

## Center for Childhood Resilience (CCR) Guidance for Conducting Tier II Groups During Remote Learning

### DETERMINING WHETHER TO FACILITATE A VIRTUAL GROUP

There are many factors to consider when determining if you should initiate virtual Tier II group services to re-convene groups that had been running prior to school closure.

Below are some questions to help you decide on the best next steps:

- Do I have support from my administration and district to convene groups to provide tele-health?
- Am I aware of the district policies and procedures regarding consent, privacy and confidentiality, crisis protocols, and approved virtual platforms?
- Is the school as a whole (and this grade level in particular) using virtual groups (e.g., Google Meets, Zoom, etc.) for e-learning?
- Had my Tier II group of students met for more than 2 sessions prior to school closure?
- Are my students likely to be developmentally able to manage a virtual group in terms of their ability to use technology and maintain attention? (*Note: you can check in with grade level teachers to determine answer to this question; also consider chronological age and grade level*)
- What was the level of group cohesion among group members prior to school closure?
- What was the level of student engagement in the group prior to school closure? (e.g. attendance, interest, and on-task behavior)
- When I reached out to check-in on students individually, how many of them expressed interest in continuing the group?
- Do my students all have devices and internet access? If not, do we offer the group if not all of the students can join?
- Am I emotionally able to assist my students in this way?

**Based on the answers to the questions above, you have two options:**

- 1) Do not proceed to convene a group. Instead, you may connect with students and families individually to:
  - Learn about the student's experience with shelter-in-place
  - Check-in on well-being and functioning
  - Encourage healthy behaviors (e.g. sleep hygiene, eating habits, regular movement and routine)
  - Connect with parents to identify any concerns or needs; connect with resources as appropriate
  - Offer support on e-learning to ward off schoolwork contributing to increased stress levels (creating structure and schedules for students to stay on top of e-learning, break down long-term projects, get late assignments in, and for the school day to end and social/play time to begin)
- 2) Convene your group. Dedicate at least 2 sessions to acclimating to the virtual platform, setting shared agreement/group rules for your time together, re-establishing connections, and sharing feelings. During these sessions, you may also:

- Establish safety through conversation prompts or drawing activities
- Practice grounding techniques using the senses
- Discuss feelings; identify where they feel these in their bodies
- Identify areas of support and connection (at home and virtually)
- Practice relaxation exercises and identify helpful apps to use
- Teach and model mindfulness practices
- Provide time for reflection on shelter-in-place experiences

**After your first 2-3 sessions, ask yourself the following questions:**

- Are my students developmentally able to manage the virtual group in terms of their ability to use technology and maintain attention?
- What is the level of group cohesion among group members?
- What is the level of student engagement in the group? (attendance, interest, and on-task behavior)
- Am I emotionally able to assist my students in this way?

**Based on your responses, you may choose to:**

- 1) Provide closure to the group:
  - Acknowledge group members' strengths
  - Ask students to reflect on coping strategies they could use during the upcoming weeks
  - Let them know how to contact you with questions or concerns
- 2) Continue the group, but focus only on reviewing group content that was prior to school closure rather than introducing new content. See intervention-specific guidance for ways to review key concepts on the virtual platform.
- 3) Continue the group and teach new content in addition to reviewing group content that was covered prior to school closure. See intervention-specific guidance for ways to teach key concepts on the virtual platform.

**ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS BEFORE LAUNCHING A REMOTE GROUP**

**Coordinate with Administration and Teachers:**

- Reach out to teachers to confirm most recent contact information for students' caregivers and learn about their level of communication with students and their families.
- Coordinate with teachers to establish a time for group.
- Check in with school administrators or direct supervisor, advise them of schedule for planned contacts with students in the event their support or direction is required.
- Share Tier II intervention resources that could be used with whole class during e-learning SEL instruction (e.g. relaxation strategies).

**Communicate with Families and Students:**

- Outreach to families may include:
  - Set a warm and calm tone for the virtual contact (consider having an introductory script to help you begin each check-in)
  - Validate the student's/caregiver's feelings of fear, worry, distress, etc. while keeping the brief check-in action-oriented and positive

- Reminder about student’s participation in group prior to school closure. Define the group, explain what students had been learning, provide rationale for continuing to convene the group virtually, etc.
  - Ensure that the student and caregiver understands the limits of confidentiality
  - Focus on things the student can do to feel better, rather than becoming more overwhelmed
  - Share resources
  - Confirm preferred parent cell phone number in case of need for emergency contact regarding student safety
- Determine students’ interest to continue the group. Consider group dynamics, access to technology and privacy when organizing your group.
    - For students that are not interested or available, consider...
      - Sharing resources via email that they can engage in on their own time that reinforce core concepts of the intervention (e.g. relaxation strategies, coping thoughts, etc.)
      - Offering individual check-ins to reinforce concepts from group

### Facilitator Preparation:

- Identify plan for crisis or emergency, including planning for completing safety checks for students who are endorsing self-injurious behaviors, suicidal thoughts, or other safety concerns
- Review intervention resources and core concepts
- Coordinate scheduling and logistics with the co-facilitator
- Test technology prior to meeting. If it is your first time with the technology, consider practicing facilitating the technology with your co-facilitator a few days in advance!
- Review and prep material/content before group
- Complete a “self-check.” Prior to meeting with students virtually, ask yourself questions such as:
  - How am I doing?
  - Is this a good time to connect with a student / family?
  - How can I ready myself to be fully present for this student?
  - If doing individual check-ins, how will I space the check-ins so I have time to refresh between each one?

