

# INvision

## Indiana Division of Disability & Rehabilitative Services Newsletter

### HOPE NOTES

## A message from Director Kylee Hope

*We are charting this new territory together*

I continue to be in awe of how our community comes together to support each other during difficult times. Today's difficult times happens to be the COVID-19 health emergency. Individuals with disabilities and their families are supporting each other and finding creative ways to stay connected to their friends, family and community. Providers are working to ensure that they are supporting individuals and families the best way possible while keeping them healthy. Direct support professionals—who truly are the backbone of various programs—are working tirelessly to ensure individuals receive their necessary supports. Case managers are helping families and individuals navigate this new world so that everyone can continue on their positive trajectory of their best life. Staff of the Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services are continuing to work to keep critical programs running. Local communities have recognized needs of individuals we serve and offered various supports and resources. With this, I want to simply say thank you!

All of the DDRS programs have been working hard to find ways to support you and your family during COVID-19. We are continuously evaluating and implementing flexibilities to provide supports to you and your family during this health situation. In the interest of taking every possible measure to protect individuals from the public health emergency and promote social distancing, DDRS closed its physical office locations and implemented a division-wide remote work policy. While the physical office is closed, DDRS' programs remain open and we continue operating virtually.

As a division, we often have to pivot and make adjustments based on current needs of the state. COVID-19 has required DDRS to reevaluate priorities and identify new goals to help guide us through the current situation. I want to share our newly established HOPE goals for the COVID-19 efforts:

**Help prevent the spread of COVID-19 and keep people alive**

**Operationalize flexibilities**

**Provider network maintained**

**Empower person-centered decision making for self-advocates, families, case managers and providers**

All of us are charting this new territory together. It has brought about opportunities to build on our own personal strengths, learn new ways to use technology, heightened the value we place on our community, and strengthen the relationships of people who are important to us. We are also learning new ways to stay connected to each other, get the supports we need to remain healthy and safe, maintain relationships, and not lose focus on what our vision of what a good life entails. The COVID-19 pandemic is temporary. While I don't know how long this will last, I do know that we will come out of this stronger with a new set of skills and experiences. Take care of yourself and each other.

*Kylee B. Hope*

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### STORIES IN THIS NEWSLETTER

- **Bureau bits:** The Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services has set up a COVID-19 webpage with the most up-to-date guidance from each bureau that outlines how the delivery of their services have been affected.
- **News you can use:** If worries become too much to handle on your own, these resources can help you through to help you cope with COVID-19 anxieties.
- **Featured story:** Take care of yourself using these ways to help reduce your coronavirus-related stresses.
- **Making the LifeCourse work for you:** Maintaining relationships while social distancing can be challenging. Using the Integrated Supports Star allows you to identify several ways to foster those relationships that are important in your life.
- **Events you don't want to miss:** The current commission, councils and public meetings that you may be interested in learning more about and/or attending in the future.

## BUREAU BITS

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services has set up a [COVID-19 guidance webpage](#).

On this page, you will find the most up-to-date guidance from each bureau that outlines how the delivery of their services have been affected along with what allowances or temporary changes are currently in effect. The following bureaus are within the Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services: First Steps, Bureau of Developmental Disabilities Services, Bureau of Quality Improvement Services and the Bureau of Rehabilitative Services.

In addition, you may find the following links especially helpful: Webinar: Managing Life during the Pandemic, [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#) [BDDS Guidance to Families on COVID-19 Temporary Policy Changes](#)

[First Steps COVID-19 resource document](#)

[Hands in Autism—COVID-19 information and strategies](#)

For more information about COVID-19 and how to protect yourself and your family, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [COVID-19 webpage](#).

Information, webinars and tools are being shared all the time, so check back frequently!

The screenshot shows the top navigation bar of the Indiana Department of Health website. It includes the IN.gov logo, navigation links for Family and Social Services Administration, DFR Benefits Information, Find child care, SNAP (Food Assistance), and Health Coverage. Below the navigation bar is a search bar and buttons for 'Find an Agency' and 'Gov. Eric J. Holcomb'. The main content area features a breadcrumb trail: 'DDRS HOME / COVID-19 (CORONAVIRUS) GUIDANCE FOR DDRS STAKEHOLDERS'. The title is 'COVID-19 (coronavirus) guidance for DDRS stakeholders'. The text states: 'The Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services is actively working to develop and share ongoing guidance to assist in the delivery of DDRS services in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. Listed below are the guidances released to date by DDRS, and all FSSA COVID-19 announcements can be found here, and to receive all DDRS updates please [click here](#).' Below this is a section titled 'Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services' with a list of updates: '• DDRS Advisory Council April meeting canceled; Provider and case manager webinar scheduled (April 9, 2020)', '• COVID-19 multi-language resource available from Luna (April 1, 2020)', '• HANDS in Autism resources for COVID (March 31, 2020)', '• Family as paid caregivers, COVID-19 and Appendix K (March 30, 2020)', and '• FSSA launches Hoosiers Serving Hoosiers service to connect job seekers with ways to support Hoosiers needing direct'.

