

SUPPORTING CLIENTS WITH MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS DURING COVID-19

Nurses and other care providers can use this tool to help them collaborate with clients to ensure supports and resources are in place to maintain mental wellness, remain safe and supported during this unusual, unpredictable event.

<p>Practice considerations</p> <p>Clients and community members with current and history of mental health concerns may be at greater risk for poor outcomes, increased mental health symptoms and decompensation, suicidality, self harm, poor self care, increased substance use and deterioration of relationships and supports in the context of the community and personal restrictions related to COVID-19 responses.</p> <p>It is therefore important to connect with clients with mental health and substance use issues or diagnoses to ensure that assessments and care plans are done and a plan is developed (along with the client) to have someone in the client's supports to regularly check in with the client.</p>	
<p>Document</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your assessments, care plans, client's plans, safety plan, supports and networks, and who will check in with the client regularly (and backups), clinical mental health support/treatment and method of communication <p>Be sure that client has copies of: their suicide prevention safety plan, COVID-19 safety plan, KUU-US support line and crisis response contact information (info in resource list), and other contact numbers and resources that they may need.</p>
<p>Be Informed</p>	<p>Existing barriers to access care, medications and treatment may be exacerbated at this time. Inform yourself about the temporary measures which may help and/or hinder care and access to treatment and care; you may need to advocate and creatively address barriers when necessary.</p>
<p>Harm Reduction</p>	<p>Consider creative ways to support clients with a harm reduction approach, meeting clients where they are. Assess substance use and client's need to access substances to cope and to avoid adverse outcomes from withdrawal.</p>
<p>Communication Considerations</p>	
<p>Calm approach</p>	<p>Recognizing that anxiety and fears are heightened during this time, your calm and supportive manner will assist your client in feeling supported and heard.</p>
<p>Planning</p>	<p>Helping clients make plans to stay well (mental health wellness, suicide prevention, anxiety and stress relief approaches), and identify their supports and networks will help decrease anxiety and fear, and increase a sense of control and predictability and routine.</p>
<p>Hopeful messaging</p>	<p>The COVID-19 situation is unpredictable and scary with many unknowns. It is important to help clients identify and be supported by comprehensive layers of</p>

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	<p>supports and to assure them that this is temporary, and that a requirement such as physical distancing is a “pause” in normal life in order to keep everyone safe.</p> <p>Encourage clients to limit their social media time focused on COVID-19 messaging.</p>
Stigma	<p>Clients with mental health and substance use issues are already at risk of being stigmatized and this crisis may decrease the supports that they currently have or need. If they become ill with the COVID-19 virus or other illnesses at this time, they are at risk for greater stigma, due to fear, marginalizing experiences, being targeted as vectors, having fewer advocates and less secure housing, all of which could cause barriers to care.</p>
Simple, clear information	<p>Do not assume that clients fully understand the COVID-19 virus or the details about why and how to keep safe with physical/social distancing - and isolation if necessary. Use clear, simple, trauma informed language and infographics for the clients to keep and refer to. Ask for their understanding of COVID-19 and help inform them and assess their fears and help address these.</p> <p>Explain why you might need to wear a mask (e.g., for injection clients) and why they might need to when you are working in close proximity, check for their permission and assess for fears and misinformation.</p>
<p>Assessments and interventions</p> <p>Help clients plan ways to nurture mental wellness while practicing physical distancing. Consider their risk of food, housing and social insecurity, and help with creative solutions.</p> <p>Utilize your community first responders and healthcare team members, and collaborate in a creative response that supports and monitors the client, keeping everyone safe.</p> <p>COVID-19 considerations for interventions and safety planning:</p>	
Stress Reduction	<p>Discussions and planning with client about their plans for self care and self soothing, and keeping to a routine in ways that keep them safe from contracting COVID-19: meditation, deep breathing, positive distraction and creative practices, recreational reading and journaling, breaks from phone and computers, play board and card games with people in the same house, or online games with others, take baths, give pets attention, exercise. See: Managing COVID-19 Stress, Anxiety and Depression</p>
Safety planning	<p>Work with clients and fill out the safety plan together (see template and discussion under Suicide assessment section).</p> <p>Brainstorming using their own ideas: how to safely reach out to external supports when personal resources are exhausted, help them identify barriers and consider alternate ideas or people, identify specific ways to stay connected and social, and decrease isolation and loneliness, considering physical distancing measures or</p>

