



COVID-19 RESOURCES

Community-Based Day Supports During the Pandemic

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NOTE: This publication specifically references CBDS services funded by the Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services (DDS). A key outcome of CBDS is community life engagement, defined as access to and participation in community life, both as a pathway to employment or for engagement outside of the job. While community life engagement is a common goal nationally, states may have different names and parameters for these supports or services. For example, in Missouri these services are referred to as Community Integration. Many of the strategies discussed in terms of CBDS can be applied to similar services in other states. However, states may vary regarding what is permitted under their specific service definitions.

Community-Based Day Supports (CBDS) are services that help individuals with disabilities to participate in purposeful and meaningful activities. The role of CBDS varies depending on the particular needs of the individual. For those who are of retirement age, CBDS supports structured activities to participate in. For working-age people, CBDS serves several purposes:

- ▶ For those currently working, providing wrap-around supports during non-work hours that enhance the benefits of work or allow the person to pursue a particular interest.
- ▶ For those not working, supporting activities that promote a path to employment.
- ▶ For those who are underemployed, supporting activities that promote a path to increased hours and wages.

The current pandemic has created major challenges to a core tenet of CBDS: spending maximum time in the community and physically interacting with other community members. With COVID-19, depending on the nature of local restrictions and comfort level of individuals, this is not always possible or advisable.

However, CBDS can still be provided, with individuals participating in their communities, interacting with other community members, and working on goal directed skill development. With the economic downturn and many individuals either not working or working fewer hours, the need for structured non-work activities is critical.

CBDS Program Considerations Under COVID-19

Maintaining values of CBDS

While the pandemic poses many challenges, it is important to maintain the core values of CBDS:

- ▶ Goal-oriented activities with a deliberate purpose
- ▶ Flexible supports customized to individual needs
- ▶ Engagement in a rich and diverse group of activities
- ▶ Participation in activities with other community members in ways that are fully inclusive
- ▶ Maximum participation in mainstream, non-disability-specific activities

Dealing with implications of the pandemic

The basis for provision of CBDS services begins with any directives and guidance from government, public health officials, and DDS in terms of what is permitted, as well as necessary precautions when in the community. From there, help individuals determine and deal with what they are comfortable with.

- ▶ Some individuals may be cautious and not ready to go out in the community or to your organization's building. It is important to listen to, acknowledge, and respect concerns, while also sending a clear message that this situation is temporary.
- ▶ Make services available remotely, for individuals who are concerned about going out either into the community or to the agency's facility. Check with them on a regular basis regarding whether their comfort level has changed.
- ▶ For those individuals willing and able to come to your building and/or go out into the community, provide training, guidance, and support in terms of protecting themselves and others, and ensure they are able to abide by required precautions.



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Allowing individuals an informed choice

It is critically important that a process of informed choice be used as individuals decide whether to go out in the community or come to your organization's facility. Each person's choices and preferences should drive the decision, in conjunction with families and guardians as appropriate.

Such decisions are not necessarily easy or simple. Consider the following:

- ▶ What is the individual's preference regarding staying home, going out in the community, or going to your building?
- ▶ What supports and assistance are available if the individual remains home?
- ▶ When family members, housemates, etc. are physically going to work, can the individual safely stay home alone?
- ▶ Does the individual have health conditions that need to be considered? (e.g., compromised immune system)
- ▶ Is the individual comfortable with the changes required for safety and protection in the program's building and/or the community? Are they capable of abiding by the necessary requirements?
- ▶ What is the role of family and guardians in guiding the decision?

Remote services: Home-based supports

If individuals receive CBDS services remotely while at home, the support of family, housemates, and/or residential staff is important for successful participation. This includes support on:

- ▶ Using technology
- ▶ Scheduling CBDS activities
- ▶ Preparing for CBDS activities
- ▶ Practicing and applying skills from CBDS

Ongoing communication is important. With the individual's permission, work closely on these issues with the people who support the person at home. This includes provision of the individual's weekly schedule for CBDS, and areas the individual may need assistance on at home (use of technology, proper use of personal protective equipment, etc.)

Group configurations

Best practice for CBDS is setting up groups based on specific interests, which may mean each individual interacts with multiple groups throughout

the day or week. However, individuals spending time with a wide variety of others can result in increased exposure to the virus. Therefore, during the pandemic, consider modifying this approach. Keeping group configurations consistent (who is in a group) may outweigh the need for mixing groups up. Also, for health and safety reasons, going out into the community in small groups rather than large groups is even more important than usual.

