Guidance: Best Practices for Family Visitation to Residential Settings

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The coronavirus (COVID-19) state of emergency has brought many changes for everybody in their daily lives. New challenges have arisen, and difficult decisions have had to be made. At the forefront, the health and wellbeing of everyone has been the focus when deciding how to best respond during the state of emergency. One difficult decision was the announcement and implementation of Governor Mike DeWine and Dr. Amy Acton’s stay-at-home order. The reason for this is to greatly minimize the spread of COVID-19 and make sure that as many people as possible would not become ill. Although this has been a difficult time, the order to stay home has been beneficial in minimizing the spread of COVID-19.

In some cases, your family member may reside in group homes, intermediate care facilities (ICFs), or with roommates, and everybody within these homes must do everything they can to prevent contracting COVID-19. For this reason, you must not remove your family member from their home unless essential for their health or safety, because this poses an increased risk of exposing everyone in their home upon their return. Understandably, this is very difficult to do, but it is in the very best interest of keeping everyone healthy by minimizing the spread of COVID-19.

Residential providers may restrict a person from returning if the person poses a risk to other household members due to COVID-19. Providers also have the option upon return to place the person on a 14-day quarantine in their room, or can refuse the person to return to the home until the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) communicates the risk for COVID-19 is no longer there. While the provider cannot discharge the person without proper notifications, the provider can temporarily use that bed to assist with the COVID-19 state of emergency, if necessary. After clearance from the local department of health or a medical professional, the residential provider must allow the person to return.

It is extremely important to discuss with the residential provider any desire to take someone from their residential setting. This discussion must occur before removing the person from the setting for any reason other than an essential health and safety need or an end-of-life situation. Specific plans for the return of the person to the residential setting must be clearly understood by all involved.
If you feel strongly that your family member would be best served in your home during this state of emergency rather than in their current residential setting, you must have a discussion and planning session with the residential provider and the service and support administrator (SSA) before the relocation. Family members must be ready and able to support the needs of the person for an extended time, including having a backup plan if the family members become sick or otherwise are unable to provide the agreed-upon care and support.

The Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD) understands the difficult decisions that families are having to make, yet it is important to abide by Ohio’s stay-at-home order to make sure to minimize everyone’s risk of illness during this state of emergency. Below are some questions you may have.

**Are there tools available to help people who are struggling to understand why they cannot be together as often as in the past?**

Your family members may have a difficult time understanding these changes in their daily routines. One good way to help people understand is the use of social stories. Also, this Charting the LifeCourse Integrated Star will help you think about how to fulfill a vision for a good life during this period of change for you and your family member. Additionally, this resource for Having a Meaningful Day will provide you, your family members, and their direct support professionals (DSPs) with ideas of how to explore interests and how your family members can stay connected to other people through those interests.

**How can you help your family members not feel isolated during this time?**

Families can use other options of contact through technology, phone calls, social media, or writing letters or cards to communicate with their family members. While it is very important to follow the stay-at-home order, it is equally important that families virtually stay in touch with one another to prevent further feelings of isolation.

**Can family members visit people who reside in a supported living setting?**

Yes; however, some providers are limiting visitations and establishing screening protocols to ensure the health and safety of all people living and working in the home. Families should contact the residence manager ahead of visiting to see what those protocols might be and what families need to do before visiting. Families should follow the stay-at-home order mandated by ODH, follow ODH recommendations, and limit in-person interactions with people who are not residing with them.