

COVID-19 Facilitator's Manual

# Family Recovery Journey



If you find this resource helpful, or if you have any suggestions or questions, please let us know.

Email messages can be sent to [info@schizophrenia.ca](mailto:info@schizophrenia.ca), or phone **1-204-320-3188**.

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## Acknowledgements

The Schizophrenia Society of Canada (SSC) would like to thank all those who contributed to this COVID-19 ADDENDUM to the Family Recovery Journey Program.. We especially express our sincere appreciation and gratitude to Fran Schellenberg. Fran Schellenberg spent her 25+ year career in the field of mental health as a front-line mental health worker, a policy developer, and executive director of mental health, addictions, and spiritual health care for the Province of Manitoba. Since her retirement, she has continued to move forward mental health initiatives through her work as a consultant and through volunteer work.

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a global pandemic. This new virus has had unprecedented impacts on populations globally. Provinces to varying degrees and with gradual caution have started to lift COVID-19 restrictions, however it is very possible that subsequent waves of cases could emerge and it is uncertain at this point when the pandemic will “end.”

In a pandemic, people living with severe mental illness, such as schizophrenia and psychosis, and their family care givers, can be faced with additional issues and problems. Because we simply don't know how long and to what degree we will be impacted by this pandemic into the future, it is important to stay educated, to stay vigilant, and to implement strategies that will keep us to be healthy and hopeful. To this end, information within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic has been added to each of the Family Recovery Journey sessions. We hope that this information will help you to feel better equipped to manage challenges that you may be faced with during this unprecedented time.

This COVID-19 addendum is made possible through funding from the COVID-19 Employment & Social Development Canada Emergency Community Support Fund, which is administered by the United Way Centraide Network.



Government  
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du Canada



United Way  
Winnipeg

## Delivering the Program in Times of COVID-19: Before you Begin

In most circumstances during COVID-19, delivery of the Family Recovery Journey (FRJ) program will occur online for safety purposes. For online delivery guidelines, please refer to the general FRJ online delivery guidelines in Appendix C.

Your local public health authorities and governments will provide direction as to when/whether groups can meet face to face for training, education, meetings, etc. If it is determined that face to face training can occur safely at any point during COVID-19, be sure to follow the recommended guidelines of your public health agency related to physical distancing, mask wearing, hand washing, etc.



## Delivery Readiness Checklist

Week	Topics & Objectives	Activities/Content	Options/Variations	Handouts
1	<b>Introduction Psychosis &amp; schizophrenia in the COVID-19 context</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Introduction of COVID-19 Family Recovery Journey context.</li> <li>○ Lecture/discussion                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Impacts of COVID-19 on people with existing psychosis</li> <li>› The Mental Health System during COVID-19</li> </ul> </li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Participant notes</li> <li>○ Region specific mental health resources, including any adaptations that have been made locally</li> </ul>
2	<b>Living with Psychosis and Schizophrenia within the COVID-19 context</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The “treatment battle” and COVID-19</li> <li>○ Self-care during COVID-19</li> <li>○ Reimagining your self-care plan</li> <li>○ Additional supports for family caregivers during COVID-19</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Participant Notes</li> <li>○ Region specific supports and resources</li> <li>○ Reimagined self-care plan</li> </ul>
3	<b>Managing Mental Health Crises during COVID-19</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Impacts of COVID-19 on substance use and helping your family member</li> <li>○ Suicide risk of people with psychosis during COVID-19</li> <li>○ A note on aggressive behaviors during COVID-19</li> <li>○ Completing a family crisis plan for COVID-19</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Participant Notes</li> <li>○ Region specific addictions resources</li> </ul>
4	<b>Lived Experience and Recovery</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Strategies for supporting Recovery during COVID-19</li> <li>○ Relapses and warning signs during COVID-19</li> <li>○ “Normal” reactions</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Participant Notes</li> </ul>
5	<b>Building Strengths and Going Forward during COVID-19</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Building on internal and external strengths during COVID-19</li> <li>○ Housing and financial support during COVID-19</li> <li>○ Advocacy</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Participant Notes</li> <li>○ Region specific housing and financial resources</li> </ul>



# Session 1: COVID-19 Context



## Objectives:

At the end of the session, participants will be able to:

1. Understand the impacts of COVID-19 on people living with psychosis
2. Understand the mental health system during COVID-19

### Materials for Delivery:

- o Participant Notes for Session 1: COVID-19

### Local Materials:

Information on local resources available during COVID-19, including any adaptations that have been made.

