

Updates to Substance Use Treatment Programs During the COVID-19 Outbreak Issued: April 8, 2020

Many of the families you are working with may be dealing with substance use. Parents and caregivers dealing with substance use may experience greater stress and isolation during these times. Being home for extended periods is difficult for people recovering from Substance Use Disorders or Mental Health Conditions as isolation can be one of the biggest reasons for a reoccurrence/relapse. Below is information for families as well as suggestions on ways to support conversations with clients. Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, treatment providers are adjusting the ways they support individuals and families impacted by Substance Use Disorders and it is important to stay in contact with collaterals who can support your families and may know how they are doing. DCF Substance Use Coordinators are available and ready to assist with any concerns or questions you may have. A list is posted on the Intranet.

Check in with your Families Regularly

A sign of strength in any recovery journey is the ability to ask for help for both recovery and parenting. Ensure parents know who to call for help. Consider speaking to those family and friend supports to ensure they are checking in on parents and children. We can support parents impacted by substances by finding creative ways to help them remain focused on staying healthy and calm. Other ways to assist parents include finding ways to use technology so they remain connected to services, and providing them with small goals they can accomplish and share with you.

Encourage them to connect: It is vitally important that parents and caregivers dealing with substance use utilize their phone and/or technology to stay connected to supports, programs, treatment providers, friends and families. If parents are connected to a treatment program, there is likely an option for telehealth. Individuals connected to a treatment provider should be in contact with their program. Encourage parents to attend online meetings, recovery chat rooms and utilize resources. Some Peer Recovery Centers have remained open, others are doing online or zoom meetings. It is being suggested that people call ahead to confirm status.

Writing Exercises: One productive way to track progress is through writing down successes and stresses so they can bring them up with you. Suggest some of the following:

- Note which meetings they attended online, what they did or did not like, and one positive takeaway.
- Three things a day they did in which they enjoyed and decreased stress. These can be as small as taking a shower, a walk, listening to a funny podcast or music, playing games with kids.
- Three people they can call to either have a chat or ask for help.
- Three things a day they did to connect to another adult or support, like a sponsor, online meeting, therapist, DCF worker, family member, etc.

Obtaining Information from Treatment Providers:

Treatment providers often have valuable information on how a parent or caregiver may be doing. This is important information to gather and consider when you are assessing safety and risk in your families. If you are experiencing barriers in getting this information from providers, please reach out to your Substance Use Coordinator.

Medication Assisted Treatment Providers:

Many of the parents or caregivers you are working with are prescribed medications like Suboxone, Methadone, and Vivitrol. These medications must be taken as prescribed to prevent becoming sick from withdrawal and/or relapse. At this time some clinics remain open, administering medication in ways that decrease risk of exposure to COVID 19. The majority, however, have transferred counseling over to telehealth and are utilizing “take home” medication dosing.

Patients considered “stable” can receive up to 28 days of medication to be self-administered. People considered “less stable” may receive up to 14 days of medication. These determinations are made by the program’s Medical Director. *Considerations when working with families where an individual has take homes provided by a methadone clinic:*

- Ensure children do not have access to medications. All medications must be safely stored. Methadone programs typically require individuals to have access to lock boxes. Ask parents where their medication is stored – ensuring methadone is not in reach of children. The Department of Public Health will support methadone clinics in supplying lock boxes to people.
- With the COVID 19 restrictions in Massachusetts, clients now have less in-person contact with their methadone clinic, possibly increasing their feelings of isolation and decreasing the supports and external accountability.
- It is not uncommon for prescribed medications to be diverted and inappropriately distributed on the streets. With an increase in take homes, it is expected that this will occur with methadone.

All Medication Assisted Treatment providers are taking measures to ensure patients will receive their medication. If you have any questions or need additional information reach out to your supervisor and the Substance Use Coordinator.

Drug Screening Facilities:

Some parents, as part of their action plan or treatment/court programs, are asked to participate in drug screening. In an effort to reduce the spread of COVID-19, drug screening capacity has been greatly reduced. This may cause parents to worry that this will negatively affect their involvement with DCF. Talk to your families about this. Let them know that at this time a no-show will not be a presumptive positive and/or held against them.