

Self-Compassion during Virtual Home Visiting

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NMAIMH competencies addressed:

Working with Others

- Building & maintaining relationships
- Supporting others/mentoring
- Empathy & compassion

Reflection

- Contemplation
- Self-awareness
- Professional/personal development

With all of the stress of delivering Home Visiting services virtually, many of us question if we are providing the quality services our families are used to and deserve. The question we need to ask ourselves is “What am I providing that the families feel they need?” There must be something you are giving them that they value; otherwise, they would not keep your virtual home visits. If you did not meet a need the family has, they would not answer the phone, reply to the text, or connect via ZOOM. Families continue to connect with you because they value the relationship you have with them and, if they are a new family, they value the information and support you provide to them now.

Many times, I have heard from home visitors that their families are not as engaged as they had been and that they seem less enthusiastic with virtual home visiting as time has gone on. There may be several reasons we all miss our face-to-face home visits. Face-to-face home visits are important for the communication of attitudes and feelings. Sensitive topics with families also require us to notice subtleties and display empathy. Feelings and attitudes are conveyed by nonverbal signals such as facial expressions, the tone and pitch of the voice, gestures, posture and the distance between us. In face-to-face home visits, we process these cues automatically while still listening to the family at the same time, but on video or on the phone we need to work harder to process nonverbal cues.

There are many strategies to help us with this processing. Asking the family to “paint a picture” of an interaction or activity they enjoyed with their child. Having them describe in detail what they did, how the child reacted, what the child enjoyed, and how they reacted to their child, you will be able to praise the positive interactions, ask reflective questions such as, “Why do you think they reacted that way?”, “How did you think to do that?”, and “Is there anything that you might do different the next time?” The Institute for the Advancement of Family Support Professionals have given many suggestions to support virtual home visits and help us to process information. These can be used during an observation or even when the parent describes an interaction between them and their child. We will focus on listening in the virtual environment:

- Listen for parent’s tone of voice when they share about how they are doing and when they speak with their children.
- Listen for their speech pacing and pauses to inform our understanding of their mood, energy, and comfort level in the conversation.
- Listen for the background noises to inform who else may be in the home, to help understand what distractions and barriers may exist

that could influence a parent-child interaction.

- Listen for children’s chatter and conversation
- Listen for those non-verbal smiles—“smizing”—from parent and child that we can hear through a phone call that indicate happiness, contentment, and joy in a conversation or interaction.
- Use pauses to allow your verbal message to be delivered.
- At the end of the visit, generally summarize the conversation, schedule the next visit, and set a follow-up plan. Interpreting Observations Intentionally: allow yourself to replay the visit that just happened, to organize your thoughts and feelings, and think about your next visit.

It is important for us to be aware of our own feelings and expectations of the virtual home visit. Giving ourselves self-compassion is important when we are feeling that the family’s lack of engagement is something we have done or not done. Strong self-compassion can even set the stage for better health, relationships, and general well-being. Harvard Health has the following four ways to give our self-compassion skills a quick boost:

- **Comfort your body.** Eat something healthy. Lie down and rest. Massage your own neck, feet, or hands. Take a walk. Anything you can do to improve how you feel physically gives yourself a dose of self-compassion.
- **Write a letter to yourself.** Think of a situation that caused you to feel stress. Write a letter to yourself describing the situation, but without blaming anyone – including yourself. Use this exercise to nurture your feelings.
- **Give yourself encouragement.** Think of what you would say to a fellow home visitor if he or she were facing a difficult or stressful situation. Then, when you find yourself in this kind of situation, direct these compassionate responses toward yourself.
- **Practice mindfulness.** Even a quick exercise, such as meditating for a few minutes, can be a great way to nurture and accept ourselves.

Questions to encourage discussion and reflection...

- Who do you turn to when you have these feelings of “not doing enough”?
- What do you do to take care of yourself and give yourself self-compassion?
- How have you responded when families seem disengaged? What have you done to re-engage them? What has worked? What could you have done differently?

References/Additional Resources

Harvard Health Publishing (nd) *4 ways to boost your self-compassion.*

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/mental-health/4-ways-to-boost-your-self-compassion>

Institute for the Advancement of Family Support Professionals (nd) *Virtual Home Visiting/Telehealth Resources: Parent-Child Interactions.*

<https://institutefsp.org/covid-19-rapid-response-resources-parent-child-interaction>

Sander, L. & Bauman, O. (2020) *Zoom fatigue is real – Here’s why video calls are so draining.*

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