

BEST PRACTICES FOR TECHNOLOGY USE

FOCUS ON RELATIONSHIPS

Technology is an important tool during times like these, and can support important human relationships. Caseworkers should also normalize that we are all feeling distracted, experiencing losses, and need extra support. Pandemics increase risk of abuse, domestic violence, and substance use. Losses (of visits, routine, etc.) may trigger reminders of previous losses for kids and adults. Check in with families about their stressors, supports, and needs. Use extra empathy and patience. Encourage foster families to attend an online support group like those offered at [Chosen](#). Help parents connect to online [12-step groups](#) if appropriate..



CELL PHONES & VIDEO CHAT

Emergencies create the need to innovate quickly. Although we need to be creative with technology, we must also maintain ethical best practice. And although using your own device is convenient, it adds liability. For instance, your phone may be subpoenaed if it contains text messages about clients, and you may be liable if your child accidentally reshares a picture of a client. Text messages may be shared in court.

Consider the following tips:

- Instead of giving out your personal cell if you don't have a work phone, sign up for a Google Voice number which can transfer calls to your cell; give that number to clients.
- Check out [Federal guidance from HHS](#) which says that 30-day visits can be conducted remotely for now.
- HIPAA regulations are relaxed due to COVID, allowing use of tools like Jitsi, FaceTime, Skype, Zoom, or Google Meet (confirm what your agency allows).
- Do not exchange client files on your personal phone or email; use your secure work email.
- Use a free app like Google Voice, Spruce, or Signal for secure text-messaging.
- Be sure your devices are protected with passwords. If anyone else uses your devices, password-protect programs or file folders that store work data, including email. Directions for doing this here: [Android](#) or [iPhone](#); find instructions here to lock folders on your [desktop](#).



VIDEO VISITS

TIPS FOR MAKING VIDEO VISITS WORK

We were not prepared for this rush into video visits but here are are! Whether you use video to facilitate family visits or to check in with kids and families, here are some tips to improve outcomes.

- Normalize that this is not the best way to connect, and is temporary.
- Use a plain background, and tell clients who is within your earshot. Ensure conversation privacy, especially when working from home.
- If you are not in a very quiet location, use earbuds with a built-in mic. A phone headset is under \$10.
- Remind everyone that the attention span of children is shorter on video visits. Keep tech visits between family members short and frequent. Use video with audio when possible. Encourage stories, books, and games for younger kids during visits.
- Avoid back-lighting. Light sources should be in front of you to avoid looking like a dark shadow on camera.
- Look at the camera, not at yourself on video; this is the best way to make virtual eye contact.
- Ask clients who is in the room with them so you know who might overhear what you say.
- Give informed consent: explain that the devices you are using are not completely secure, and tech disruptions may occur, explain how you'll handle them. Do not record conversations without authorization from your agency and client.
- Get help from IT and your supervisor when you need it.

WELLNESS WHEN WORKING FROM HOME

TECH TOOLS TO DE-STRESS

Many are stressed or anxious right now. Child welfare workers are essential staff and are fighting on the front lines to ensure families' needs are met. As a result, they often experience burnout and secondary trauma. We need to remember we are as only good to our clients as we are to ourselves.

Consider using tools like these:

- Virtual lunch meetings or happy hours on Zoom or Google Meet
- Prayer and/or Meditation with apps like Insight Timer, Headspace, and Calm.
- Exercise apps like Glo or YouTube videos like Yoga with Adrienne.
- Download the Libby app and enter your library card for free audio books through your library!
- Try out a new online recipe.
- Set a timer for 25 minutes of work and then take a 5 minute break (this is called The Pomodoro Method.)
- Find some Podcasts: whether you love funny, spiritual, news, or fan-fiction, there's one for you!
- Tune in to a free concert. Look up your fave artists online. Many are livestreaming free living room shows on social media.
- If protections are limited at work, find a face [mask pattern](#) or hand [sanitizer recipe](#) online.
- Consider sharing an Outlook or Google Calendar with a supervisor that says where you are when you are in the field as a back-up security feature. You can also enable free phone tracking apps like [Life360](#) or [Find My iPhone](#).



FOCUS ON HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

Technology is an important tool during times like these, but it does not replace the importance of human relationships. We are all feeling distracted, experiencing losses, and need extra supports. Find ways to connect with people you love. Reach out to a friend or family member. If you can't connect on phone or web due to schedules, consider an app like Marco Polo that lets you send a direct or group video message to friends which they can watch any time and send you a response on their own time. It's free and doesn't have time limits. Use it during a walk and share the sunset or views from your neighborhood.



TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

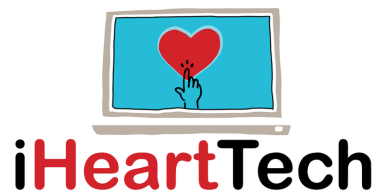
WORK-LIFE BALANCE

We are doing the best we can under difficult circumstances. We made a fast transition to working from home in many cases. Lots of us have additional distractions- kids or a partner at home, difficult access to clients and case files, and worry about people we love. Above all, be kind to yourself.

Here are things we know work at improving the success of your day:

- **Plan your day the night before:** use to-do lists, and do the toughest things first or when you have the best energy
- **Stick to a schedule:** decide beforehand what time you will start and stop as much as possible.
- **Get up, get dressed.** It has psychological power.

- **Take breaks** to adjust posture, stretch, breathe, refill your water bottle (set a timer if needed).
- **Limit distractions:** inform family member of your availability. Consider a 10 minute break every hour if you have grade-schoolers; they may wait for you if they know when you'll be available.
- **Limit news consumption:** it can become addictive & impact mood.
- **Make a sign** for the door so family members know when you are on private calls.
- **Request virtual** case reviews and supervision.
- **Find an accountability buddy** to help you stick to your plans.



Institute Directors: Melanie Sage, PhD & Laurel Iversen Hitchcock, PhD



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Email us: ssw-iHeartTech@buffalo.edu

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Got comments or suggestions about this document? Email us so that we can improve our next version.
msage@buffalo.edu