



## Working from Home During CORONAVIRUS COVID-19 Pandemic Updated 9/1/2020

The State of New Jersey is in the midst of a response to COVID-19. This situation is unique and is evolving daily. In accordance with the Department of Children and Families (DCF) Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) for a pandemic, and as directed by the Governor's office, DCF has implemented and updated this temporary work from home policy.

Because of the extraordinary situation in the workplace caused by COVID-19, we understand that staff might not be able to perform all of their job's essential functions during this temporary period because they are working remotely. DCF has evaluated the ongoing need for staff to work from home and based on the continued state of emergency and direction from the Governor's Office, we will continue to follow the temporary work from home policy which has been extended for an additional six months to ensure the continuous safety of DCF Staff.

Under the present circumstances you should be guided by the following:

- **Essential employees.** Essential employees must report for duty and depending on their job responsibilities, may be required to report to their usual work location or be permitted to work from home.
- **Non-essential employees.** Employees not designated as essential must “report for duty” by working from home.

Please keep in mind that this is an evolving situation that requires everyone's continued cooperation. Everyone, regardless of designation, may be required to report to their worksite as plans and employee designations continue to shift. As DCF continues to evolve in performing essential job functions and providing services, the Continuity of Operations (COOP) plans should be adhered to by staff. This may include employees reporting to offices on a rotating basis. Employees unable to report to the office on scheduled days will be required to request and use leave time in accordance with DCF policy. Staff should monitor their email, text and telephone throughout the day to ensure that you are able to receive any notice of a change in designation, return to work notice or other time-sensitive information. Staff may not begin to work from home until approved by the Cost Center manager.

DCF employs just over 6,700 staff. We carefully reviewed our essential functions and positions and determined that, with limited exceptions, most DCF staff can work from home for a temporary period, provided they are equipped with the appropriate technological support.

There is a small contingent of DCF staff for which work from home is not suitable. Those staff are employed in various capacities including but not limited to our State Central Registry (SCR),



## NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Information Technology, and certain central office functions including Human Resources. The services provided by these entities are dependent upon access to state IT main frame systems and paper-based processes. In addition, there are some necessary functions that will need to be staffed in the local Child Protection and Permanency (CP&P) and Area Offices.

SCR is a hotline system that operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The SCR receives and prioritizes reports of alleged child abuse and neglect 24-hour, seven-days-a week. It also dispatches responses to suspected child abuse and neglect situations and provides information and referrals for families in need of support. This function will be performed by on site staff on a rotating basis.

CP&P is New Jersey's public child welfare agency, responsible for receiving and responding to reports of alleged child maltreatment, and ensuring the safety, permanency and well-being of children. CP&P carries out child protective investigations and child welfare assessments, provides case management for children and their families, recruits, trains and supports kinship and unrelated foster and adoptive parents, facilitates family preservation, reunification, adoption and guardianship processes, licensing of resource homes, and utilizes a statewide network of community-based services. Over 5,000 CP&P staff work in 46 local offices and 9 Area Offices across New Jersey. Almost all DCP&P staff will work remotely from home. Beginning Monday April 13th, CP&P Local Office operations were transitioned to the nine Area Offices that remained open with a small skeleton crew while Local Offices closed. It is important to note that the Local Office security guards remain in each of the Local Offices. Employees who need to retrieve items from their Local Offices are directed to first inform their supervisor that they will be going to the office then contact the guard to let them know the time of their anticipated arrival. Staff (e.g. any employee who is primarily assigned to or frequently works in a particular Local Office) will not be permitted to stay in their respective Local Offices for any extended period of time. This will ensure that checks can be issued for payments to resource parents and vendors, and that children's access to Medicaid is maintained.

The DCF-Office of Information Technology (DCFOIT) supports the IT needs of the DCF workforce and IT systems. Initial installations and hardware provisioning for remote work requires local network connectivity and these activities must be conducted from a DCF office. In addition, DCF OIT staff support and maintain numerous critical software applications including NJSPIRIT. At this time, DCF's IT needs are evolving daily and are compounding in their complexities. As a result, a small team of identified staff are required to be on site at different locations and times of day. This will require varying numbers of staff being present on-site, dependent upon the challenges of the day and the skill sets required.

The DCF Office of Human Resources is responsible for providing all aspects of personnel and payroll services for DCF employees. Many of these essential functions can be performed from home. However, minimal coverage is required. Staff will be scheduled on a rotating basis.