### RUNNING GROUPS REMOTELY:

**Consider the below tips once you have determined to move forward in implementing a virtual Tier II group.**

#### Communication:

- Make sure to follow your district guidelines of approved methods of communication with students and families.
- Understand and clearly communicate to students and families the limits of confidentiality in the virtual setting.

#### Logistics:

- Send a reminder of the scheduled meeting time to student/caregiver
- Use language such as, “create a safe, quiet space to the best of your ability” to allow for privacy when conducting student check-ins/groups.

- Have a contingency plan if technology malfunctions (e.g. ask student to call parent, send follow-up email to parent, or call parent)

### Before the Group – Be Prepared!

- Self-check-in – Are you ready mentally/emotionally for this session? Consider doing a brief mindfulness meditation or breathing exercise to prepare yourself for the session.
- Minimize background noise and interruptions
- Look up any birthday or cultural holidays that might be important to recognize at the beginning of the call
- Have your resources ready
  - Info on COVID-19
  - Resources that families may need (e.g., housing, financial assistance)
- Structure the session:
  - Have a session agenda/outline of goals for the session
  - If using worksheets/handouts, consider emailing or sharing them with the family before the session
  - Assign home learning practice at the end of the call

### Opening & Closing Sessions

#### Opening

- Discuss technological etiquette
  - Muting microphone when not speaking.
  - Setup device (e.g., phone, tablet, computer) in an environment free of distractions.
  - Eliminate distractions such as multiple browsers, email notifications, phone ringtone, and app notifications.
  - Look into the camera when talking instead of looking at video of self.
- Establish and/or review group norms and expectations
- Check in on mood using a scale (e.g., 1-10 with higher scores indicating more distressed mood).
  - Group facilitators/hosts can make note of group participants with lower scores to check-in with them individually after the group to assess for more severe symptoms (e.g., SI, HI, or non-suicidal self-injurious behaviors).
- Open with an ice breaker or group grounding exercise.
- Quick review of what was covered in group up until this point
- Review last group's home practice assignment (if applicable)
- Normalize distress and concerns about the pandemic and missed life experiences.
- Provide necessary psychoeducation on COVID-19 and resources

#### Sample Opening Activities:

- Younger kids:
  - Quick check-in: If your mood was a type of weather, what would it be today? Sunny? Cloudy with a chance of rain? Hurricane? Snow storm?
  - Bubble breathing – imagine you are blowing bubbles every time you breathe out for 10 breaths
  - For kids who have some energy to work out:

- ✓ Simon Says
  - Stand if you...
    - Went outside today and wore a mask
    - Did exercise today
    - Helped your parent cook today
    - Washed your hands for 20 sec
    - Did e-learning
- Teens:
  - Rose and a thorn: Share one rose/positive from your week and one thorn/worry or upsetting thing
  - Calming, centering opener: 5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Experience
    - <https://insighttimer.com/blog/54321-grounding-technique/>
    - **5, 4, 3, 2, 1, GAME**
      - Name 5 things you can see in the room with you.
      - Name 4 things you can feel (“chair on my back” or “feet on floor”)
      - Name 3 things you can hear right now (“fingers tapping on keyboard” or “tv”)
      - Name 2 things you can smell right now (or, 2 things you like the smell of)
      - Name 1 good thing about yourself
      - (SOURCE: [www.ibiblio.org/rcip//copingskills.html](http://www.ibiblio.org/rcip//copingskills.html))

### Closing

- Assign group home practice assignment for the week (if applicable)
- If time permits, reassess for mood symptoms at closing of group to see if mood has improved.
- Mindfulness exercise to close the group.
  - Group facilitator may ask for volunteer to lead activity.
- Group facilitators/hosts should stay in meeting until all participants have exited.

### Sample Closing Activities:

- Younger kids:
  - What is your weather pattern now?
  - Power Hug – cross your left hand over your body and put it on the right shoulder, right hand on the left shoulder and squeeze as you say a grounding affirmation to yourself (e.g., “I am safe in this moment.”) Repeat as needed
- Teens:
  - Container exercise:
    - Imagine a container
    - Use any materials you want to decorate it. Pay close attention to details like size, color, and texture.
    - Imagine holding the container in your hands and move it around to examine it on all sides.
    - Open the container and imagine wrapping your memories, feelings, and experiences you have just shared in a wrapping of your choice.
    - Place the package inside the container and seal it/lock it.
    - Place the container on a shelf where you can come back to it at a later time.
    - (SOURCE: Kraemer & Patten, 2014)

## **Contributors and References**

- Office of Social Emotional Learning at Chicago Public Schools (<https://sites.google.com/cps.edu/selremote/home?authuser=0>)
- Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital Pritzker Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Health: Tips for Telephonic Appointments
- Project Fleur-de-lis in New Orleans, LA: Guidance for Groups during COVID-19
- School Mental Health Ontario: Student Mental Health Check-Ins during Initial School Closures

## **CCR Overview**

Center for Childhood Resilience (CCR) at Lurie Children's Hospital believes all children should have access to adults who can address their mental health needs. Since 2004, CCR builds the skills of professionals in schools and youth serving agencies with new perspectives, tools and strategies.

Through innovative, sustainable, culturally-attuned and evidence-based strategies, CCR partners with schools and other youth-serving organizations to address the impact of trauma, promote mental health and wellness, and foster resilience in the face of adversity. CCR evaluates emerging best practices and collaborates with policy makers and communities to promote system change, increase access and reduce health disparities where kids live, play and learn!



*Resilient Kids. Stronger Communities. Brighter Futures.*

**[www.childhoodresilience.org](http://www.childhoodresilience.org)**