

COVID-19 BIPP RESPONSE TOOLKIT

— 2020 —

**Short-term Modified
BIPP Services**..... page 3

Closing your agency..... page 3

Remaining operational page 4

- **Online Group Sessions**..... page 5
- **Individual Phone Check-Ins**..... page 9
- **Participants with No Phone
or Technology**..... page 9

**TDCJ-CJAD Waiver to
Provide Alternative Measures** page 10

**Maintaining Communication
and Access for All Participants** page 11

*Communication with victims
and referral sources* page 11

High-risk perpetrators..... page 12

*BIPP Website and
Communication Templates*..... page 13

Payment Processing..... page 13

Additional Support..... page 13

Short-term Modified BIPP Services

In responding to the large-scale implications of COVID-19, accredited Texas BIPPs are encouraged to develop a plan for temporary cancellation of in-person and group-related programming due to local, state, or federal mandates. You may choose to close your agency during the COVID-19 pandemic, cancel a portion of available BIPP services such as group sessions, or may consider alternatives to cancellation. In deciding the best option for your community, always collaborate with your referral sources such as CSCD, District/County Attorney, or Child Protective Services, and develop the plan focused on victim safety.

BIPPs must provide in writing the plan to cancel or describe in detail the alternative to cancellation and include updated contact information. **All accredited and probationary accredited BIPP programs must notify TDCJ-CJAD of their status using [THIS FORM](#).***

Closing your agency and providing no services

If your agency closes and offers no services during any part of the COVID-19 pandemic, you must:

- » Immediately notify TDCJ-CJAD, participants, their referral sources, and victims.
- » Provide participants and referral sources with referrals to Texas accredited BIPPs who are offering online sessions during the pandemic. Referrals shall only be made to Texas BIPPs accredited by TDCJ-CJAD and after coordinating with that accredited BIPP.
- » Post information on your website and update your voicemail to reflect how you may be contacted during the closure.
- » If your program length exceeds minimum requirements of 18 weeks/36 hours, assess if any participants have met the minimum requirements, and consider exiting them as successful completions.
- » Update MAR. If your agency closes and offers no services during any part of the COVID-19 pandemic, you must update MAR accordingly. For reference, see [BIPP Data Reporting Guide \(2018\)](#).

MAR entries: If your program experienced an interruption in services, discharge all participants impacted by the interruption from MAR during the reporting period when the interruption occurred. Exit all participants who experienced an interruption in services of at least one session using exit reason 'Unable to Participate.' Re-enter participants in MAR when services resume using 'New placements.' For example, if you closed for the last two weeks in March, discharge all participants in MAR, and your end of month count should be 0. For April, your beginning of the month count should be 0. When you resume services, add participants who restart as new placements.

* <https://www.cognitofrms.com/Tcfv1/ServiceUpdateBIPPProgramStatusDuringCovid19Pandemic>

Your agency is operational but unable to offer in-person services

Alternatives to closure during this pandemic include:

- » In consultation with the referral source and on a case-by-case basis, reduce the required group sessions for participants that appear to have completed learning nonviolent behaviors to 18 weeks/36 hours for participants who are close to completing the program.
- » Offer weekly online group sessions to allow participants to work towards program completion.
- » If possible, conduct routine weekly phone check-ins for participants unable to join online sessions.
- » Conduct intakes, orientations, and assessments online using electronic documents.
- » When you resume in-person sessions, allow participants to attend one additional make-up session per week for sessions missed during closures.

MAR entries: If your program experienced an interruption in services and you were unable to provide weekly sessions to some or all participants, discharge the participants who did not receive services from MAR as 'Unable to Participate'. Re-enter participants as new placements in MAR when they resume participation in your services.

For all participants remaining engaged in either individual sessions or group sessions, report hours provided in individual sessions and hours provided in group sessions. Do not discharge clients participating in group or individual sessions who did not experience an interruption in weekly engagement in services. Examples:

- » If you stopped having in-person group sessions on March 15 and began conducting meaningful programming related sessions with participants on a weekly basis, these participants do not have to be discharged during March. For March, you will calculate all hours you provided in-person group sessions in the group hours, and all hours you conducted individual sessions to participants in the individual hours.
- » If you stopped providing in-person group sessions and did not offer any individual sessions, discharge all participants due to 'Unable to Participate.' Your end of month count should be 0. When you resume individual or group sessions, re-enter the participants as new placements in MAR.