## Outline:

Note: Times are approximate to allow flexibility for questions and discussion.

Topic/Activity	Time	Materials
Introduction to COVID-19 Context	3-5 minutes	Participant Notes
Impacts of COVID-19 on People Living with Psychosis	5-10 minutes	Participant Notes
The Mental Health System during COVID-19	5-10 minutes	Participant Notes Local information



## COVID-19 Slide 1: Introduction to the COVID-19 addendums to the Family Recovery Journey sessions

### Key Points:

- In a pandemic, people living with severe mental illness, such as schizophrenia and psychosis, and their family care givers, can be faced with additional issues and problems.

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- It is important to stay educated, to stay vigilant, and to implement strategies that will keep us healthy and hopeful.

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- Information within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic has been added to each of the Family Recovery Journey sessions. We hope that this information will help you to feel better equipped to manage challenges that you may be faced with during this unprecedented time.

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- The information in this addendum has been gathered from reliable sources, but the content is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice or treatment. If you have any specific questions regarding you or your family member's health issues, always seek the advice of your health care provider.

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- This COVID-19 addition is made possible through funding from the COVID-19 Employment & Social Development Canada Emergency Community Support Fund, which is administered by the United Way Centraide Network.

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## COVID-19 Slide 3: Impacts of COVID-19 on people with existing psychosis

### Key Points:

- Review of literature suggests that people with psychosis or at risk of psychotic disorder may be disproportionately affected by the effects of COVID-19, and are at increased risk of:
  - **Transmission** of COVID-19, due to higher prevalence of residing in shelters, group housing, other housing, or homelessness, as well as challenges associated with symptoms of psychosis (including disorganized thinking, poor insight and decision-making)<sup>1 2</sup>

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  - **Adverse symptoms or treatment outcomes** of COVID-19, due to ongoing stigma in health care services<sup>3</sup> and very high prevalence of co-occurring medical conditions (such as type II diabetes, respiratory illness, heart disease)<sup>4</sup>

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  - **Being impacted by the psychosocial impacts** of COVID-19 (ex. social isolation, unemployment, homelessness, etc.)<sup>5</sup>

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- Social isolation and physical distancing makes symptoms more difficult for family members to recognize, resulting in delays in seeking care

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<sup>1</sup> Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction, April 2020.  
Morgan VA, Waterreus A, Carr V, et al.. Responding to challenges for people with psychotic illness: updated evidence from the Survey of High Impact Psychosis. Aust N Z J Psychiatry. 2017;51(2):124-140.

<sup>2</sup> Nicole Kozloff et al., The COVID-19 Global Pandemic: Implications for People with Schizophrenia and RElated Disorders. Schizophrenia Bulletin, 2020 Jul; 46(4): 752-757.

<sup>3</sup> (Thornicroft G, Mehta N, Clement S, et al. 2016) (Clement S, Schauman O, Graham T, et al. 2015) as cited in Nicole Kozloff et al., 2020

<sup>4</sup> (Wu Z, McGoogan, 2020) (Guan WJ, Liang WH, Zhao Y, et al. 2020) (Correll CU, Solmi M, Veronese N, et al. 2017) (Ward M, Druss B. 2015) (Zareifopoulos N, Bellou A, Spiropoulou A, Spiropoulos K.2018) all cited in Nicole Kozloff et al., 2020