Prior to these current events, a limited number of employees possessed the technology sufficient to support working from a remote location. Following the Governor's directive to implement a work



from home policy, the DCF Office of Information Technology deployed hundreds of personal computers, laptops, and monitors. In addition, IT sought permission and installed ‘Go to My PC’ on thousands of staff computers so that staff can access their work computers and systems from home. DCF is also encouraging the use of Microsoft Teams, a cloud-based team collaboration software that is part of the Office 365 suite of applications. The core capabilities in Microsoft Teams include business messaging, calling, video meetings and file sharing.

To support this work, DCF developed the following guidelines for staff.

**1. Hours of Work.**

- a. DCF normal business hours are Monday through Friday 8:00 am to 6:00 pm, with the exception of staff in 24 hour operations, Facilities and Office of Education.
- b. Employees who wish to, may apply for a Flextime schedule. Flextime is an arrangement that allows an employee to alter the start and end times of their workday between the hours of 8:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m. Saturday through Friday. Employees should follow the “NEW” Flextime policy and must seek approval to work different hours other than their normal 8:00 – 4:00, 8:30-4:30, 9:00-5:00 etc., work hours in accordance with the flextime policy. [https://www.nj.gov/dcf/policy\\_manuals/DCF-III-A-2-200\\_issuance.shtml](https://www.nj.gov/dcf/policy_manuals/DCF-III-A-2-200_issuance.shtml)

**2. Set Clear Expectations.** Supervisors shall identify specific duties and assignments that employees must perform and communicate these duties and assignments to the employee.

- a. The list of duties and assignments shall be reviewed regularly during communications between the supervisor and employee and may need to be updated periodically.
- b. Supervisors and employees shall review work as it is completed to properly balance workloads.
- c. Employees are expected to complete work assignments and other assigned duties as directed by Supervisors to support the mission critical work of DCF. Supervisors and employees shall communicate on a regular basis and make necessary changes to work assignments as per the operational needs of the unit/office.
- d. Alternative work, including research, trainings, and other tasks related to DCF’s work, may be assigned to employees in the event that it is not possible or appropriate to continue an employee’s current work.

**3. Communications Plan.** Supervisors shall work with their staff to develop a communication strategy. Frequent communications are a necessity when supervising an employee working from home. Communication can and should occur in a variety of ways: via telephone, emails, video conferences, activity reports, and, if appropriate, in-person meetings.



- 4. Availability.** Employees working from home shall be available to their coworkers, supervisors, and others in the same manner as if they were in a traditional office environment. Employees must be responsive and available when contacted during the workday by a Supervisor, Manager, or other colleagues. Employees are expected to participate in scheduled conference calls and other available modes of communication established by the Supervisor. Employees who have state issued cell phones shall ensure they are operable and if necessary, provide an alternate phone number (e.g. personal cell phone) to a Supervisor in the event technical issues arise that impact the employee's ability to use their work cell phone.
- 5. Calendars.** Employees working from home shall keep their Microsoft Outlook calendars current.
- 6. Voice Mail.** Employees working from home shall modify their outgoing voice mail message to advise callers how best to reach them.
- 7. Timekeeping.** Proper monitoring and certification of employee work time is required. In accordance with DCF Timekeeping policy, supervisors must review and certify in the eCATS that employees are paid only for work performed and that leave time usage from scheduled work hours are properly reflected. Supervisors must obtain a reasonable assurance that employees are working when scheduled. Reasonable assurance may include a review of work products to ensure an acceptable level of productivity during the time spent working from home as well as written weekly status reports provided by the employee which document progress on work assignments and projects.
- 8. Reassignment.** Designated Essential and Non-Essential Employees may be reassigned to do out of title work when necessary to ensure the continuity of DCF's essential functions. The decision to reassign staff will be made by the Commissioner in concert with the Offices of Human Resources and Employee Relations consistent with the authority provided by Executive Order 103 (March 9, 2020).
- 9. Privacy and Confidentiality.** Employees working from home remain subject to all Department and OIT rules and regulations regarding privacy of information, protection of confidential information, security of data and passwords, and records retention. Any work materials taken home must be kept in a safe location and not be made accessible to others. All electronic records, data, and files created in connection with the performance of an employee's job duties are the property of DCF and are subject to confidentiality and records retention practices of the State of New Jersey, as well as all applicable federal rules and regulations.



**10. Invitations to Speak.** Employees that consider participating in a virtual event (e.g. presenter in a webinar) shall follow the same procedures for approval that are established for attending an in-person event.

**11. Security.** Employees working from home shall follow established directives regarding the use of DCF records, data, user IDs, and passwords. Employees are responsible for protecting and securing sensitive and confidential data and records at all times.