Early Exits for Participants who Completed 18 weeks/36 hours

Your program may modify the program completion requirements in response to COVID-19 closures and exit participants who have attended the minimum required weeks and hours according to the Guidelines. This option should be limited to participants who have attended at least 18 weeks and 36 hours of BIP programming and have made progress in covering core curriculum components outlined in the Guidelines. Consult with your referral source to determine if this is an acceptable alternative.

Expand Services to Completed Participants

Offer participants that have completed your program options for accessing support to make nonviolent choices, particularly during pandemic-related stay-at-home orders, such as joining online group sessions for free or scheduling individual check-ins with facilitators.

Weekly Online Group Sessions

Because of the unprecedented nature of the COVID-19 outbreak, BIPP professionals must make critical decisions about the continuity of services very quickly. The BIPP field and TDCJ-CJAD guidelines have not supported or promoted online BIPP groups as a safe and accountable alternative to in-person sessions. However, due to the nature of this pandemic, online sessions appear to be a sound alternative. As your program adjusts services, carefully consider safety risks for providing online services.

Assess how many participants have access to technology to determine your program staffing and scheduling needs. Consider safety concerns gathered from victim contacts or based on participants' behavior in the program or other known information.

Call each participant to determine how many participants will be able to participate in online group sessions. Participants will need access to:

- » WIFI or cellular network
- » A device that is connected to the internet, such as a laptop or desktop computer with a webcam and microphone/headset, a smartphone, or a tablet. When available, the use of a desktop, laptop, or large tablet allows participants to see each other on the screen.
- » Headphones are preferable to protect privacy.
- » A private place to join the session
- » To join online sessions, participants will download an app on their device. When available, encourage the participants to use a desktop, laptop, or large tablet so they can see each other on the screen.

Participants who do not have access to a device that allows them to participate online can join an online group via phone call. Monitor engagement of participants who are only able to call in. You may consider having them participate in smaller groups to encourage more engagement. Participants calling in by phone will need to agree to the rules that apply to participants online.

Confidentiality for Online Group Sessions

- » Consider updating your privacy, limits of confidentiality, and group agreement forms to reflect online group usage and reiterate BIPP's limited confidentiality under TDCJ-CJAD Guideline 5, 7, 8, and 23.
- » Require facilitators and participants to disable any devices that could collect information from the environment, such as Google Home Assistant, Amazon Alexa, or Apple Siri.
- » Consider requiring the use of headphones to ensure others do not hear the conversation.
- » Review group rules or develop them with the group members to enhance privacy. For example, you may want to add a group rule that participants may not take screenshots or make recordings of the sessions.
- » BIPPs choosing to use online sessions should require the participant to commit to participating in a private space so that others could not observe or hear other participants and break their confidentiality.
- » BIPPs utilizing teleconferencing for group sessions should consider using methods for each session to help verify the identity of participants on the phone.
- » Begin sessions by asking for verbal confirmation from all participants that they are in a private space to participate.
- » When available, using headphones, turning on a box fan, vent fans, or white noise machine or app will limit sound traveling in the home.
- » Programs will also need to consider how they will place this responsibility on the participant. You do not want the participant to kick out his partner or children during the time of your session, so having these discussions upfront is imperative.
- » If there are children in the home, special considerations need to be made to ensure children are not interrupting the session or listening about men's use of violence. Programs should have discussions with each father on how they will work around this.

Tools Needed for Online Group Sessions

1. ONLINE PLATFORM. Participants and facilitators can access online platforms through web browsers when using a computer and can download the online platform's app when using their mobile devices.

- » [TechSoup](#) offers nonprofit organizations discounted access to online platforms.
- » TCFV is available to provide consultations and coaching on using online platforms for educational purposes.
- » Telehealth platforms provide more security than online meeting services; some programs offer advanced security only with a signed Business Account Agreement. The following

telehealth platforms offer group sessions: Gruveo, Doxy.me, Cyph (group video available in April), Zoom.com Healthcare platform. TCFV does not endorse any platforms but recommends that your program utilize an online platform that protects the privacy of group members and is compliant with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).

