**Best Practices & Crisis Planning Protocols**

**for Remote Meetings with Students**

*adapted from Methuen Public Schools*

**Points of Contact with Students**

When considering options, please be sure to consult your district’s Acceptable Use Policy. Possible methods of contact are listed below.

* ***Google Hangouts (Video):*** Video-chat technology accessible through district Gmail accounts
  + [Google Hangouts Tutorial](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1sJN5WH7aOLbFSv8bex4lD2jsSBDRoRGnx1RgK3WMw0A/edit?usp=sharing)
* ***Google Hangouts (Chat):*** Instant-messaging service accessible through district Gmail accounts
  + Make sure your history is turned on/off (consult district policy)
* ***Zoom****:* Video-chat technology accessible to all educators (using district email address)
  + Confirm whether your district has unlimited time for meetings
  + While Zoom has said all meetings will require a password and the use of the “Waiting Room” function by default, be sure to double check this when setting up meetings
* ***Email:*** Regular district email
  + If concerning information is shared via email from a student, be sure to **consult** with your supervisor, and, if deemed necessary, call parent and move forward with risk assessment protocol
* ***Phone:*** Can make calls via Google or with personal cell phone (see below for instructions)
  + Avoid giving out your personal cell phone number to students and parents -- we as counselors will be initiating phone calls. To block your number from being seen by the student/parent, dial \*67 and then the phone number you want to call
  + You can also make calls from a hidden number by calling from Google -- click the phone icon on the bottom left side of your Gmail inbox. You will be asked to put your own number in for emergencies (a verification code will be sent to your cell phone)
    - Parents/guardians/students will see “No Caller ID” on their end
    - You would be speaking to them via the microphone on your computer

**Best Practices for Remote Meetings with Students** (consult your district-specific procedures)

* Districts may require a point of contact with a parent/guardian prior to setting up a call or Google Hangouts meeting with a student; ensure parents/guardians are notified and consent to your communications
  + This is a great opportunity to connect with parents/guardians on the phone or on Google Hangouts to show your support of the student and his or her family
  + Counselors should also use this opportunity to ensure that you have an updated contact number/email for the parent
  + Some districts may require that a parent/guardian be in the home during tele-counseling sessions in the event of a crisis and to be on call in the event that we need to speak to them
    - If so, call parent/guardian and/or get a visual through Google Hangouts to verify that there is an adult home before beginning a meeting or session
* Be upfront about what these meetings will look like
  + Ensure that students and parents/guardians know that in these virtual meetings, the same limits of confidentiality apply -- make sure students are aware that we are mandated reporters and explain why we are taking these precautions
  + If there is a risk or safety-related concern, staff may use interventions such as law enforcement wellness checks in order to ethically respond to crisis needs
* Go over confidentiality and when we would have to break it
* If you see/hear something in background concerning - consult
* In the event of a true emergency, dial 911

**Telehealth Best Practices**

* Adjust camera/screen so you are eye-level with your student
* Check-in around volume to ensure that the student can clearly hear you and it is a comfortable level. Be sure that there are no visual or audible distractions on your end, and discuss what to do if the video connection is lost
* Conduct all telehealth sessions on either a computer/laptop or iPad, **not** your cell phone (if possible). This will allow you to have access to a phone on a different line in case you need to make an emergency call while in session with the student
* It is more important to hold eye contact when counseling virtually because students may think that you are distracted by your surroundings
  + If you need to break eye contact let the student know. If you look away to take notes like you might do in an in-person session, inform the student that that is what you are doing because they might not be able to see your notebook, and therefore think that you are distracted or disengaged
  + Be sure that there are no visual or audible distractions on your end, and discuss what to do if the video connection is lost.
* Recognize that this is new and may feel a bit strange at first but reassure the student that you are going to try and keep it as normal as possible as if they were in your office

**FAQs/What-if Scenarios**

1. **Counselor sees or hears something concerning in the student’s home during a session**

Ensure the student’s immediate safety is not in question; document what you see or hear; consult with supervisor and colleagues to share concerns and determine ethical next steps. Remember, we are still mandated reporters, so decisions around filing 51As still apply in remote meetings

1. **Counselor is concerned about the immediate safety of the student based on something that he/she says or does**

In this instance, we will need to break confidentiality and inform an adult in the home of our concerns. Students that we are “meeting” with (via phone, Hangouts, or Meet), will have already been informed of our responsibilities related to breaking confidentiality, and a parent/adult in the home will have been informed that they need to be available in the home during these meetings. Depending on the severity of the scenario, recommendations regarding next steps (i.e. referral to an outside agency for a psychological evaluation, emergency room visit, etc.) will be made by the counselor and a colleague/supervisor

1. **Counselor is unsure about the severity of language student is engaging in regarding his/her safety**

In general, we have to err on the side of caution. This will definitely include involving a parent, drafting a safety plan, and potentially triggering emergency services

**Hotline Resources**

*NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION HOTLINE:* Call: 1-800-273-8255; Text: 838255

*NACIONAL DE PREVENCIÓN DEL SUICIDIO:* Llama: 1-888-628-9454

**Suggestions for Ethical Redirect Message for Staff’s Email Signature Line**

* Outside of school hours (Monday-Friday 7 AM-2 PM), I will not always be readily available by email or phone. I will be sure to get back to you at my earliest convenience the next school day. If this is an emergency, please dial 911 or contact your local emergency services provider.
* Please note that I cannot guarantee responsiveness via email beyond the hours of 7 AM-2 PM. If this is an emergency, please dial 911 or contact your local emergency services provider.