

Living on Shifting Sand

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NMAIMH competencies addressed:

Working with Others

- Empathy & compassion
- Supporting other/mentoring

Reflection

- Self-awareness
- Emotional response

“During the past 16 months it has seemed that we have been living on shifting sand.” Lindsey Lopez, UNM CDD Consultant, described our lives these past months with such an accurate description. It seemed as though overnight our world changed without giving us any time for planning or to process our feelings. Most of us transitioned to working from home and all of us transitioned to providing home visiting services virtually. And just as we started to find our footing, things changed again with an increase in our anxiety of the unknown, health issues all around us, and navigating work, home, and our children’s school life. This year has given a new meaning to transitions and how we navigate those changes in our lives.

We have discussed transitions and changes several times in the past few years. Supporting families through home visitor transitions, effective transitions of families into and out of your program, supporting families by planning ahead for what comes next with those smooth transitions that we work so hard to provide for them.

We now have the opportunity to plan our transition back to in-person home visits. What will that look like? What are the feelings we have about meeting with families in-person? What are the family’s feelings about you coming back into their home? According to the UNM CDD Quarterly Reports, there are approximately 32 new home visitors that have not conducted a home visit in-person because they were hired in the last year. We also have 12 new Program Managers. Other home visitors have families that have enrolled and received services exclusively virtually and will be meeting for the first time in-person. This can bring up strong feelings for both the families and the home visitors. While there is general guidance at the state level (NM Department of Health, 2021), the New Mexico Early Childhood and Education Department (ECECD) has provided specific guidance (New Mexico Early Childhood Education and Care Department - Home Visiting, 2021) on the health and safety aspect so that we can support families and home visiting staff by using the following strategies.

- Conversations and planning with home visitors for transitioning to in-person home visits. Bringing in your program’s mental health consultant as needed.
- Providing individualized support for home visitors. Understanding that each home visitor will have different reactions and support needs.
- A conversation and a plan created with the family for transitioning to in-person home visits that meet the family’s needs, priorities and desires.
- Best practice is to review and revise the plan as needed with the family.

It isn’t enough to simply be aware that the families need guidance to transition to in-person home visits successfully. If we can provide them with time and space to process their feelings, reflect on the past year and how they want to move forward with their home visiting services, then this will support them in being better prepared to resume in-person visits. We must also be prepared if the situation changes, and we must resume tele-health only visits. That flexibility to transition back if necessary is something to keep in mind to support each other and our families.

This is also true for us as home visitors. Are we taking advantage of our reflective supervision time to discuss our feelings about in-person home visits? In the article by VanHorn (2018), “Feelings matter: relationships and interpersonal interactions (family, home visitor, supervisor) bring up emotions. Reflective supervision recognizes and makes sense of this important source of information. Parallel process is intentionally explored through reflective supervision as a way of understanding how relationships (past and present) affect relationships and ultimately affect the babies and young children served through home visiting”. Do we need to seek support from our Program’s Mental Health Consultant? We have many support systems set up in home visiting and this is a good time to take advantage of those systems.

Questions to encourage discussion and reflection...

- What is the emotional impact of the transition?
- What do you do with your own feelings and how much of those feelings are appropriate to share with the family?
- If a home visitor finds themselves experiencing strong emotions as they transition to in-person home visits, are these emotions acknowledged and what is done or said to help everyone move through this transition?
- How will it feel if we transition to in-person visits and then must go back to tele-health? What emotions will this bring up for families and for home visitors?

To ease fears and concerns by both families and Home Visitors, programs are already working to provide Home Visitors with the PPE they need to keep themselves and their families safe. Programs will determine what these kits or bags will contain. This will help to support the transition to face-to-face visits with families.

References

- New Mexico Early Childhood Education and Care Department - Home Visiting. (2021). *COVID-Safe Practices for New Mexico Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD) Home Visiting Program Agencies*. Santa Fe: ECECD.
- NM Department of Health. (2021, June 30). *All Together New Mexico, COVID-Safe Practices for Individuals and Employers*. Retrieved from New Mexico Department of Health: <https://indd.adobe.com/view/3f732e94-0164-424d-9ac6-a0ace27e70c8>
- UNM CDD Training and Development Consultant Quarterly Reports
- Van Horn, J. (2018). *Reflective supervision: A guide from Region X to enhance reflective practice among home visiting programs*. Developed by the Reflective Supervision Collaborative in Region X, chaired by WA-AIMH.