- » Platforms may be offering free live demonstrations or have recorded tutorials that will be useful for staff and participants. BIPPs will need to train participants and facilitators on how to utilize the online platforms.
- » Use a platform that offers accessibility for Deaf participants and allows for closed captioning and ASL interpretation.

2. COMPUTER WITH WEBCAM AND MICROPHONE. It is recommended that BIPPs utilize a webcam connected to a computer or a mobile device with video capabilities. Facilitators may find it helpful to manage the group using a computer rather than a mobile device. If your device does not have a built-in webcam, purchase one and test it before each session.

Utilizing a headset or microphone may enhance audio quality. Select a microphone that plugs into the laptop or desktop system using a USB connection. Facilitators may consider purchasing lighting, so they are visible during the session. [Here](#) is an example of affordable, easy lighting.

Elements that Support Effective Online Group Sessions

1. GROUP SIZE. Determine the best group size. TDCJ-CJAD BIPP Accreditation Guideline 13 limits groups to 15 participants and co-facilitated groups to 20 participants while assigning a consistent facilitator(s) to each group. However, given the distinct nature of online group sessions, best practice recommendations are to limit virtual groups to 8 to 10 participants.

When possible, assign two facilitators to each session. One facilitator should focus on monitoring participant engagement and supporting tech-related issues; the other facilitator should structure the session utilizing the program curriculum and engaging participants in the discussion.

2. TOOLS. Facilitators should decide if/how they will utilize classroom-based tools and implement some strategies to promote effective sessions:

- » To view videos with the group, screen-share while streaming digital videos on your device.
- » Type notes in a Word document, PowerPoint, or Notepad instead of using the features of the online platforms for writing on a whiteboard or sticky pad. This will allow you to save notes documented during the session.
- » Before starting an online session, close all apps and documents on your system that are not used during the group session. This will prevent distractions from email and chat alerts and accidental sharing of confidential or private materials.

3. GROUP PARTICIPATION. Determine how you will count participation and assess participation requirements (TDCJ-CJAD Guideline 19 and 23):

- » Establish new ground rules (TDCJ-CJAD Guideline 22) for online groups. Items to consider:
 - how your BIPP will handle restroom breaks
 - moving the camera to other locations during the session as a distraction
 - pausing the video
 - navigating group interruptions
 - smoking or drinking alcohol during the session
 - protecting privacy and confidentiality
 - pets/children interruptions
- » Ask participants to be prepared before the group starts with notebooks/drinks/pens, etc. These new tech-based rules could be a group activity to develop a group agreement to foster group cohesion and trust in the online session confidentiality.
- » Disable the private chat features often offered in video conference platforms. This will help prevent any potential collusion or cross-talking you cannot witness.
- » Ask participants to join online sessions with video so that they are visible during the session to the facilitator. Participants should have access to participate fully with audio capabilities.
- » Consider if you will require participation from every group member. For example, each group member must respond to a set number of discussion questions via chat or voice features to get credit for the session.
- » Determine how to handle participants' difficulties with technology, for example, temporary loss of internet during a session. Ask the participants to contact the facilitator immediately and offer attendance to another online session free of charge. Explain how you will determine if they get credit for a session.

4. GROUP TOPICS. All group conversations must be informed by an understanding that participants will use coercive control in the context of COVID-19. Address pandemic-related issues within the curriculum your program uses.

Due to the public health crisis, the realities of life, relationships, and parenting have drastically changed. BIPPs can promote victim safety and offender accountability by maintaining the integrity of the curriculum while using examples and discussions focused on life during this public health crisis.

Examples may include examining if participants are protecting their families and their health by avoiding risk-taking behavior, exploring healthy, supportive parenting and child development needs, financial abuse, job loss and locating employment, navigating conversations with partners around cleanliness and domestic labor, and respecting partner's requests for health-promoting behaviors.

