

A decorative graphic consisting of a curved, multi-colored wave shape that spans across the top of the page. The colors transition from dark red on the left to teal, then yellow, and finally light green on the right.

**Practice Alert**

**School Continuity and the COVID-19 Pandemic:  
Issues and Opportunities**

**October 2020**

School districts throughout the nation are faced with the challenge of how to ensure continuity of preK-12 education during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Whether they are in districts that are implementing virtual, in-person or a combination of reopening models, school social workers are essential workers in school continuity. They provide valuable expertise in mental health and social care, as well as an understanding of racial and economic equity and the implications of these social determinants in student success. School social workers are especially crucial in addressing the impacts of COVID-19 on vulnerable students, including students of color, low-income students, English language learners, students with disabilities, immigrants and other special populations.

## **Key Considerations**

Many school districts are including students, teachers, families, and other stakeholders in their decisions regarding how to resume operations this fall. There are many concerns being addressed such as:

- Ensuring infection prevention through a variety of measures (e.g. facilities, personal protective equipment, de-densifying approaches such as staggered schedules for in-person instruction, etc.)
- Addressing emotional trauma related to COVID-19 and deaths of students, staff, family members and others
- Repairing the impact of the disruption in learning and socialization due to school closures in spring 2020
- Addressing the social care needs of vulnerable students, including food security, mental health supports and adequate access to technology for online learning
- Addressing the learning and associated needs of students with disabilities for whom virtual or hybrid instruction may pose challenges

Below are ways that school social workers can play a role in supporting students and the larger school community this fall:

- Conduct a professional development training with school staff, including teachers, administrators and other professionals to help them understand and

effectively respond to the mental health, social care and other challenges that may impact learning such as:

- a) Disconnection and isolation from peers and staff
  - b) Grief over the COVID-19 related death of family members or loved ones
  - c) Unmet social care needs (e.g. adequate food, housing stability, access to technology, etc.) Family stress, which is associated with increased student maltreatment
  - d) Concerns about learning loss or learning disruption, particularly for students with disabilities
- Promote a caring and nurturing school community climate
    - a) Provide students with individual and/or group counseling as appropriate
    - b) Provide resources to staff, students and families
    - c) Facilitate team building activities. Examples are available at <https://www.weareteachers.com/team-building-activities/>
  - Use trauma-informed approaches to support students and families
    - a) Treatment and Service Adaptation Center (Resiliency, Hope, and Wellness in School) <http://traumaawareschools.org/traumaInSchools>
    - b) Grief and Trauma Intervention (GTI) for Children (ages 7yrs – 12yrs) <https://www.childrensbureauola.org/gti>
    - c) Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools (CBITS) 5<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> grade, <https://www.nctsn.org/interventions/cognitive-behavioral-intervention-trauma-schools#:~:text=Systems->

[.Cognitive%20Behavioral%20Intervention%20for%20Trauma%20in%20Schools,to%20multiple%20forms%20of%20trauma.](#)

#### Virtual Service Provision

- Given that many schools will largely be conducting operations virtually this fall, below re resources school social workers may find helpful :Link to NASW Telehealth webinar from May 2020

Professor Michael Kelly, Loyola Chicago SW and School Mental Health Advanced Practice Program (SMHAPP) student Ms. Tonya Hernandez, LCSW (School Social Work Liaison, Clark County School District, NV,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JaT2EbaKPPI>. Provides a video with resources for online social work services.

- COVID-19 Books Bundle for Special Education | Distance Learning  
[https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/COVID-19-Adapted-Books-Bundle-for-Special-Education-Distance-Learning-5708321?utm\\_source=EMAIL%20%2F24%20prepare&utm\\_campaign=COVID%20bundle](https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/COVID-19-Adapted-Books-Bundle-for-Special-Education-Distance-Learning-5708321?utm_source=EMAIL%20%2F24%20prepare&utm_campaign=COVID%20bundle)
- Youth Today <https://youthtoday.org/topic/COVID-19/>

#### Additional Resources

NASW Practice Alert. [COVID-19 Resources for School Social Workers.](#)

<https://www.socialworkers.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=n4pFJVJ3nkQ%3d&portalid=0>

This alert provides essential resources for school social workers education  
Mental health services during COVID-19.

*Trinka and Sam Fighting the Big Virus: Trinka, Sam, and Littletown Work Together, and*  
<https://www.nctsn.org/resources/trinka-and-sam-fighting-the-big-virus>

Helps young children and families talk about their experiences and feelings related to  
COVID-19 and the need to shelter in place.

*Fighting the Big Virus: Trinka's and Sam's Questions,*  
<https://www.nctsn.org/resources/fighting-the-big-virus-trinka-and-sam-questions>.

Answers children's questions about the virus is also available.

*We're in This Together: Promoting Positive Mental Health for Teens Feeling Isolated*  
*[Erika's Lighthouse],* <https://secure.qgiv.com/event/inthistogether/>

Provides practical tools and resources for teens to support themselves, peers, parents,  
family members and their community during this crisis.

*New Research On Opening Schools Safely In The Covid-19 Era: School Social*  
*Work Experiences & Recommendations.* Posted by Michael Kelly | Jul 15, 2020  
[https://schoolsocialwork.net/new-research-on-opening-schools-safely-in-the-covid-19-  
era-ssw-experiences-recommendations/](https://schoolsocialwork.net/new-research-on-opening-schools-safely-in-the-covid-19-era-ssw-experiences-recommendations/)

*Best-selling Treatment Planning Tool for Mental Health Professionals,*

<https://www.wiley.com/WileyCDA/Section/id-819711.html>

*Comcast Response to COVID-19*

<https://corporate.comcast.com/covid-19>

*Resilience for Children & Families: Coronavirus*

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*Resilience for Children & Families: Protective Factors During Covid-19*

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*Resilience for Children & their Families 3: Overcoming Fear During Covid-19*

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*Resilience for Children and Families: Problem Solving During COVID-19*

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*Resilience for Children & Families: Tough feelings During Covid-19*

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