Using the organization's building vs. the community

One of the core tenets of CBDS is building maximum time in the community and limiting time in an organization's facility. There may be pressure to change this during the pandemic, with keeping individuals in a controlled environment (the facility) seen as a safer option. However, spending more time at the facility may not be the best solution, for both immediate and long-term reasons. The pandemic requirements in terms of sizes of groups and social distancing, and need to supervise individuals to ensure they are abiding by these precautions, creates challenges in safe use of organization facilities. In addition, outdoor activities are generally recommended over indoor activities in terms of virus prevention.

Beyond the issues specific to the pandemic, it's also important to avoid both individuals and staff getting comfortable with all services being provided in the program's building. This would be a step back from efforts to increase integration and inclusion in the community.

Hybrid and "without walls" service models

With limitations on the ability to go to community settings, varying comfort levels in going into the community, and the need to avoid larger groups, consider a hybrid approach to CBDS. This may mean a combination of online activities that individuals can participate in from their homes, activities at your building, and activities in the community where all proper precautions are being taken.

Advantages to this approach include:

- ▶ A diverse array of activities can continue to be supported.
- ▶ Exposure to the coronavirus is limited.
- ▶ Individuals who are concerned about leaving their homes can continue to participate in CBDS.
- ▶ Participants can spend time in the community, based on their comfort level.

CBDS Activities During the Pandemic

You may also want to consider a “without walls” approach where individuals spend no time at your organization’s building. This might look like:

- ▶ Working with individuals and small groups outside your facility and in the community on activities, with all necessary precautions being taken.
- ▶ Working with individuals in their homes.
- ▶ Having individuals go from their homes directly into the community, rather than going to the organization’s facility.
- ▶ As feasible, combining time in the community with activities online.

This “without walls” approach of not going to the program building is not only a good short-term practice for limiting contact with others, but also provides a great opportunity to implement such a structure for the long term, in line with CBDS best practices.

Staff issues

Effective CBDS during the pandemic requires that staff be prepared and trained to properly support individuals. Specific areas include:

- ▶ Understanding guidelines on how CBDS will be provided during the pandemic
- ▶ Supporting individuals in remote service delivery
- ▶ Supporting individuals in participating in CBDS activities online
- ▶ Knowing the types of community activities that individuals can be supported in
- ▶ Ensuring community settings are safe
- ▶ Taking precautions for themselves and individuals when out in the community
- ▶ Knowing and following guidelines for safe transportation

CBDS consists of a wide variety of activities: skill development through training and classes, participating in community groups for personal growth, volunteering, participating in civic groups, employment exploration, and many others. This section discusses CBDS activities and specific considerations as a result of the pandemic.

Starting point: Maintaining previous activities

Review the activities the individual was participating in before the pandemic. Consider how they can continue to do these activities in some form. Help individuals reach out to organizations where they were previously participating. What is the status of the organization’s activities? How have activities changed, and are there new requirements for participating (e.g., wearing a mask, social distancing)? Have they moved activities online? Are there alternate ways that individuals can participate? If previous activities are not currently available, are there alternatives (e.g., a similar group in another community)?

Possible new activities

In addition to determining whether existing activities can continue, there is the opportunity to consider new interests. This includes activities that are now more easily accessible because they have moved online. It also includes opportunities resulting from the pandemic: organizations needing additional help and individuals giving back to their communities. We are also in an atmosphere where daily routines and habits have been disrupted, which provides the opportunity for reconsideration and exploration of new options for day-to-day activities, potentially for the long term.

Going into community settings

One of the core elements of CBDS is individuals participating in activities at various locations in the community. With the pandemic, there is the need to ensure that sufficient health and safety protections are in place to protect individuals and support staff in these settings. For both previously existing and new activities, reach out to the organization where they take place and determine the following:

- ▶ What steps and procedures does the organization/community setting have in place to protect participants’ health? (social distancing, personal protective equipment, sufficient cleaning, etc.)
- ▶ Are these steps and procedures sufficient for protecting the health of CBDS participants?
- ▶ Can participants comply with the requirements for the organization/community setting in terms of personal health and safety?

In addition, consider how individuals will get to community activities, and the steps being taken to ensure health and safety in terms of transportation.

