprecedented time:

- Develop a face-to-face video call program using programs such as Skype, Facetime, Google Meets or Zoom
- Arrange in-person through the window calls or visits with family and friends
- Develop a family call program where activities or social work staff call families regularly with clinical updates
- Establish an ambassador program that makes support staff available to answer phones and connect family members to nursing staff
- Hold weekly webcasts from the leadership to answer live questions from families
- Provide daily updates from the leadership of the facility on the facility's web page
- Modify the facility's web page to include COVID-19 information and communication resources
- Provide written communication via email and US Mail with regular updates surrounding the facility's COVID-19 response plan

OPWDD continues to encourage residential facilities to keep the lines of communication with residents and families open. We remain in constant contact with the NYS Department of Health on best practices and we hope to be able to provide expanded safe visitation guidance and guidelines related to the resumption of programs very soon, as regions across the state slowly begin the process of reopening. Moving forward, our number one priority will be to continue to ensure the health and safety of the people we support as we make the transition to a "new normal."

You can sign-up online to receive the [latest updates from OPWDD](#) via email or check the OPWDD website frequently for [information relating to COVID-19](#).

Sincerely,

Theodore Kastner M.D, M.S.
Commissioner