TTYL: Keeping in Contact With Your Professional

Community of Practice, Northeast Massachusetts 2011

Keeping in communication with professionals (doctors/counselors/psychiatrists/etc.) is very important. It will help keep you updated on appointments, insurance issues, medications, etc. Here are some tips on simple ways to stay in contact! ***No matter what form of communication you are using, you should always give 24 hours notice if you are cancelling an appointment, unless if it's an emergency.*** Find out your offices policy about no shows (i.e., some offices will charge you or stop working with you for missed appointments).

Keeping in Contact by Phone and Text

Cell Phones

- Let all professionals know right away if you have to change your phone number.
- You can use your cell phone's calendar to put reminders in your phone for appointments with your providers.
- Use the address book in your phone to put in all your professionals numbers and an emergency contact number so they are easy to locate.
- Write down all professionals numbers so you have a backup if a phone breaks or is lost. (Some cell phone providers will keep a backup for you online for free).
- Make sure to set up your voicemail so professionals can leave you messages about appointments/insurance issues/etc.
- Keep your cell phone charged at all times so you are easy to reach, & keep it on you whenever possible.
- Ask your professional if they are allowed to use text messaging.

SafeLink Cell Phones

- SafeLink is a government supported program that provides a free cell phone and minutes to those who qualify for State or Federal Assistance Programs.[1] For example, Medicaid, SSI, Federal Public Housing Assistance, Food Stamps and low income Home Energy Assistant Programs, etc.
- To find out if you are eligible for a SafeLink cell phone go to: www.safelinkwireless.com, put in your zip code and you will receive information on benefits, qualifying and applying for SafeLink that are specific to your State.
- You can also text on a SafeLink phone. Check your plan to see how many minutes are taken up by sending or receiving each text.
- To purchase additional minutes for your SafeLink phone you can either go online (24/7) to www.tracfone.com by phone (24/7) 1-800-378-1684 or at local retailers (Wal-Mart, CVS, Kmart or Target etc.).

Keeping in Contact by Internet

Access to computers

- If you do not own a computer and need to use one to check e-mails, etc, you can go to your town's library, or use one in your school's computer room.
- If you own a computer but don't have internet, most libraries offer free wireless internet. A lot of restaurants or coffee shops (such as McDonalds) have free wireless for customers.

E-mail accounts and Social Media

- Ask your professionals if you can contact them through e-mail.
- You can get a free e-mail account from websites like Google.com, Yahoo.com, etc.
- Make sure to check your email every other day if possible so you don't miss important messages.
- Some professionals will allow you to contact them through Facebook or Twitter, but make sure you ask if it's okay before contacting them.

[1]PCLS E-Government Services: http://pclsegov.blogspot.com/2009/06/free-cell-phones-safelink-wireless.html

Helpful Tips on Internet Communication

- Keep your passwords private & store them somewhere safe in case you forget them.
- Make sure your social media & e-mail addresses are appropriate. If you wouldn't be okay with someone like your parents seeing the picture, it shouldn't be posted. E-mail addresses should be rated PG.

Mail

- A lot of professionals send out notices & forms only through the mail. If your address changes, you need to let all of your professionals know as soon as it happens.

For Professionals
TTYL*: Keeping in Contact with a Young Adult (YA)

Keeping in Contact by Phone and Text

Many YA's change cell phone numbers and carriers due to bills, better service, etc.

- Ideally it is good to get an alternate number (family member, long-term friend, etc.)
- Young adults often rely on texting before calling. It is important to check your agency policy if texting is possible. Discuss with the YA in advance what is possible and preferable.
- Many YA's don't like to leave messages. Let them know if your voice mail is confidential and if they can call anytime day or night.
- YA's often rely on caller ID rather than a message so be sure to check your missed calls.
- If you use your personal cell phone be aware if your number will be displayed.
- Many youth have very limited minutes on their cell phone. Check if this is a concern when communicating.

Keeping in Contact by Internet

- YA's have access to the internet many places however, be aware that email is not always used on a regular basis.
- Check with YA's about how/when they use email and if it is a good way of communication.
- Most agencies do not allow professionals to be friends with YA's on Facebook/Twitter and other social media websites. Check your agency policy.
- Be aware of your own Facebook/Twitter and all social media privacy settings.
- Have a plan if a YA request social media contact in alignment with your agency policy.
- Be mindful that email can be a great way to communicate however HIPAA still applies and email is not fully secure.

When you cannot get in touch

- Call the emergency, friend, or back up number
- Try email
- Send a letter
- Depending on your relationship drop by the home if possible
- Be clear when you need contact by i.e., date, time of day, etc.
- Remember that YA's are learning how to communicate and manage appointments. Discuss ahead of time expectations on what the plan will be if an appointment or call is missed
- Be as flexible as your agency will allow and that will help YA's reach their goals

* text talk for "talk to you later"

Download at: http://labs.umassmed.edu/transitionsRTC/Resources/publications/Tipsheets_and_Briefs.html

Recommended citation: Northeast Massachusetts Community of Practice (Nov., 2011) TTYL: Keeping in Contact with Your Professional. Worcester, MA: University of Massachusetts Medical School, Department of Psychiatry, Systems and Psychosocial Advances Research Center, Transitions Research and Training Center.

This publication can be made available in alternative formats upon request through TransitionsRTC@umassmed.edu

The contents of this tip sheet were developed with funding from the US Department of Education, National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, and the Center for Mental Health Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (NIDRR grant H133B090018). Additional funding provided by UMass Medical School's Commonwealth Medicine division. The content of this tip sheet does not necessarily reflect the views of the funding agencies and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.

The Transitions RTC is part of the Systems & Psychosocial Advances Research Center (SPARC), formerly known as the Center for Mental Health Services Research, A Massachusetts Department of Mental Health Research Center of Excellence