Helping out and giving back

This is a time when many people and communities have significant needs, and a wide variety of efforts are underway to respond. If individuals are looking for ways to contribute during this challenging time, guide them to identify potential options. Reach out to community leaders and area organizations to find out ways that individuals can help support these efforts.

Examples:

- ▶ Does the individual have sewing skills, or could they learn to sew? If so, they could assist with making masks.
- ▶ Are there ways the person can support local food banks?
- ▶ Would the individual enjoy creating cards and notes for caregivers, seniors in nursing homes, etc.?
- ▶ Are they artistically inclined? If so, making “kindness rocks” or other such creations might be a good way to express themselves.
- ▶ Does the individual know other people in the community who may be feeling isolated and lonely? If so, an online chat, phone call, or note are good ways to provide support.

People with disabilities are often seen as needing the community to help them. This is a great opportunity to change that dynamic to one where individuals are seen as helping their communities.

Training on technology

Training on use of technology is more important during the pandemic than ever, as it is a primary method for connecting. Time can be spent during CBDS on:

- ▶ The basics of technology - how to use a computer, internet, email, etc.
- ▶ Helpful applications
- ▶ How to use technology in a way that is fully accessible for the person’s specific needs
- ▶ Social media
- ▶ Internet safety
- ▶ Avoiding screen fatigue

In addition to these basics, now is a great time for individuals to learn to use various apps that can assist them at home, at work, and in the community. Examples include apps for organization, job exploration, transportation, recreation, or personal well-being. Staff can help individuals identify apps

and then work with them on how to use them. [See the publication *Easy to Access Assistive Technology and Apps for Individual Success*](#) for additional information.

Guidance on participating in online events can also be helpful. This includes knowing the basics such as how to mute yourself or how to use the chat feature in an online video meeting. It also includes online etiquette (being in a quiet area, waiting for your turn to speak and not talking over others, muting when not talking, etc.).

The nuances of interacting online vs. in person can be challenging for many people. Guidance on this can be useful as well: how to let others know you have something to say, not dominating the conversation, staying on topic, etc.

Transportation

Travel instruction is always a useful component of CBDS as maximum independence on transportation is key to full community participation. Since some people have extra time available during the pandemic, this can be a good chance to work on greater independence on transportation. There are a variety of curriculums available that can be used both in person and online (see the resource list on [ICI’s COVID-19 page](#) and the [Employment First MA website](#) for options).

Travel instruction can go beyond simply how to take public transit. It can include topics such as:

- ▶ Identifying transportation options
- ▶ Trip planning
- ▶ Self-management of transportation
- ▶ Transportation safety

In addition to general travel instruction, information on safe travel during the pandemic should also be included. Travel instructors from local transportation agencies and other organizations may be available remotely to provide information and instruction.

Money management

Instruction on money management and financial well-being are core areas that are often part of CBDS. In addition to standard topics, the specifics of financial well-being during the pandemic can be addressed including handling of stimulus checks, unemployment benefits, the financial impact of loss of work, and related issues.

Exploring community

Community exploration is a core component of CBDS. During this time, when the ability to go out physically in the community may be limited, there are alternative options. They include having staff with a GoPro camera or similar device exploring the community with individuals online. Another option is to enter the job seeker's address into Google. Click on the street view and conduct a virtual walking tour with the individual to see what organizations, activities, and businesses are nearby.

Skill development

Developing new skills for employment and personal growth are key components of CBDS. With less time in the community, many of us are developing skills differently. This includes practicing skills at home or accessing instruction online via online courses or instructional videos. ([GCFLearnFree.org](https://www.gcflearnfree.org) has a wide variety of instructional courses.)

There are also a wide variety of online discussions and talks available. (As always, start with local resources, such as adult education classes, to see if they are offering options online.) In using these online resources for skill development, it is important that the individual then spend time reviewing and applying the information with the support of staff, including:

- ▶ What was the course/video about?
- ▶ What did the individual learn?
- ▶ How can the individual apply the information and develop the skills discussed?

Staying connected

With in-person contact limited, everyone is figuring out ways to stay connected with others. CBDS can include teaching individuals how to stay connected with others in their lives, including individuals they used to participate in community activities with.

Self-advocacy

This can be a time for enhancement of self-advocacy skills. Reach out to your state and local self-advocacy groups to see what types of activities they are undertaking. A number of national organizations have also been sponsoring ongoing gatherings for mutual support during the pandemic, including [SARTAC](#) and [TASH](#).