## NEWS YOU CAN USE

# Resources to help you cope with COVID-19 anxieties

*If worries become too much to handle on your own, these can help you through*

During this time, it is understandable to be experiencing increased stress, worry or anxiety. You may know someone who has been exposed, infected or even died from COVID-19. You may have lost your job, your formal supports or are feeling isolated due to social distancing. If these feelings and worries become too much to handle on your own, there are resources available to help you through.

**National Alliance on Mental Illness Helpline: 800-950-NAMI**

Volunteers are available to answer questions, offer support and provide next steps

**Crisis Text Line: Text "NAMI" to 741741**

Chat with a trained crisis counselor

**SAMHSA Disaster Distress Helpline: 800-985-5990**

Provides counseling and support to people experiencing emotional distress related to national disasters

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 800-273-TALK**

Trained crisis counselors provide support and resources if you or someone you know is in crisis

[www.VirusAnxiety.com](http://www.VirusAnxiety.com)

A collection of research-backed tools (articles, meditations, access to mental health experts, anxiety screenings)

# Taking care of yourself

*Find ways to help reduce your stresses and anxieties*

We are going through something that we have never experienced before. Parents, caregivers and individuals with disabilities are no strangers to having to adapt to unique situations. COVID-19 is another situation where we are learning together how to cope, modify our environment, find support and take proper care of ourselves and our families. The stay-at-home order and the need for social distancing can make us feel isolated and lonely. The disruptions in formal and community supports, schools closing and closures of some day programs can make us feel overwhelmed and exhausted. Through all of this, it will be important that we find ways to have fun and maintain important relationships which will help to reduce our stresses and anxieties.

Following are some ideas of virtual fun activities that you can do with your family and friends through a variety of video chat platforms that are available as an app on your phone or on your computer and are free and easy to use:

- Grab some popcorn and watch a favorite TV show or movie together
- Play a game like charades, Pictionary or trivia
- Host a theme party and invite your friends/family to participate by dressing up, having snacks and catching up
- Have a lip sync battle
- Host a dance party
- Put on a concert or play
- Go through a virtual museum tour together
- Have lunch or dinner together

You may be finding it difficult to take time for yourself and nurture your own mental health. Whether it is a time while the kids are in the bed, when your spouse can take over for a few minutes or just in those spontaneous moments where everyone seems to be occupied take the time to do something for you. Here are a few ideas of things you may enjoy:

- Take a bubble bath
- Go for a walk or bike ride
- Work in the garden
- Do some yoga
- Meditate
- Cook or bake
- Play a game on your phone
- Listen to music
- Do an online exercise class
- Read a book
- Watch your favorite TV show
- Chat with your best friend
- Create pieces of art
- Write in your journal

You may be finding that your children are struggling with increased challenging behaviors or even having new behaviors that never existed before. This is understandable and probably even expected. Remember that all behavior is communication. The individual or child is trying to communicate a need or emotion that

they can't express otherwise. Here are some ideas of things you can do that may reduce some of those challenging behaviors:

**Establish a routine.** Creating predictability in their day can reduce anxiety and boredom. You can do this by creating a visual schedule, setting timers or alarms and/or creating a checklist to work through the day. Don't forget the basics of routine. Wake up and go to bed around the same time every day. Start your day off by getting dressed and eating breakfast. These simple things can set the stage for better days.

**Ward off boredom.** Boredom can create frustrations that lend to behaviors, meltdowns and doing things that they aren't allowed to do. Work fun activities into your day. Create opportunities for movement and sunshine when the weather permits.

**Talk it out.** Your child may be having a difficult time understanding and expressing the emotions they are feeling right now. They may be feeling confused about why they can't go to school or play with their friends. They may be hearing pieces of the news stories that are causing them to have fear and anxiety. Create social stories or narratives to help them understand what is happening. Create cards with simple faces of feelings they can point to communicate how they are feeling. Everyone communicates. It may be through spoken word, facial expressions, communication devices, sign language, eye gaze, picture systems or a combination of modalities. Use their preferred style of communication to work through how they may be feeling and validate those feelings by letting them know they are not alone.