Conducting Individual Phone Check-ins

If your BIPP program determines it is not safe or possible to conduct online BIPP sessions, your program should:

- » Offer regularly scheduled individual phone check-ins during the COVID-19 pandemic to promote safety.
- » Set determined dates and times each week for the phone check-ins.
- » Develop a structure for sessions that supports nonviolence and offers resources for pandemic-related stressors.
- » Encourage participants to practice healthy relationship skills and promote engagement with your BIPP.
- » Support participants' efforts to be proactive regarding how they will avoid violence, coercion, and control during these stressful times.

Although phone sessions will not count toward or replace the required group sessions, the weekly phone check-ins may be documented as individual sessions provided by your program.

MAR entries: If your program experienced an interruption in services and you were unable to provide weekly sessions to some or all participants, discharge the participants who did not receive services from MAR as "Unable to Participate." Re-enter participants as new placements in MAR when they resume participation in services.

For all participants remaining engaged in individual sessions, report hours provided as individual sessions. Do not discharge clients participating in individual sessions who did not experience an interruption in weekly engagement in services.

Participants with No Phone or Technology

For participants who do not have resources to participate in services, BIPPs should:

- » Contact the referral source and determine if they have information on how the participant could remain active in BIPP services or if they have resources to help the participant to continue services.
- » Confirm with referral sources that the participant was temporarily discharged from the program during the COVID-19 pandemic due to the participant not having a phone or technology to attend alternative BIPP services or other reasons. (TDCJ-CJAD Guideline 5 and 20)
- » Notify the referral source and document in the participant's file that the participant was put on pause/temporarily discharged due to the inability to participate caused by lack of access to phone and technology during the COVID-19 pandemic. [A sample letter](#) that can be shared with referral sources to document the inability to participate is available in TCFV's online resource center.

MAR entries: For participants with no phone or technology, utilize exit reason 'Unable to participate' during the reporting period when they stopped participating in individual or group sessions.

TDCJ-CJAD Waiver to Provide Alternative Measures

Since these measures are generally not allowable under the TDCJ-CJAD BIPP Guidelines, TDCJ-CJAD has developed a temporary waiver allowing programs to provide alternative, short-term measures for group sessions, for the sole purpose of responding to community health advisories during the response to COVID-19 pandemic. **Access the waiver [HERE](#).***

These interventions are intended to respond to the extraordinary circumstances due to life-threatening events that have forced a sudden shutdown and lockdown of portions of the world's population. It is in NO WAY reflective of "best practice" intervention with family violence perpetrators and does not reflect the same aims or goals of normal BIPP interventions.

The goals of these short-term alternative interventions are to:

- » Reduce the risk of violence
- » Increase coping mechanisms for perpetrators
- » Mitigate increased risk factors in families living together during a shelter-in-place or stay-at-home order
- » Indirectly mitigate the effects of violence on family members as much as possible
- » Coordinate with victim support services, listen to victims' voices, and continue to make efforts to gather feedback from victims

Therefore, interventions should primarily be based on:

- » Providing support and crisis intervention for pandemic-related stressors (loss of employment, restrictions on movement within the city/travel)
- » Promoting healthy relationship skills and nonviolent behavior

Follow guidelines on limits of confidentiality to respond to immediate danger and/or safety risks. Document concerns that can be addressed when you resume in-person sessions.

* <https://tx.coalitionmanager.org/resourcemanager/resourcefile/details/70>

Maintaining Communication and Access for All Participants

Provide thorough updates about your program status. At the end of this toolkit, you will find sample templates for communicating key information about your program changes.

Set boundaries, but make yourself accessible remotely:

- » Consider setting up a Google voice number that you can provide to keep your cell phone number private.
- » Set expectations about your availability. Be clear that you will return calls as you are able, but you are not always accessible.
- » Avoid connecting on social media.
- » Update your BIPP webpage, social media, or phone tree system to reflect important changes to services, when and how participants can reach staff, how payments are made, and other important changes.

Communication with victims and referral sources

Please communicate with the victim and referral source, informing them of the BIPP closure or modified services, such as, “The participant will be attending a predetermined number of online sessions or make-up sessions.” This will ensure that the victim and referral source have accurate expectations about the BIPP services and length of participation.

If you do not have access to files or the ability to print and mail letters to victims, request alternative contact information (phone and/or email) from participants when you share updated agreements and forms related to alternative services. For participants who do not provide alternative contact information, communicate with referral sources to determine if any additional contact information is available for victims.

