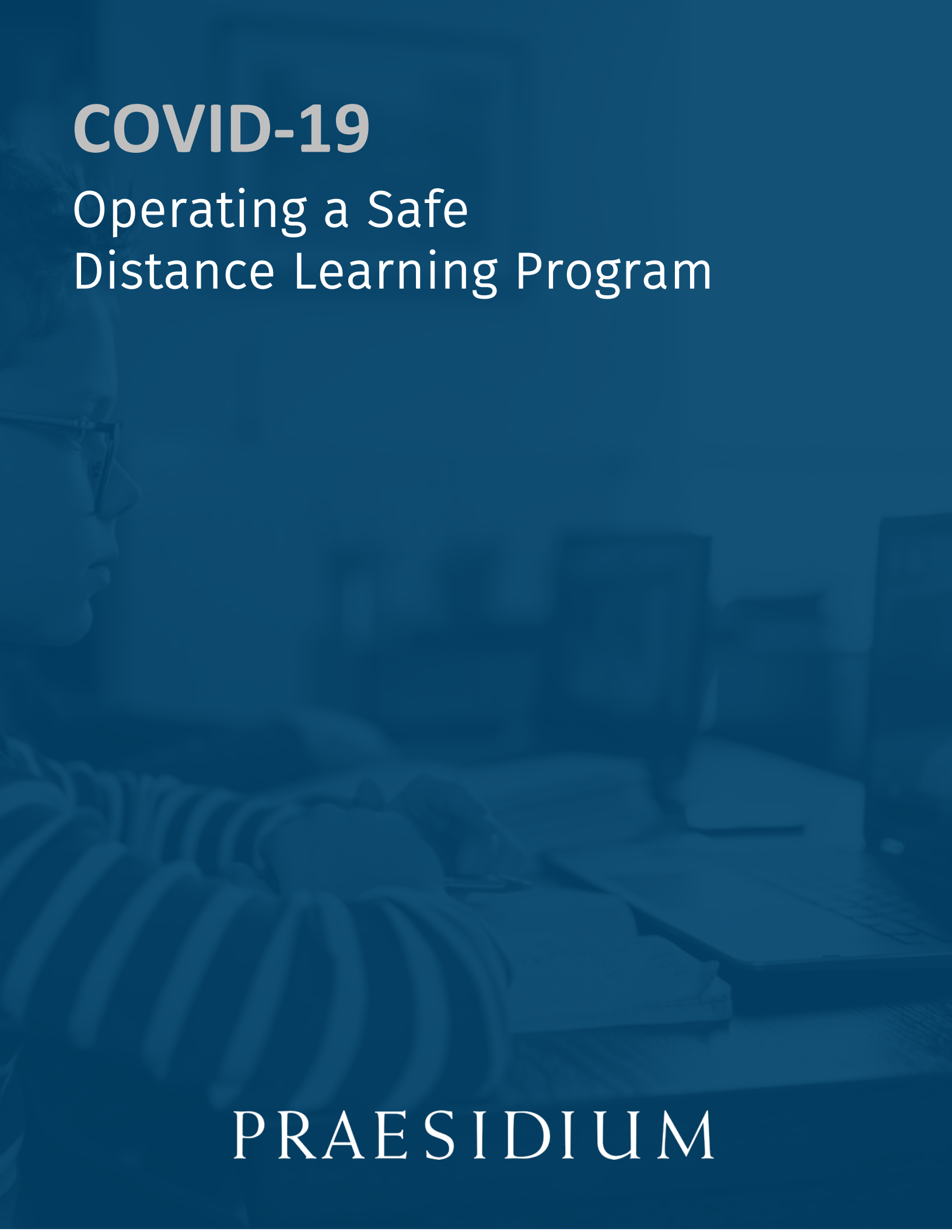
COVID-19

Operating a Safe Distance Learning Program



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Operating a Safe Distance Learning Program While Using Electronic Communications

COVID-19 is significantly impacting all industries Praesidium works with, but schools are facing unprecedented challenges as they have shifted overnight to distance learning. This abrupt shift has allowed for continued instruction, but many questions exist regarding safely implementing this technology. Further, schools may find it difficult to protect students and faculty during these interactions. As always, we are here to help you navigate these difficult times with a unique focus on maintaining a safe environment for all members of the school community.

Below are some things to think about when operating a distance learning program that includes Zoom or other types of face-to-face communication:

1. **Set appropriate boundaries for communications**. Your school may have guidelines for communications under "normal" operations, but things have quickly shifted. While the type and amount of electronic communication faculty and youth are engaging in has changed, some expectations have not.

    a. Faculty should still refrain from communicating with students via private emails, texts, or social media in accordance with school policy.
    b. Additionally, if your school has a policy requiring copying administrators on communications after hours, continue enforcing that.
    c. Conversations should be focused on learning and instruction, not the personal life of the educator or the student.
    d. Invite an administrator or other teacher to 1-1 conversations with students.
    e. In the spirit of transparency, consider recording instruction sessions.

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2 **Maintain Professionalism**. This is an unusual learning situation, and it is easy to be more relaxed when in your own home, but here's no need to compromise professionalism. Maintaining professionalism helps reinforce existing boundaries between faculty and students.

a. Set parameters on when faculty may interact with students electronically. If you have existing policies prohibiting conduct before or after a certain time, continue to communicate those expectations.
b. Require educators and students to dress appropriately during instruction time.
c. Ensure that the view students see is appropriate. For example, encourage instruction from a home office or living room rather than a bedroom. Depending on the web conferencing platform, there may be options to blur the background or have a custom backdrop.

3 **Involve Parents**. Keeping parents in the loop gives you another set of eyes and ears to manage this risk-especially in this unique and difficult time!

a. Assume the parent is in the room and encourage parents to drop in periodically. This helps ensure their students are paying attention and nothing inappropriate is happening.
b. Ensure any new expectations are clearly communicated to parents and students.
c. Informed parents can help reinforce your revised policies.
d. Ensure parents know how to report concerns or issues to school leadership

4 Respond to concerns. Just because inappropriate behavior may not be happening within the physical space of your school, if it happens between your faculty or students, the school must respond.

a. Encourage faculty to discuss concerns with their supervisor immediately.
b. Follow existing reporting chains internally and externally.
c. Share ways for parents and students to report concerning behaviors.
d. Use this as an opportunity to share your reporting protocols with them.

Praesidium is here to help during this unique time! Here is a link (https://bit.ly/2JfsXoU) to resources we've developed to help address some of the more common concerns and questions clients have asked about programming during COVID-19. **For further information on any of the above items, please contact us at info@praesidiuminc.com to set up a call!**

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