**Think outside the box.** Meeting sensory needs may be a challenge right now. Shaving cream, dry rice, water, ear buds, and swing sets may all be things you can use creatively to meet some of those needs. Talk with your therapists about items around the house or activities you can do to meet those needs.

**Ask for help.** Talk to your behavior therapist. Seek advice from mental health professionals. Talk to other parents to exchange ideas. Child Mind Institute currently has resources to help families through this time including daily tips, Facebook Live video chat with expert clinicians along with a host of articles over specific topics related to dealing with emotions associated with COVID-19.

**Most of all, be gentle with yourself.** There are going to be really tough days. There are also going to be really great days. You will have opportunities to make memories that you, your children and your family will cherish for the rest of their days. You will develop deeper connections with friends as you lean on each other to get through this. You will get to witness humanity at its finest through amazing acts of love and kindness. You will find another layer of strength and perseverance just when you thought you had nothing left.

# Making the LifeCourse work for you

## Using the Integrated Supports Star

Maintaining relationships while practicing social distancing can be challenging. Using the Integrated Supports Star allows you to brainstorm and identify several ways that you and your child can continue to foster those relationships that are important in your life. The star featured here has some ideas of ways you can stay connected to those people who are important in your life. Each section of the star is the variety of supports that everyone accesses to live their best life. When thinking about how to

maintain relationships during this time of social distancing and stay at home orders let explore each section together:

**Personal strengths and assets.** What are your child's strengths, your strengths and those strengths you possess as a family? If you are creative this may be a great time to put those artist skills to work! Create pieces of art, cards or jewelry to mail or do porch drop-offs to those people who are important to you. Is your child kind and thoughtful? This is a great

time to use those strengths to create simple care packages for neighbors who may be struggling to buy groceries. What is your child's communication style? Even individuals who are non-verbal have the ability to communicate. Create a page on their communication device so they can still chat with friends and family by telephone or video chats.

**Technology.** This is a time where technology is our friend. Video chats, Facebook Messenger and FaceTime are all avenues to stay connected using video. There are a lot of free apps you can download to stay connected whether through video, voice messages or typed messages. You can also simply text or call someone over the phone.

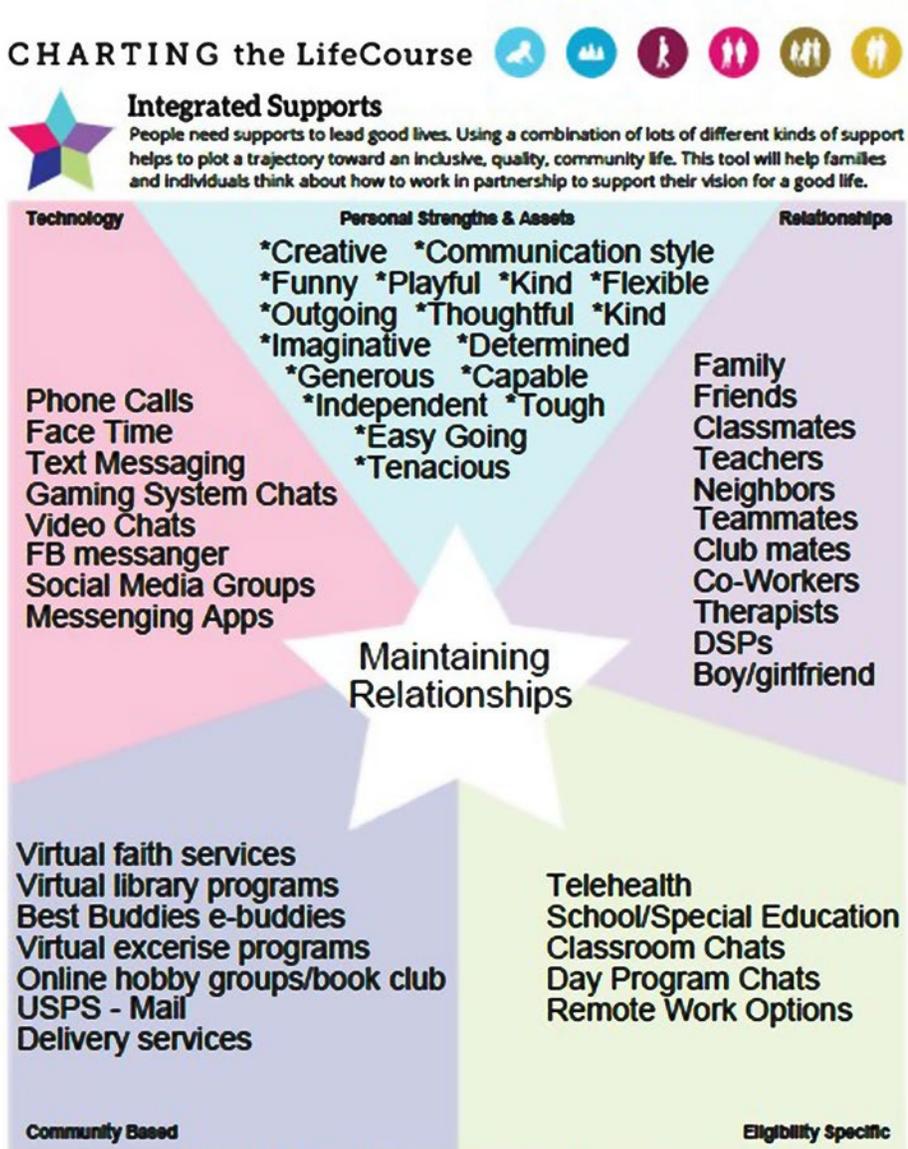
**Relationships.** Think about who those people that are important in your and your child's life. Don't forget those special teachers or therapists who are an important part of your child's life. Take time to schedule regular phone calls or video chats.