- a. Employees are to abide by all DCF, OIT, state and federal policies, rules, procedures and regulations that govern data access, data or information breaches, as well as all DCF and State Ethics Commission rules, regulations and statutes which govern employee conduct and ethics requirements.
- b. The loss, unauthorized release or other unpermitted disclosure of confidential information should immediately be disclosed to the DCF Privacy Officer pursuant to DCF's [HIPAA](#) policy.

**11. Technology.** In the event of an unexpected loss of internet connectivity (that cannot be immediately repaired), equipment failure, or power outage when an employee is working from home, the employee must immediately report the failure or outage to his/her supervisor and IT staff so that alternative arrangements can be made. Information Technology has provided all staff working from home with the necessary technology and equipment to complete work that is normally performed in a traditional work environment. In the event there is a need to pick up equipment, staff are **must coordinate with IT staff** for assistance with disassembly and packaging for transport. Staff are expected to use all the tools provided to them to perform their duties.

**12. Worker Safety.** DCF has an obligation to provide a safe and secure work environment for staff. The remote workplace is treated as an extension of the workplace for safety requirements. Injuries incurred during worktime should be reported immediately by calling your Assistant Area Director (Child Protection and Permanency) or Office of Human Resources at 609-888-7830. In addition, all staff reporting to work or visiting the work setting must wear protective face coverings while entering or exiting the building, when interacting with others and in all common areas including hallways, elevators, restrooms and lobbies. Staff may decide not to wear a face covering only when in their own workspace.

**13. New to Working from Home.** Employees are again encouraged to review the resources provided in the policy about best practices and strategies to be productive and effective while working in your home environment.



**14. Unwilling or Unable to Work from Home.** Employees that are not able to or are unwilling to work from home shall advise their supervisor. Employees who are not able to work from home will be directed to report to an alternate DCF office or may be permitted to utilize a leave of absence as appropriate. Employees should contact the Office of Human Resources at 609-888-7830 for information and guidance. Staff are expected to follow all of the tenets of the Work from Home Policy, however; if an employee is unable to comply with the established guidelines of the policy, they should discuss with his/her Supervisor to explore alternative work options which may include reporting to a DCF work location.

It is important to emphasize that these procedures do not and cannot account for all circumstances or all needs. This plan seeks to strike a balance between the needs of DCF employees and their families and the goal of DCF performing its essential functions efficiently and effectively. DCF leadership continues to monitor the situation and will update this plan, as necessary.



## Tips to Work from Home COVID-19 Pandemic 2020

### **Working from Home:**

20 Tips for Working from Home

<https://www.pcmag.com/news/get-organized-20-tips-for-working-from-home>

8 Tips to Make Working From Home Work For You

<https://www.npr.org/2020/03/15/815549926/8-tips-to-make-working-from-home-work-for-you>

7 Effective Ways to Work from Home During the Coronavirus Outbreak

<https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/life/career/a31436581/working-from-home-tips/>

5 Tips for Staying Productive and Mentally Healthy While You're Working from Home

<https://time.com/5801725/work-from-home-remote-tips/>

Get More Done: 18 Tips for Telecommuters

<https://www.inc.com/christina-desmarais/get-more-done-18-tips-for-telecommuters.html>

9 Ways to Stay Productive When You Work from Home

<https://www.success.com/9-ways-to-stay-productive-when-you-work-from-home/>

Working from Home? Ten Tips for Staying Productive

<https://www.governing.com/now/Working-from-Home-Ten-Tips-for-Staying-Productive.html>

### **Mindfulness from Home:**

5 Ways to Practice Mindfulness While Working from Home

<https://www.theworkathomewoman.com/practice-mindfulness/>

### **Free Resources for Students:**

42 Free Online Resources for Schools Shifting Online During Coronavirus

<https://schoolchoiceweek.com/37-free-online-resources-for-schools-shifting-online-during-coronavirus/>

10 strategies for online learning during a coronavirus outbreak

<https://www.techlearning.com/resources/free-online-learning-resources-for-schools-affected-by-coronaviruscovid-19>

Free resources and subscriptions for remote learning and home schooling due to coronavirus

<https://qns.com/story/2020/03/16/free-resources-and-subscriptions-for-remote-learning-and-home-schooling-due-to-coronavirus/>



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### **Other Resources**

Employee Advisory Services (EAS)

Call: 1 - 866 - 327 - 9133

Email: [EAS\\_Help@csc.nj.gov](mailto:EAS_Help@csc.nj.gov)

Alia Workforce Wellbeing

Group chats held every weekday at 12:30 PM

<https://zoom.us/j/456471278>

Microlearning session

<https://facebook.com/AliaInnovations/>