Communicate with referral sources by phone and email if possible, since they are most likely working remotely and unable to review mailed documents.

If the participant is currently living with the victim from the referring violence/precipitating incident or the participant has access or child visitations, your agency should consider:

- » If possible, contact the victim prior to starting online sessions to assess safety concerns about online BIPP sessions. If you have information that the participant is still working and knowledge of their schedule, make the calls when you know he/she is at work. Specifically, discuss if the victim feels safe being in the home during the time of BIPP services.
- » If it is unsafe to contact the victim prior to starting online sessions and you have staff resources to do so, make the calls during a session that the participant is involved in.

- » When you speak to the victim, inform them of who you are and why you are calling. Ask them if it is safe to talk to you; if it is not, suggest they hang up and say that the call was a wrong number. Encourage them to call you back when it is safe.
- » BIPPs in contact with victims should provide the victim with a warm referral to a local family violence program advocate for additional safety planning resources and an explanation of victim services.

Do not make victim calls if trauma-informed domestic violence advocates do not train you. If your program does not typically handle phone calls with victims/partners, please contact TCFV for support.

If your program is connected to a domestic violence program, collaborate with your victim services department to determine a process and best practices for calling and safety planning with victims. In some cases, you may arrange for victim services to contact victims and coordinate any adjustments that need to be made with BIPP staff.

Note: All communications with survivors must meet the confidentiality and privilege requirements for advocates under FVPSA, VAWA, and Texas Family Code. For more guidance on digital victim services go to <https://www.techsafety.org/digital-services-toolkit>.

High-risk perpetrators

Participants who pose a high safety risk to their victims, as determined from screening tools or a referral source, may be deemed ineligible to participate in online group sessions.

- » Programs should avoid informing participants that feedback from their victims/current partners was used to inform their ineligibility to participate.
- » BIPPs should inform referral sources that victims/partners believe the ineligible participants pose a safety risk/threat and work with referral sources to determine how to follow up on victims'/partners' concerns.

In situations of higher risk, consider a more intensive approach and conduct short, daily (or every 2 or 3 days, depending on the situation) 15-minute check-ins. These will count as individual sessions. Refer to MAR entry requirements for individual sessions. Briefly address these questions:

- » Something good you expect out of today?
- » What problems do you expect today?
- » How do you think you could overcome these problems?
- » If there are children in the household, make sure to address the children's safety and well-being.
- » If the participant's violent behavior seems to be escalating, contact referral source and/or local authorities.

BIPP Website and Communication Templates

Update your BIPP webpage, social media, and phone system to reflect important changes to your services, detailing when and how participants can reach staff, how payments are made, and other important changes. Sample communication templates for websites and social media are available [here](#).

Payment Processing

Develop a payment policy for alternative sessions and communicate with participants. Your agency may need to develop alternatives for processing payments for the virtual or make-up sessions. You may request online payments or mailed payments.

Consider alternative payment arrangements for participants who experience financial hardships, including modified payments or providing complimentary sessions during the COVID-19 pandemic, as many industries are impacted and may reduce or lay off.

Online payment collection platforms worth exploring for your agency may be Paypal, Venmo, or Cash.me. Be sure to review each platform's payment processing procedures and fees. Some platforms have zero fees, reduced fees for nonprofits, or allow the sender to pay the fee themselves.

Consider designating one staff person to handle all payment processing to minimize confusion and institute checks and balances.

Additional Support

TCFV is here to support your program during this time. Information and status of the services may change quickly or frequently over the coming months. TCFV will maintain an updated FAQ as the situation develops.

Please contact TCFV and TDCJ-CJAD for clarification and support and connect with other professionals on TCFV's BIPP Listserv to receive the most current information and share best practices.

TEXAS COUNCIL ON FAMILY VIOLENCE PROMOTES SAFE AND
HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS BY SUPPORTING SERVICE PROVIDERS,
FACILITATING STRATEGIC PREVENTION EFFORTS, AND CREATING
OPPORTUNITIES FOR FREEDOM FROM DOMESTIC VIOLENCE.