*Being creative in how you continue to contact the important people in your life will ease feelings of isolation.*

**Community-based.** While we may not be able to participate in our regular community activities there are many programs that offer virtual or online activities. Best Buddies e-buddies is a program where a young adult or adult with a disability can connect to their buddy via email, phone, text or video chats. Everyone likes to have a special card in their mailbox. Send those close to you letters or handmade cards. There are many delivery services right now. Is there a special gift you would like to send someone?

**Eligibility-specific.** Take advantage of telehealth options that some of your service providers may be offering. Does your child's classroom have a regular classroom virtual chat? Do you have the ability to maintain your employment and those work relationships through remote work options?

Social distancing can make you feel very lonely and isolated. Being creative in how you continue to contact the important people in your life will ease those feelings of isolation.





## Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services

Indiana Family and Social Services Administration

Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services

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You can sign up to receive this newsletter by [clicking here](#).

You can receive other updates from DDRS by visiting [here](#).

The Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services is a program of the Indiana Family & Social Services Administration. If you have questions about DDRS programs and services, [visit us online](#).

Did you know that families can sign up to receive text messages and email updates from First Steps? Families will learn more about policy issues, how to become an effective advocate, how to be involved in your local planning and coordinating council, how to connect to events and groups, how to tell your family story and more. [Go to this site](#) to sign up!

## EVENTS YOU DON'T WANT TO MISS

Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic and rapidly changing times, all DDRS Commissions, Councils and public meetings have either been cancelled, postponed or moved to an online format. To find the most current information, including next meeting dates and locations, [please click here](#). Following are the current commission, councils and public meetings that you may be interested in learning more about and/or attending in the future:



## Building Bridges

These meetings are an opportunity for families and self-advocates to meet and speak with the Bureau of Developmental Disabilities Services state staff. These sessions are an important part of the Bureau's efforts to create direct avenues for individuals and families to share their feedback. These meetings are solely for families and individuals with disabilities to provide a forum for constructive and valuable conversations on successes or concerns, as well as suggestions or input regarding BDDS programs and services.

## INSILC public meeting

The Indiana Statewide Independent Living Council provides oversight of the Indiana State Plan for Independent Living and assists the Centers for Independent Living with the SPIL's implementation and coordination of services. For more information, visit [the Statewide Independent Living Council webpage](#).

## DDRS Advisory Council

The DDRS Advisory Council was established to assist the Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services in ensuring that individuals with disabilities are as independent and self-sufficient as possible. For more information, visit the [DDRS Commissions & Councils webpage](#).

## ICC meetings

The Interagency Coordinating Council for infants and toddlers with disabilities is the state's federally mandated early intervention council. The council is charged with advising and assisting DDRS in its responsibility to develop an early intervention system of the highest quality, balancing family-centered services with fiscal responsibility. The council is comprised of parents, state agency groups, early intervention service providers, legislators and others. The meetings are open to the public. For more information, visit [the DDRS Commissions & Councils webpage](#).

## Commission on Rehabilitation Services

The Commission on Rehabilitation Services works with the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services' Vocational Rehabilitation Services on matters such as the effectiveness and customer satisfaction with the services provided to individuals participating in the VR program. The commission is also involved in matters affecting VR policies and procedures, goals and priorities, and the state plan.