<sup>5</sup> (Anglin et al., 2020) as cited in Brown et al., The potential impact of COVID-19 on psychosis: A rapid review of contemporary epidemic and pandemic research. 2020

## COVID-19 Slide 4: Accessing virtual care during COVID-19

### Key Points:

- Expect changes in accessing mental health services, including transition to online or virtual mental health services for both group or one-on-one therapy
- There may be challenges associated with virtual care, such as privacy issues or lack of access to technology

## COVID-19 Slide 5: Emergency services during COVID-19

### Key Points:

- Crisis services that are already operating remotely should continue to be available. As well, some new phone lines or online crisis supports may be available. (Such as Wellness Together Canada)
- Emergency services are still in operation, though may have additional safety measures in place

### Emphasize:

As in pre-COVID-19 times, if you or your family member is in immediate danger or requires immediate medical response, do not hesitate to call 911 or present to your local emergency department.

## COVID-19 Slide 6: Accessing medication during COVID-19

### Key Points:

- It is important for individuals to continue to regularly take any prescribed medications and to stay updated on challenges associated with accessing medicine during COVID-19
- Due to supply shortages, some pharmacies may have limits in place on how much they are able to dispense of certain medications at one time, and processing times may be longer than normal
- The pharmacist can assist individuals that are unable to see their regular care provider by contacting their doctor to obtain a prescription renewal
- Some pharmacies will deliver medications for free to at-risk or quarantining individuals.

### Emphasize:

Speak to your pharmacist to stay updated on changes to pharmacy policies and restrictions.

### Additional Resource:

For anyone with a family member taking medication that requires regular blood tests, refer to: <https://www.bcsc.org/what-you-need-to-know-if-youre-on-clozapine-during-covid-19/>

### Ask and Discuss:

What challenges have you experienced accessing care during COVID-19, and how did you overcome them?

## Session 2: COVID-19 Context



### Objectives:

At the end of the session, participants will be able to:

1. Understand the challenges in supporting your family member during COVID-19
2. Identify strategies for addressing some of these challenges
3. Reimagine your own self care

### Materials for Delivery:

- Participant Notes for Session 2: COVID-19

### Outline:

Note: Times are approximate to allow flexibility for questions and discussion.

Topic/Activity	Time	Materials
The "Treatment" Battle and COVID-19	5 minutes	Participant Notes
Strategies for encouraging collaboration with treatment and safety; dealing with social isolation	10 minutes	Participant Notes
Self Care During COVID-19	10 minutes	Video: <a href="https://youtu.be/xwTXgLGUa9M">https://youtu.be/xwTXgLGUa9M</a>
Activity: Reimagine Your Self Care Plan	Homework	Participant Notes



## COVID-19 Slide 3: The Treatment Battle and COVID-19

### Key Points:

- Family members face unique challenges to supporting and encouraging their family member during COVID-19, including:
  - > Disruption to routines
  - > Usual ways of communication and support might not be possible
  - > Family member's symptoms may exacerbate
  - > Access to mental health services may have changed (BRIEFLY REVIEW: changes mentioned in Session 1)
- There are strategies that can be used to help you encourage treatment and recovery during COVID-19 and to support safety for your family member

## COVID-19 Slide 4: Strategies for collaborating with treatment during COVID-19

### Key Points:

- Become knowledgeable about how supports and services will change during COVID-19, so that you can help your family member make alternative arrangements for their care
- Stay connected while social distancing, including regularly checking in online or over the phone (or outside, when safe to do so)
- Encourage your family member to take part in online social activities, such as online peer support

### Ask and Discuss:

What are some of your favorite ways to stay connected to others while physical distancing?

