



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

**August 2020**

*This quick reference is intended to assist parents and school staff in considering mental health services for students while schools are operating virtually. For all other questions related to mental health, please contact the Shelby County Schools (SCS) Social Emotional Support Line—416-8484 or the SCS Mental Health Center—416-8311.*

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### **1. Will school mental health services be available to students once the school year begins?**

Yes, school social workers and psychologists will be available to work with students in a virtual format beginning August 31<sup>st</sup>. Teletherapy sessions will be held on Microsoft TEAMS, the only platform approved by the TN Department of Education. MS TEAMS requires an internet connection and is accessible by computer, laptop, tablet, or smartphone by downloading the app. A dial-in only option is available for those who prefer not to use video. Services are available for free to all SCS students regardless of age or educational status.

### **2. What kinds of services are available?**

While a full range of tiered prevention and intervention services are typically offered, during the virtual learning phase of re-entry the focus will be on providing teletherapy sessions and community outreach through the SCS Social-Emotional Support Line—416-8484. Schools may also call upon designated mental health staff to offer special virtual programs, usually in collaboration with school counselors, as needed.

### **3. Are school mental health services confidential?**

Yes, SCS Mental Health Center complies with all state and federal mental health laws as well as FERPA, a law governing the privacy of student education records. In most cases, mental health services are not considered a part of the educational record and are kept in a separate file subject to strict confidentiality laws. However, under limited circumstances, a school administrator may be given general information about a student's mental health services, such as the time of day a session is scheduled or feedback about the student's general progress in treatment. State law also requires reporting in cases where a student presents a

serious immediate threat of danger to self or others, or in instances of suspected abuse or neglect.

**4. Is parental consent required for a student to receive mental health services?**

Therapeutic services are available to legal minors only with the informed consent of the parent or legal guardian. “Informed Consent” means, for instance, that the parent will be given opportunities to ask questions, learn about the benefits and limitations of treatment, and have input into the goals of therapy, the format in which it is delivered—individual, group, or family—and the length of its course. Tennessee also recognizes the “mature minor exception” to permission for behavioral health treatment, which defines the age of consent to mental health treatment and/or services as 16 years of age. While the school district continues to operate in a totally virtual environment, consent may be given verbally during an MS TEAMS meeting. Otherwise, a signed permission form is required.

**5. How do parents request mental health services for their child?**

If you are the parent or guardian of an SCS student, you can request mental health services by calling the Social-Emotional Support Line at 416-8484 or by talking with your child’s school counselor.

**6. How do school counselors or administrators request mental health services for a student?**

School staff will continue to make mental health referrals by contacting your school social worker or psychologist. A mental health referral form is required to document each referral and will be made available upon request. School psychologists working in the Department of Exceptional Children (DEC) do not accept mental health referrals.

**7. Can I bring my child to a school or office for services?**

No, due to health considerations associated with COVID19, there are no provisions or plans for working with students in a classroom or office setting at this time.