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	<p>when personal isolation may be required. KUU-US support line and crisis response can be used for the client to call for support and someone to talk to as well as for suicide intervention. KUU-US can also be used for safety monitoring calls (as regularly as the client wants).</p>
<p>Suicide Assessment</p>	<p>Assess: 1) <i>Suicidal thoughts/ideation (wish to die) in past month or ever; thoughts to kill self.</i> 2) <i>plan, intention, working out details of plan.</i> 3) <i>active preparation to act on plan and lethality.</i> *All expressions of suicidal ideas must be taken seriously, and frequent thoughts in the past month and any suicidal behaviours increase risk.</p> <p>Assessment Tool Examples:</p> <p>Columbia Suicide Severity Risk Scale: Use to determine risk of suicidality and intervention needed to support your client and keep them safe. For example, see: Columbia Protocol, specifically: “screener recent” and “risk assessment page”.</p> <p>Safety Planning (for suicide prevention): an intervention to provide people experiencing suicidal thoughts with a specific set of strategies, using their own resources and ideas to decrease the risk of suicidal behaviours.</p> <p>Essential components:</p> <p><i>In collaboration</i> with the client and with their ideas, and in their own words help them build their own plan to use when they have suicidal thoughts to safely cope and feel empowered and less alone. Ensure the client receives a copy and place the other copy in their chart.</p> <p><i>Basic elements/steps:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) recognizing warning signs and triggers of an impending suicidal crisis b) identify their own coping/soothing strategies c) identify other people to contact in order to distract from suicidal thoughts or distracting but safe social situations d) family and friends who can help specifically to resolve the crisis e) mental health professionals or services to contact for help f) reducing or removing availability of unsafe objects or potentially lethal methods <p>Safety Plan templates:</p> <p>See: The Brown Stanley Safety template (Authors have given permission for use.)</p>

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	<p>**delete the US Suicide Prevention lifeline phone <i>adding</i>: KUU-Us support and Crisis line 1-800-KUU-US17 or 1-800-588-8717, BC Province Mental Health Support 310-6789; 1-800-SUICIDE or 1-800-784-2433)</p> <p>Centre for Suicide Prevention guide and template, delete the US Suicide Prevention lifeline phone <i>adding</i>: KUU-Us support and Crisis line 1-800-KUU-US17 or 1-800-588-8717, BC Province Mental Health Support 310-6789; 1-800-SUICIDE or 1-800-784-2433).</p> <p>Permission has been granted to use this template; see: Safety plans to prevent suicide</p>
<p>Additional Considerations</p>	<p>Treatment and Monitoring, check:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental status assessment; see: Early Psychosis (page 28: "ABC STAMP LICKER") • medications are sufficient and up to date • how will client receive their Long acting depot injection (if receiving)? • counselor/mental health team will be following up; when and how? • technology is helpful as many are planning to use telehealth or phone appointments; ensure that client has these available. If they do not have a phone or access to telehealth how will they access their care providers? • review with client what their triggers are and how they know when they are feeling good and when they aren't feeling well and what to do <p>Safety and Connection check-ins:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • who are their supports and are they able to check in? When will they check in? • assess food and housing insecurity and help client access supports • help client make a plan that remains within COVID-19 physical distancing restrictions • review self soothing techniques • grounding and anxiety skills; also see: First Responders and Trauma-Informed Care <p>Allow clients to tell you their concerns and fears and assure them that this is normal. Help them make plans to self sooth in healthy ways and ways to fill their days at this time when routines are different.</p> <p>Use BAP or motivational interviewing skills to help them plan for their wellness at this time</p>

