



Infectious Illness Response and Preparedness Plan

Better Together Family Therapy is committed to the health and safety of our clients, staff, contractors, and colleagues. We have reviewed the following source material to develop a thorough understanding of the potential impact of infectious illness in our therapy office, and the professional ethics involved in making decisions to close or open the office in the context of an infectious illness threat.

1. Interim CDC Guidance on Handling Non-COVID-19 Public Health Activities that Require Face-to-Face Interaction with Clients in the Clinic and Field in the Current COVID-19 Pandemic.
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/non-covid-19-client-interaction.html>
2. OSHA Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19 <https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3990.pdf>
3. Johns Hopkins University Operational Toolkit for Businesses Considering Reopening or Expanding Operations in COVID-19
<https://www.centerforhealthsecurity.org/our-work/publications/operational-toolkit-for-businesses-considering-reopening-or-expanding-operations-in-covid-19>
4. COVID-19: Reopening Practices and Resuming In-Person Sessions, American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
https://www.aamft.org/Events/COVID-19_Reopening_Practices_and_Resuming_In-Person_Sessions.aspx
5. The Trust's Statement on In-person Psychological Services During the COVID-19 Crisis
https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.tpaonline.org/resource/resmgr/2020_other/the_trust_s_statement_on_in-.pdf
6. Montgomery County Maryland Department of Health and Human Services COVID-19: Data Dashboard
<http://montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS/RightNav/Coronavirus-data.html>
7. Cleaning Your Play Room, Association for Play Therapy
<http://a4pt.org/general/custom.asp?page=covidplayroomcare>

Notice pertaining to SARS-CoV2/COVID-19

The area in which our office is located (Montgomery County, Maryland) is facing ongoing community spread of SARS-CoV2, the virus that causes COVID-19. As of January 2022, COVID-19 vaccines are widely available in the area and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) lists the vaccination rate for individuals ages 5 and older as 88% in Montgomery County.

Notices pertaining to in-person therapeutic services (documents 1, 4, and 5 above) advised against in person services prior to the availability of a vaccine for COVID-19, unless treatment was medically necessary and telehealth services were not clinically appropriate for the client. As vaccines have become available and vaccination has been widespread in our area we have updated our policies to allow clients to choose in person therapy. Clients choosing to attend therapy sessions in person are required to complete an informed consent acknowledging the risks inherent in attending therapy in person and agreeing to abide by our infectious illness prevention policies. As rates of community transmission change, we will continue reopening or return to a prior stage as appropriate.

Stage 1: Telehealth sessions only. When public schools or other businesses in the community have closed due to risk of transmission, therapy services remain online.

Stage 2: Partial return to in-person sessions. Telehealth remains the default treatment modality, and informed consent will be required for in-person sessions. Decisions to conduct sessions by telehealth or in person will be made jointly by client and therapist, taking into consideration the following factors

- a. Clinical appropriateness of telehealth sessions for the client.
- b. Risk and potential benefit of a return to in person sessions.
- c. Client's ability to take preventative measures while in the office.
- d. Travel patterns of the client and therapist and those with whom they reside. Clients with high or very high risk occupations and therapists residing with someone in a high or very high risk occupation will continue telehealth sessions exclusively.

Stage 3: Reopening with ongoing risk mitigation. In person sessions become the default means of conducting therapy again. This stage occurs when community spread of SARS-CoV2 has become very low or treatment and vaccination are widely available. Some clients may continue attending sessions via telehealth due to personal choice or client or therapist risk factors.

I. Infectious Illness Preparedness

Better Together Family Therapy is prepared to respond to possible transmission of an infectious illness in the following ways:

- Confidential communication with all clients has been established through the client portal.
- Policy has been established to require clients and staff who have been in the office to immediately report suspected exposure to SARS-CoV2 or COVID-19 to the practice Director. Reports can be made by telephone at 240-242-5185 or via [this form](#).
- A plan has been established to alert clients who may have been in the office concurrent with or immediately after someone who is suspected of having COVID-19 quickly via the client portal.
- Policies are in place to close the offices for a deep cleaning when a suspected case of COVID-19 occurs among clients or staff who have been at the office.
- Cleaning products have been secured to sanitize shared materials and spaces.
- High capacity air cleaners with HEPA filtration and UV-C light have been obtained for enclosed areas.
- Staff, contractors, and office subletters have been given instruction on sanitizing procedures.
- An office sanitizing log has been implemented to track daily sanitizing procedures.

II. Infectious Illness Prevention

OSHA Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19 recommends 3 levels of prevention to limit the spread of SARS-CoV2, with personal protective equipment to be used as a last line of defense after engineering controls and administrative controls are implemented. The offices of Better Together Family Therapy, located at 3720 Farragut Ave. Suite 301, are currently using the following engineering and administrative controls to minimize risk of infectious illness:

A. Minimizing Person to Person Contact and Shared Materials

- Therapy sessions are conducted only by telehealth with clients or therapists who are at high risk of death due to COVID-19 because of personal risk factors.
- Masks are required to enter the waiting room and building common areas, as well as in therapy rooms.
- Staff and contractors are required to wash hands before and between client sessions.
- Clients are required to wash hands before entering their therapy sessions.
- Hand washing instructions are posted at the office sink.
- Signs depicting correct hand washing and other prevention measures are posted in the waiting room.
- The waiting room has been rearranged to improve social distancing and waiting room use is limited to 2 families at a time.
- Items that cannot be sanitized such as thinking putty and moon sand have been removed from the office. Soft toys have been removed from the waiting room.

- Books remain in the therapy rooms for therapist use only.
- Clients attending in person therapy are asked to attend in the same time slot each week in order to minimize the number of other families with whom they have contact.

B. Sanitizing of Shared Materials and Enclosed Spaces

- Offices are cleaned daily (each working day) with sanitizing products.
- Play materials are sanitized after each use.
- Soft surfaces (couches, beanbags) and hard surfaces (doorknobs, tables, chairs) are sanitized at the end of each day.
- High capacity air cleaners with HEPA filters and UV-C light have been installed in the waiting area and hallway.
- Sanitizing wipes, hand sanitizer, and tissues are provided in the waiting room for client use. (Masks are not routinely provided, as all clients must bring their own in order to enter the building, but are available if needed).
- In-person sessions will end on time (45 minutes for a typical individual or family session) to enable sanitizing to occur between clients.

C. Illness and Wellness Policies

- Staff and contractors are required to complete a [screening form](#) prior to resuming in-person therapy services during the COVID-19 crisis.
- Staff and contractors are required to remain out of the office if they have a fever above 100 degrees Fahrenheit, cough, or other signs of respiratory illness during the COVID-19 crisis.
- Staff and contractors operate as independent professionals and are always free to take time off for illness or any other reason.
- Staff and contractors are required to remain out of the office when a member of their household is suspected of having COVID-19 and for 5 days following that person's full recovery.
- Staff and contractors may provide client services via telehealth if they are experiencing symptoms that prevent them from coming to the office or have a household member with COVID-19 but are feeling well enough to work.
- Clients are required to cancel their in-person sessions or replace them with telehealth sessions if they have been exposed to COVID-19 within the past 5 days, are feeling ill, or have an elevated body temperature (above 100 degrees), cough, or shortness of breath.

III. Infectious Illness Response Plan

- Existing communication systems will be utilized to immediately alert any staff, clients, or contractors who were in the office concurrent with or immediately after a person diagnosed (within 14 days) with COVID-19.
- The office will be closed after such an incident until it can be thoroughly disinfected.
- The Director of Better Together Family Therapy will be responsible for implementing this plan.