

April 2, 2020

To: NC State-Certified Domestic Violence Intervention Programs

From: NC Council for Women and Youth Involvement/  
NC Domestic Violence Commission

RE: Coronavirus (COVID-19) and Virtual Group Work

On March 30, the NC Council for Women and Youth Involvement (NC CFW & YI) in partnership with the NC Domestic Violence Intervention Management Committee (NC DVIMC) proposed a resolution to temporarily allow state-certified Domestic Violence Intervention Programs to conduct group work utilizing a virtual format.

The NC Domestic Violence Commission voted to approve the resolution, effective April 1, 2020 and remaining so until the State of Emergency declaration in North Carolina has been lifted. The formal resolution is available on the NC CFW & YI website (<https://ncadmin.nc.gov/advocacy/women/abuser-treatment-program>).

The decision to propose this resolution was borne from careful consideration of the impact of COVID-19 mitigation measures on Domestic Violence Intervention Programs, the individuals they serve and the victims whose safety remains a priority for program providers, NC CFW & YI and the NC DVC. The ability of Domestic Violence Intervention Programs to maintain contact with program participants throughout the duration of the State of Emergency declaration will help minimize group work disruption, lessen the financial impact of COVID-19 on programs and continue vital services that prioritize victim safety and breaking the cycle of intimate partner violence. This measure solely applies to programs that have received state-certification from NC CFW & YI as of April 1, 2020.

The following are recommendations for Domestic Violence Intervention Programs regarding Virtual Group Work and COVID-19:

- Continue to follow the recommendations and guidance put forth by Local, State and Federal Governments regarding Coronavirus (COVID-19).
- Exercise leniency with group participant absence policy.
  - Participants that are absent from virtual group work, due to COVID-19 related quarantine, self-isolation, care of self or others or social distancing should not have those absences counted against them.
  - Participants should be allowed to resume group work at the point where they left off and not be made to restart group classes upon returning from COVID-19 related absence.
  - Participants are still expected to complete 26 weeks of group work, even if they exceed the 30-week time frame due to COVID-19 related absences.

Participants that are unable or unwilling to attend virtual group meetings due to lack of available equipment, financial barrier, lack of internet access, childcare, or housing circumstance should not be penalized for absences. Group participants meeting the above criteria should be allowed to resume group work as soon as practicable not be made to restart group classes. Refrain from terminating participants if absences from virtual group classes, are due to COVID-19 impacts, lack of available equipment needed for virtual group, financial barrier, lack of internet access, childcare or housing circumstance.

All virtual group work must adhere to the same standards established for in person group work.

- At least 1 facilitator present for every 8 participants, no more than 16 participants per group meeting.
- Groups must remain gender-specific, female participants shall not attend or be enrolled in groups with male participants.
- Each group session shall last at least one and one-half hours.
- All programs shall provide intervention for a total of 39 hours of group treatment over a minimum period of 26 weeks.
- Programs shall comply with written policies and procedures regarding participant and victim confidentiality.

Agencies should continue reporting any COVID-19 related impacts they are experiencing to NC CFW & YI.

For more information, visit the NC CFW & YI website (<https://ncadmin.nc.gov/advocacy/women/abuser-treatment-program>) or contact the NC CFW & YI Western Region Office at 828-251-6169.

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CC: April Burgess-Johnson, Chair, NC Domestic Violence Commission  
Robert M. Wilkins, Chair, NC Domestic Violence Intervention Management Committee  
Tiffany R. Bell, Co-Chair, NC Domestic Violence Intervention Management Committee