Resources:

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BC Ministry of MH and Addictions (2020): Managing COVID-19 stress, anxiety and depression. A good one-page resource with strategies to manage and build strengths and links to resources. Accessed: https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health-safety/covid19_stressmanagement_5_accessible.pdf

KUU-US Crisis response services (BC only): Crisis AND Support line (does not have to only be “crisis”, line can be accessed when someone just wants support or to talk). By First Nations for First Nations, culturally safe, by phone suicide prevention and crisis response, family members, community members and nurses can also consult with them when concerned about someone. They will do safety monitoring calls as well: **1-800-588-8717** or 1-800-KUU-US17. <http://www.kuu-uscrisisline.ca/>

Kids Help Line: Supporting the young people in your life during COVID-19: <https://kidshelpphone.ca/get-involved/programs-resources/resources-caring-adults/supporting-the-young-people-in-your-life-during-covid-19/>

Kids Help Line (text, online chat and by phone): Text CONNECT to 686868, call 1-800-668-6868

Compass program, BC Children’s Hospital: Province wide service, for healthcare providers, to support evidence based care to all BC children and youth living with mental health and substance use concerns. A multi-disciplinary team can provide advice, support, connection with resources, consultation, assessment and education to healthcare providers (Nurses, GPs, NPs, mental health and substance use teams, etc.). Available M-F 9am-5pm via phone. 1-855-702-7272. **Not a crisis response service.** <https://compassbc.ca/>

Foundry: BC Youth Primary care and mental health services. Current info on COVID-19, resources and help. Soon to have telephone, telehealth mental health supports: <https://foundrybc.ca/>

UBC. Mental Health Evaluation & Community Consultation Unit (2000) A Guide for Mental Health Clinicians: Early Psychosis Handbook: accessed: https://www.health.gov.bc.ca/library/publications/year/2000/EarlyPsychosis_ClinicianGuide.pdf

References and Further Reading:

Action for Happiness, Coping calendars: <https://www.actionforhappiness.org/calendars>

Anxiety and Depression association of America (2020). Top Ten COVID-19 Anxiety reduction strategies; accessed: <https://adaa.org/learn-from-us/from-the-experts/blog-posts/consumer/top-ten-covid-19-anxiety-reduction-strategies>

Anxiety Canada (2020). What to do if you are anxious or worried about COVID-19, accessed: <https://www.anxietycanada.com/articles/what-to-do-if-you-are-anxious-or-worried-about-coronavirus-covid-19/>

Anxiety Canada, Downloadable resources (stress, relaxation, anxiety, self help, teaching tools); accessed: <https://www.anxietycanada.com/free-downloadable-pdf-resources/>

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FNHA (2020). First Responders and Trauma informed care. Access <https://www.fnha.ca/Documents/FNHA-First-Responders-and-Trauma-Informed-Care.pdf>

Gov of BC (2020) Managing COVID-19 Stress, Anxiety and Depression. 5 coping tips and directions and list of resources; accessed: https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health-safety/covid19_stressmanagement_5_accessible.pdf

SFU: Centre for Applied Research in Mental Health and Addiction (CARMHA). Tools and resources (coping with suicidal thoughts: a resource for patients; working with the suicidal patient: a guide for healthcare professionals); accessed: <http://www.sfu.ca/carmha/toolsandresources.html>

Centre for Suicide Prevention. Suicide safety plan guide and template; accessed: <https://www.suicideinfo.ca/resource/safety-plans/>

Stanley, B and Brown, G (2020) Safety Planning Intervention website; (Permission to use has been obtained) accessed: http://suicidesafetyplan.com/Home_Page.html

WHO (2020) Mental Health considerations during COVID-19 outbreak: https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/mental-health-considerations.pdf?sfvrsn=6d3578af_2

Very Well Mind, How to stay mentally healthy during the COVID pandemic; accessed: <https://www.verywellmind.com/stay-mentally-strong-during-coronavirus-4800190>