Maintaining an Employment Focus

With the economic downturn, there are increased challenges in finding and maintaining employment. However, it is important to continue efforts focused on employment. Be clear with individuals that there are still job options out there, career prospects will improve in the future, and it's important to be prepared for those opportunities.

Career exploration activities

The following is a list of career-exploration activities that can be conducted as part of CBDS. As you look over this list, consider how these activities can be conducted during the pandemic. Many of these activities can easily be conducted entirely or partially online, while others may require a bit more creativity.

- ▶ Volunteering in organizations connected to a potential career interest
- ▶ Job tours
- ▶ Job shadowing
- ▶ Situational assessments and job trials
- ▶ Internships
- ▶ Workplace visits/tours
- ▶ Informational interviews
- ▶ Job clubs

[See the publication *Providing Employment Services for Job Seekers Remotely*](#) for ideas on how these types of activities can be provided remotely.

Supporting individuals who have experienced job loss

For those individuals who have either been temporarily furloughed or have permanently lost their jobs, CBDS can help provide a day-to-day routine while maintaining interest in employment. As with many people who are out of work, it can be difficult to adjust not only because of loss of income, but also loss of workplace connections and friendships and disruption of the daily routine.

Beyond working with individuals on the practical realities of being out of work (filing for unemployment, reporting to Social Security regarding change in income, etc.), provide guidance on dealing with the emotional challenges of being unemployed. Emphasize to individuals that lots of people are suddenly out of work, and losing their job is not their fault.

This can be a good time for individuals to reflect on what they liked about their job and what they didn't like, to take inventory of their skills, and to consider what they are looking for in the next job. It is also important to keep work-related skills sharp and strengthen those skills.

Aligning Home-Based and Online Activities with CBDS Goals

With many services being provided at home and online, it can be useful to revisit the DDS definition of CBDS. Per DDS, CBDS (service code 3163) is “designed to enable a person to enrich his or her life and enjoy a full range of community activities by providing opportunities for developing, enhancing, and maintaining competency in personal, social, and community activities. Services include, but are not limited to, the following options:

- ▶ Career exploration, including assessing of interests through volunteer experiences or situational assessments.
- ▶ Community integration experiences to support fuller participation in community life.
- ▶ Skill development and training.
- ▶ Development of activities of daily living and independent living skills.
- ▶ Socialization experiences and support to enhance interpersonal skills.
- ▶ Pursuit of personal interests and hobbies.

Consider whether the services and supports being provided fit within these parameters. While a case can be made for some activities that fall into a gray area, clear criteria, a focus on the goals of the individuals, and monitoring by program managers in terms of the types of activities being engaged in at home and online, are important. The following can be helpful in making these determinations:

- ▶ If the activity is supporting community membership and contribution, is individualized, and is goal oriented, it likely aligns with CBDS.
- ▶ If the purpose of the activity is to increase skills that allow the individual to more fully participate in employment and the community, it likely aligns with CBDS.
- ▶ If the purpose of the activity is to make an individual more independent at home, it likely does not fall within CBDS.
- ▶ While CBDS activities should be enjoyable, if the intent of an activity is primarily for personal enjoyment, fun or entertainment, it is probably not appropriate for CBDS.

Here are a few examples that may be helpful:

- ▶ An individual creating a shopping list and preparing a meal is in most cases an activity that would not fall under CBDS, unless the individual is interested in food preparation as a career.
- ▶ If an individual is being provided instruction on how to clean at home, this would not fall within CBDS, unless they are practicing skills for a cleaning job.
- ▶ Watching a video strictly for entertainment purposes would not be appropriate for CBDS. However, watching an instructional video for skill building would be.

Guidelines for Online CBDS Activities

In addition to ensuring that online activities are aligned with the goals of CBDS, the following additional guidelines for online activities can also be helpful.

Focus on live activities

Particularly in this time when individuals are spending more time than ever at home, the emphasis should be on activities that result in live personal interaction with others. For example, if the choice is between a live art class and an online tutorial or video, the live art class is the better option.

Local is preferred

While there are benefits to participating in a group with individuals from other places, if there is an opportunity to participate in a local group for a particular activity that interests the individual, that is preferred, as it will allow the individual to build and maintain relationships that can continue in person.

Non-local activities may have their place

While local activities are preferred, there may be cases where individuals have the opportunity to participate in activities that are not local, but that fit within the parameters of CBDS. For instance, building social connections and skills by being part of a national advocacy group.