## COVID-19 Slide 5: Strategies for Encouraging Protection from COVID-19

### Key Points:

1. Use the LEAP (listen, empathize, agree, partner) approach to discuss the benefits and drawbacks of taking safety precautions
2. Remind your family member to wear a mask, wash their hands, and physical distance when appropriate
3. Provide support for accessing the equipment required to stay safe
4. Encourage learning about COVID-19 and prevention strategies
5. Follow the tips you learned for supporting good personal hygiene

**Consider:**

What level of support your family member needs in taking the appropriate safety precautions for COVID-19

## COVID-19 Slide 6: Self Care for Family Members During COVID-19

**Key Points:**

- Self-care is especially important during this time. There are several tips and resources to support your own mental health
- Many resources list similar things to keep in mind, such as keeping a routine, staying healthy, staying connected, and not consuming media beyond what you need to stay informed

## COVID-19 Slide 7: Mental Health Tips During COVID-19

**Video:**

This video provides some quick tips for promoting mental health during COVID-19

<https://youtu.be/xwTXgLGUa9M>

**Note:**

The numbers listed at the end are for the US, but still accessible in Canada. For a list of crisis lines based in Canada, please see <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/mental-health-services/mental-health-get-help.html>

## COVID-19 Slide 8: Self-care Plan During COVID-19

**Ask and Discuss:**

- What kinds of things are you doing differently for self-care during COVID-19?
- How would you like to re-imagine your self care plan going forward?



## Session 3: COVID-19 Context



### Objectives:

At the end of the session, participants will be able to:

1. Understand the impacts of COVID-19 on substance abuse, including specific information on specific substances and how to help
2. Understand suicide risk of people with psychosis during COVID-19 and how to help
3. What to consider in developing/adapting a family crisis plan for COVID-19

### Materials for Delivery:

- Participant Notes for Session 3: COVID-19

### Local Materials:

- Regional based substance use resources/adaptations

### Outline:

Note: Times are approximate to allow flexibility for questions and discussion.

Topic/Activity	Time	Materials
Impacts of COVID-19 on substance use and how to help	5-7 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Video: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Df90-f487y0">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Df90-f487y0</a></li><li>○ Participant notes</li><li>○ Regional based substance use resources</li></ul>
Suicide risk of people with psychosis during COVID-19 and how to help	5-7 minutes	Participant Notes
Completing a Family Crisis Plan	5 minutes & homework	Participant Notes

## COVID-19 Slide 3: Impacts of COVID-19 on substance use

### Key Points:

- There are additional risk factors associated with substance use during COVID-19 (Briefly mention a few of the following)<sup>6</sup>:
  - Inability to obtain drugs due to supply shortages or social distancing, which in turn can lead to withdrawal symptoms
  - Illicit drug supply disruptions could also lead individuals to consume drugs they are not used to, which might increase risk of overdose or other adverse reactions due to contaminated supply
  - Reduced access to harm reduction services and in-person treatment options
  - Physical distancing guidance and stay-at-home orders may lead to higher numbers of people using substances alone, without others around to administer naloxone, perform life-saving measures, or call for help in case of overdose.
  - Bystanders to an overdose might be reluctant to administer naloxone or perform CPR or other life-saving measures because of fear of COVID-19 exposure.
  - People may be afraid to seek medical attention in the Emergency Department (ED) or from other healthcare professionals for fear of infection. (Centre for Disease Control, 2020)

### Video:

This video summarizes the above: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Df90-f487y0>

(This video is put out by the United States. For a list of drug abuse resources in Canada, tell participants to go to: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/substance-use/get-help/get-help-problematic-substance-use.html>)

## COVID-19 Slide 4: Coping with Stress, Anxiety and Substance Use during COVID-19

### Refer to slide:

- The Mental Health Commission of Canada has put out a resource regarding how to cope with stress, anxiety, and substance use during COVID-19.
- This resource is for family caregivers as well as family members. Suggest the participants share it with their family member.

### Key Points:

- Monitor substance use
- Don't stockpile alcohol and substances
- Reach out for help when you feel you are having a problem.

