

Keeping it Confidential

How to be mindful of confidentiality during COVID-19

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Telecommuting or Working from Home

As most of us find ourselves working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. As peers providing direct services we see new challenges almost daily.

One of the challenges faced by many is how to provide confidential Peer Support remotely.

****The good news is that we are all in this together, and we can learn from others who have already adapted to this new reality (Just like peer support!)**

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Confidentiality

Confidentiality is important for multiple reasons:

- It is ethical:

As Peer Workers who have access to Protected Health Information, we have a duty to keep the information safe for the people that we serve.

- It is the underpinning of the Peer Relationship:

Individuals feel safe telling us things, because they know that we will keep their confidence.

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Peer Work

Peer support has historically been provided in-person and, at times, over the phone.

Without the ability for face-to-face interaction, creating a building connection with folks can be challenging.

Peer support programs across the country are facing these challenges. Some peer programs do not have access to secure telehealth software and have started allowing peer support to be done on platforms that might have been disallowed in the past, due to privacy concerns.

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Platforms

Some of the platforms the platforms that have been used for impromptu peer support include, but are not limited to:

- Skype
- What's App
- Facebook
- FaceTime
- Instagram
- Zoom

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Lessons Learned from MHAAO

Mental Health & Addiction Association of Oregon (MHAAO) is a peer-run 501c3 non-profit organization Located in Portland Oregon.

MHAAO has a department of peer support specialists who work in multiple settings:

- Hospitals
- Jails
- Courts
- Community Based

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Lessons Learned from MHAAO

Some of the main challenges maintaining confidentiality while working from home are:

- Not having any alone time due to having significant others and/or family members in the home during work hours.
- Children being home for extended hours during work time.
- Not having a separate space to work.
- Dealing with technical issues faced by ourselves and our peers.

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Lessons Learned from MHAAO

While every situation is different, here are some ways that our peers have found to “Keep it Confidential” while working from home:

- Having a significant other or family member take the kids for a walk during calls or video chats (while also keeping a safe distance of course!)
- Making an agreement with those in the home to give you a room to make your calls/facetimes/etc.
- Making your calls or video chats from the car, if you have one.
- Practicing talking to peers without using their names or any identifying information.

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Confidentiality on the Other Side

As Peer Workers we rightly focus on how to keep confidentiality on our end.

How can we help the peers we support maintain their own confidentiality.

Please see handout.

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Things to Remember

All funding sources are different and have different requirements. Often, agencies policies and procedures are based on these requirements. It is best to become familiar with your agencies policies to ensure that these rules are being adhered to.

When in doubt always talk to your supervisor first!

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Questions?

If you have any questions that were not answered today, or need any support during this time, please feel free to reach out.

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