Avoid passive activities

CBDS is intended to be active and to help people develop, enhance, and maintain competency. For example, watching a video may be helpful in developing an interest or skill. However, once a video is viewed, the next step should be applying the information from the video. Also, when focusing on skill building, an instructional-type video is better than a video that simply shares information on a topic.

Working with Individuals on Pandemic-Related Issues

Discussing the pandemic

The pandemic has been a time of significant upheaval, often causing major anxiety and stress. Like everyone, people with disabilities may have concerns about what is happening and what the future holds. Acknowledge those concerns, and discuss the impact the pandemic is having on everyone's lives. At the same time, you want to avoid having people fear that they can never go out in the community again like they used to. This is especially true because, for far too long, people with disabilities have been over-protected and denied opportunities to fully participate in the community.

Be clear that this is a temporary situation that is now limiting time in the community and activities, but that generally being out in the community is a good thing, and full community activities will be able to resume at some point. Use a peer-to-peer approach for these discussions, for mutual support.

Keeping safe and healthy

With the pandemic, everyone is having to learn about how to keep themselves and others safe and healthy, and this should be incorporated into CBDS. Time can be spent discussing pandemic issues including:

- ▶ What the pandemic is, and its impact.
- ▶ How to stay healthy at home, including ways to avoid coronavirus (handwashing, not touching hands to face, etc.).
- ▶ Maintaining physical health in general can also be a focus. This includes how to exercise at home, take online exercise classes, take walks, and make healthy food choices.
- ▶ Going out into the community and precautions to take. You may want to help the individual practice putting on and taking off masks and other personal protective equipment, or role-play social distancing, including situations where others are not abiding by proper guidelines.
- ▶ Strategies for maintaining emotional well-being during the pandemic.

Impact of the pandemic on employment

Talking about the pandemic's impact on employment is also important. Key topics include:

- ▶ How to make an informed choice regarding going to work during the pandemic.
- ▶ The impact of the pandemic on workplaces, and maintaining personal safety at work.
- ▶ Dealing with unemployment (for those who have lost their jobs).
- ▶ The current challenging job market and what that means.
- ▶ The importance of continuing to focus on employment for the short-term and long-term.

At the end of this publication are a series of plain language resources designed to explain the pandemic to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Impact Over the Long Term

While this is a challenging time, it also provides an opportunity to provide services in new and different ways, and in ways that can have long-term benefits. This includes using online service delivery, supports, and activities as a component of CBDS. Decreased use of an organization's building as a result of the pandemic can allow for development of "without walls" service alternatives for the long-term.

The increase in individuals' technology skills will have long-term benefits for employment and other activities. There are opportunities for new relationships and trying out new activities. And like everyone else, people with disabilities are learning how to be resilient during challenging times, which is an important skill to develop.

Providing services remotely and with a greater focus on online activities is necessary at this time. However, as the pandemic eases, it is important to determine the appropriate place for remote supports and online activities. Particularly in terms of building strong connections and social capital, there are elements of in-person activities that simply cannot be replicated remotely.

RESOURCES

Related information and publications from the Institute for Community Inclusion

- ▶ [Ensuring Excellence in Community-Based Day Supports: A Guide For Service Providers and Staff](#) - This is a practical guide that provides a variety of strategies, examples, and activities for quality CBDS services.
- ▶ [Virtual Community Life Engagement. Engage...A Brief Look at Community Life Engagement](#) - Publication on how the Community Life Engagement guideposts apply to activities provided virtually
- ▶ [Community Life Engagement Information](#) - Information from the Institute for Community Inclusion's ThinkWork! initiative including a variety of publications and the Community Life Engagement Toolkit
- ▶ [Participating in Online Groups and Activities: A Guide for Supporting People with Disabilities](#)

Plain language resources on COVID-19

- ▶ [SARTAC: Self-Advocacy and Beyond](#) - Variety of materials including webinars and plain language guides in multiple languages
- ▶ [Coronavirus Guide for People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities](#) (Alliance Center for Independence)
- ▶ [VIDEOS: Self-Determination Channel](#) (Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities)
- ▶ [VIDEO: Virus Safety for People with Disabilities](#) (TRN)
- ▶ [VIDEO: What you need to know about COVID-19](#) (ASAN)

Guidelines for at Home and the Community

- ▶ [Daily Life and Going Out](#) - Information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on staying safe at home and in the community, and managing stress during the pandemic.

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