<sup>6</sup> Centre for Disease Control, 2020

## COVID-19 Slide 5: Helping Your Family Member with Problematic Substance Use During COVID-19

### Key Points:

- Remind participants that they have learned how to communicate with their family member about alcohol and substance use and that these tools still apply,

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- Additional challenges relating to helping their family member manage their substance use challenges include:
  - Changes or reductions in services for people experiencing substance use... Remind participants to talk to a healthcare provider about what services are available during COVID-19. They should also consider encouraging your family member to connect with available virtual recovery meetings or local treatment services.

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  - Challenges identifying if an increase in substance use is occurring. Use regular virtual check ins with your family member to keep lines of communication open especially if your family member has experienced problematic substance use in the past.

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  - People who are staying at home more and consuming more alcohol may be doing so because of having no regular schedule, boredom, stress, and loneliness.<sup>7</sup> It is important to encourage your family member to maintain their regular schedule as much as possible, and to tap into their coping skills.

**Resource:** Information on specific substances and COVID-19 is included in the participant handbook

## COVID-19 Slide 6: Suicide Risk of People with Psychosis During COVID-19

### Key Points:

- During COVID-19 pandemic, people with mental illness may be at increased risk of suicide<sup>8</sup>.

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- Family members who are already receiving treatment for suicide risk including those who are having suicidal thoughts and those who have had recent suicidal thoughts or a suicide attempt, may need additional support<sup>9</sup>.

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- Previous strategies apply

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- Contact crisis and emergency services if needed

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- Review your safety plan and adapt as necessary for the COVID-19 context

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- Stay connected.

<sup>7</sup> Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction, April 2020.

<sup>8</sup> (Chan et al., 2006)

<sup>9</sup> University of Michigan, Department of Psychiatry, 2020

## COVID-19 Slide 7: Family Crisis Plan for COVID-19

### Key Points:

- Review your family crisis plan with your family member and consider if any aspect of that plan needs to be adapted to the COVID-19 context.

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- It is important that your family crisis plan includes a plan should you become ill with COVID-19.

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- If you are a primary caregiver for your family member, the adapted plan should identify who would play the roles you currently play if you become ill for an extended period of time.

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# Session 4: COVID-19 Context



### Objectives:

At the end of the session, participants will be able to:

1. Understand strategies for Supporting Recovery During COVID-19
2. Recognize that potential relapses may occur and how to plan for them

### Materials for Delivery:

- o Participant Notes for Session 4: COVID-19

### Outline:

Note: Times are approximate to allow flexibility for questions and discussion.

Topic/Activity	Time	Materials
Strategies for encouraging and supporting recovery during COVID-19	5-7 minutes	Participant Notes
Relapses and warning signs during COVID-19	5-7 minutes	Participant Notes
Relapse prevention plan	3-5 minutes & homework	Participant Notes

### COVID-19 Slide 3: Recovery during COVID-19

#### Key Points:

- o Hope has always been fundamental to the recovery journey.
- o Hope changes everything, even during COVID-19!

### COVID-19 Slide 4: Strategies for Encouraging and Supporting Recovery During COVID-19

#### Key Points:

- o There are several things you can do to support recovery for your family member during COVID-19:
  - > Encourage them to keep up with their routines and focus on their recovery goals.

- > Support healthy coping skills and relaxation skills; encourage activities that they enjoy to the greatest degree possible.

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- > Encourage them to connect with people - those established in their lives and new connections - and have a "check in" with someone everyday.

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- > Maintain a calm atmosphere

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- > Recognize your own limits

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### Ask and Discuss:

- What are some ways that you have supported your family member's recovery journey during the COVID-19 pandemic?
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## COVID-19 Slide 5: Relapses and Warning Signs During COVID-19

**Key Points:** (As indicated on the slide)

- Anticipate your family member's reaction to stress

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- Watch for warning signs of relapse that you have observed before

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- Encourage your family member to review their personal relapse prevention plan

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- As necessary, identify alternative prevention strategies to account for the COVID-19 context

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- Stay in touch and connect the best that you can under the circumstances.

