Best Practices in Virtual Service Delivery
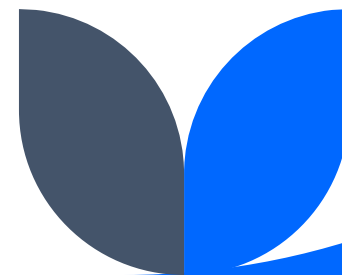
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August 18, 2022

Background

-Office of Early Childhood Home Visiting Investing Taskforce
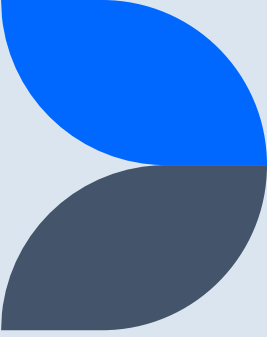
-Creation of an Inventory of Best Practices:

Virtual home visiting

Serving racially and ethnically diverse families

Rural home visiting services

-April 2022-June 2022

Methods

- Systematic search of academic literature

- Systematic search of professional websites (e.g. home visiting models, intermediary organizations, etc.)

- Interviews with professionals working in intermediary organizations, home visiting intervention developers and professionals providing services to families in Colorado

Themes from the Academic Literature

- Prior to COVID-19, few home visiting programs had developed or evaluated virtual home visiting, and guidance was limited

- In response to COVID-19 nearly all national models have some guidance, training and/or resources (e.g. the Early Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center), and some have evaluation efforts

- Most of the academic literature on virtual home visiting was produced in the last few years

- While some strategies developed in this era are pandemic-specific, findings suggest many strategies may be carried forward

Pre-COVID 19 Research Themes

- Virtual home visiting is generally feasible and acceptable to families, and models can be adapted for this format while retaining fidelity

- Virtual visits offer some advantages in terms of access and cost-savings, particularly for rural families or those facing other barriers to access

- A high percentage of families have access to technology of some form (smart phones, tablets, computers, etc.), although some need to be provided with hardware or internet access

Post-COVID Research Themes

Documented challenges in the rapid transition from in-person to virtual, as well as ongoing challenges related to virtual home visits

Difficult to disentangle findings regarding virtual service delivery from challenges of providing services through a pandemic

Few highly rigorous evaluations, with most results providing a "mixed" picture, and variations in findings may be model or component-specific

Findings generally point to the utility of a "hybrid" model

Interview Themes

The use of virtual home visits varies substantially across Colorado, with some programs never incorporating virtual services even at the height of the pandemic

Most programs provide some virtual option, based on family preference or needs

Common benefits voiced: flexibility, convenience, access, and cost-savings

Common challenges voiced: building relationships, distractions, virtual burnout, lack of observation and lack of technology or Wi-Fi access

Interview Themes

Appreciation for supports through webinars and materials provided by the state, intermediary organizations, and national models

Local organizations, supervisors, and colleagues also provided important support and guidance on how to provide virtual home visits

Integrated Best Practices

1. Use multiple approaches to frequently engage and serve families. Examples include:

- Using a mix of in-person and virtual approaches including a mix of phone calls, text, material drop-offs, postcards, apps, etc.
- Keep in touch between visits with reminders about homework, activities, and plans for the next visit
- Promptly follow up with families after visits regarding any needed resources

Integrated Best Practices

2. Create opportunities to maintain and grow social supports

- Organize group activities
- Create local social network groups (e.g. Facebook groups, group texts, etc.)

3. Keep in mind families are busy and have multiple competing demands and stressors

- Send reminders, but be ready to reschedule
- Be empathic and compassionate
- Be flexible with the timing of sessions, or hold them while families are doing daily activities (e.g. cooking dinner)
- Be clear about the benefit of virtual visits

Integrated Best Practices

4. Assist families and workers with access, using, and troubleshooting technology

- Be ready to provide devices and internet connections to workers and families (mobile hotspots, financial assistance, phone stands, libraries, tribal offices).
- Provide guidance to families and workers on how to use and maximize technology
- Provide workers with private, dedicated space for virtual visits
- Provide virtual spaces (e.g. cloud storage) to share materials, information, etc.
- Develop strategies to manage with low bandwidth (e.g. uploading video clips rather than live stream, or phone in option).

Integrated Best Practices

5. Allow more flexibility in program requirements

- Let families choose how they receive services (virtual, phone, and/or in person) and communications
- Keep virtual visits shorter, or break sessions down into more manageable chunks

6. Attend to privacy and safety

- Provide training to workers on safety, boundaries, and self-care
- Guide families on using private spaces, secure platforms, use of headphones and heads-up about visits with sensitive topics

Integrated Best Practices

7. Be mindful of the challenges of engaging families virtually, and make efforts to adjust

- Be creative and use fun engagement activities with children (e.g. singing, games, drawing, virtual backgrounds) and ask families to share their children's interests and activities.
- Attend to visual and verbal cues
- Use strong communication skills including eye contact, conversational tone, coaching, and active listening
- Invite everyone in the home to participate (partners, siblings, etc.)
- Explicitly acknowledge the challenges of virtual visits
- Connect with other providers to learn strategies and support each other

Integrated Best Practices

8. Organize virtual visits as formally as in-person visits

- Set day and time boundaries for communication with families
- Formally schedule and name a visit as such, with timeliness, preparation, professional attire, and tools

Opportunities to Learn More

1. Collect data/input from parents/families

2. Rigorously evaluate virtual home visiting, including attention to variation across models/components

Thank you!! Questions?

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