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## COVID-19 Slide 6: A Word About "Normal" Reactions...

Review "the OK's of COVID-19" wheel on the slide, point by point. Suggest that it is relevant for them and for their family member.

### Other Key Points:

- Fear, boredom, and loneliness are common feelings to have at this time.

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- Grief is also a normal experience following losses and it can be very difficult.

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- Listen, reassure, and encourage their recovery routine to the greatest degree possible.

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### Ask and Discuss:

- What has been your "biggest" feeling during COVID-19?

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- What has brought you the greatest "calm"?

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# Session 5: COVID-19 Context



## Objectives:

At the end of the session, participants will be able to:

1. Identify ways to build on internal strengths
2. Identify ways to build on external strengths
3. Become aware of financial and housing supports in their local area
4. Consider opportunities for advocacy

### Materials for Delivery:

- o Participant Notes for Session 5: COVID-19

### Local Materials:

- o Regional specific info on housing/ finances

## Outline:

Note: Times are approximate to allow flexibility for questions and discussion.

Topic/Activity	Time	Materials
Internal strengths and how to build on them during COVID-19	5-7 minutes	Participant Notes
External strengths and how to build on them during COVID-19	5 minutes	Participant Notes
Housing and financial supports - region specific	3-5 minutes	Participant Notes Regional specific info
Advocacy opportunities	3 minutes	Participant Notes

## COVID-19 Slide 3: Building on our Internal Strengths During COVID-19

### Key Points:

- o The six strengths of families mentioned earlier in this session can continue to be practiced during times of COVID-19
  - > Appreciation and affection: smiles and jokes over the phone or during facetime; sending small notes to loved ones through the mail.
  - > Positive communication: talk about things that you can feel positive and hopeful about

- > Adaptability/flexibility: read the nine tips provided in your participant notes

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- > Unity: have a meal together or play a favorite game via skype. Be creative!

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- > Spiritual well-being: spend time to find peace and hopefulness in your heart

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- > Commitment: to stay connected and to self care

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**Ask and Discuss:**

What has been most difficult for you during COVID-19 and in what ways have you built on my internal strengths to overcome these difficulties?

**COVID-19 Slide 4: Who do I want to be during COVID-19?**

Review the diagram on the slide briefly.

**Key Points:**

- We may move back and forth through these three zones (fear, learning, growth) during this difficult time. That is “normal”

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- Building on our internal and external strengths will help us spend most of our time in the “growth” zone.

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**COVID-19 Slide 5: Building on our External Strengths During COVID-19****Key Points:**

- Social support becomes even more important for family caregivers as anxieties and stresses increase.

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- Reach out to family and friends, tap into virtual family caregiver communities, and as necessary, consider virtual therapy for support.

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**COVID-19 Slide 6: Housing and Financial Support During COVID-19****Key Points:**

- Information related to housing and financial support during COVID-19 can change from month to month, and differs according to region.

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- For specific information about what supports are available in your region during COVID-19, please refer to the regional resources provided by your facilitator.

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(Provide regional handouts to participants and also provide any additional federal links that may not be up to date in the participant notes.)



## COVID-19 Slide 7: Advocacy During COVID-19

### Key Points:

- COVID-19 raises many opportunities to advocate generally for better mental health services and supports, as well as improved income and housing programs<sup>10</sup>.
- The response to COVID-19 in general has demonstrated both the need for drastic improvements to our health and social support systems, and that enhancements to programs and services can occur quickly when needed.
- Please refer to your participant notes for some specific ideas about areas of advocacy.

## COVID-19 SLIDE 8: Feedback Please!

### Key Points:

- Express that participant feedback is important so that the COVID-19 sessions can be the best they can be.
- We have about ten minutes to discuss feedback. Please express your opinions, positive and negative, about the materials presented so that we can provide this to the developers (collated and non-identifying).
- If you would prefer to provide your opinions privately to me (the facilitator), my email address is:  
\_\_\_\_\_.
- Also mention that a focus group with a small group of interested participants will be held in October to get more detailed input for the developers. Ask for email addresses for those who would be willing to be contacted to participate in a 45 minute to one-hour focus group (online).

### Ask and Discuss:

- What difference did the COVID-19 sessions make to you personally?
- What was good? What could be improved upon?
- Was anything missing?

## Additional Notes

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### Paranoia about COVID-19 in People with Schizophrenia

There is little literature available, (other than a few case examples), regarding the presence of and impacts of COVID-19 related paranoia in people with schizophrenia. One case study recorded the experience of an individual with schizophrenia presenting with COVID-19 related delusions and hallucinations which illustrated “the potential of COVID-19 to precipitate entry into a psychotic phase and impact symptom manifestation.”<sup>1</sup> In this case, the individual was more paranoid about the people around him getting COVID-19 than himself. The authors of this case study suggest that “media coverage of extraordinary circumstances may influence the content of delusional thoughts, especially in a crisis such as a pandemic.”

Another recent number of cases in a similar case study reported on four individuals who presented with acute psychosis in response to the various psychosocial stressors associated with COVID-19.<sup>2</sup> These individuals did not specifically have a pre-existing psychosis, but several had pre-existing anxiety or depression, etc. This study further referenced an observational study that suggests a “25% increase in acute psychosis for individuals living in areas with a high prevalence of COVID-19 cases (Hu et al., 2020)”.

The above illustrates the important job that media has in presenting “balanced and responsible” reporting on COVID-19 so as to reduce the potential of overreaction in people who are at risk, (including people with pre-existing schizophrenia), and to prevent potential psychotic episodes. As well, it is important as we have already discussed, that individuals try to limit the amount of COVID-19 media coverage that they watch/read and to try to consider information only from credible sources.

### How to Help a Family Member who Experiences “Technology Paranoia”

During COVID-19, the use of technology for medical, treatment, crisis, and support related services for people with serious mental illness has increased. We know that several provinces as well as the federal government has increased virtual and telephone therapies, crisis services and supports since the onset of COVID and that some in-person services have had reduced access in some circumstances.

Research regarding how people living with schizophrenia use and relate to technology is very limited. However, one study involving a web-based survey of 457 individuals who identified as having schizophrenia schizoaffective disorder, or schizophrenia spectrum disorder looked at the positive and negative feelings regarding the use of mobile devices amongst those surveyed.

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<sup>1</sup> COVID-19 Paranoia in a Patient Suffering from Schizophrenic Psychosis – a Case Report. M. Fisher et al. Psychiatry Research. 2020 June.

<sup>2</sup> Valdes-Flórido et al., 2020)

The study results found that while positive feelings toward mobile devices were more common, “individuals with schizophrenia, like the general population, have both positive and negative feelings toward their mobile devices”.<sup>3</sup> Of the survey respondents with schizophrenia, 25% reported feeling “frustrated,” 24% “paranoid,” and 19% “angry,” which were similar to the feelings caused by use of technology in the general population. One limitation of this survey, however, was that some who are afraid of technology may not have participated in the web-based survey.

So what does a caregiver do if a family member is afraid of using technology for medical treatment, recovery oriented supports, and other necessary and important services during this time of COVID? There are a few possibilities:

- If the person is more comfortable with a phone vs a computer, they could be encouraged to undertake their appointments via phone.

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- A person close to the individual whom they trust could demonstrate the use of an Iphone (with Facetime) or an android phone (with skype).

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- A person close to the individual and someone they trust could have a computer/laptop side by side with the family member and they could have a virtual chat together in the same room so they can reinforce the reality of the use.

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- Your health care provider may have other ideas as to how to facilitate needed appointments.

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<sup>3</sup> Digital Technology Use Among Individuals with Schizophrenia: Results of an Online Survey. Katrina Gay et al., JMIR Mental Health, Apr-June2016.