

# NURSE SANDRA

## TENACIOUS SUPPORT DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

**Nurse Sandra wishes she could be more helpful. The Nurse-Family Partnership® nurse who works through the Visiting Nurse Association of Central Jersey in Ocean County, N.J., has worked by phone with new moms, some coping with COVID-19 along with the often-overwhelming demands of caring for an infant.**

She advises them on coronavirus testing sites and tells them what symptoms to watch for and how to deal with them. She keeps lines of communication open, but with moms and babies in quarantine and no extended family members available to help, the days can be long and exhausting.

“Our whole team has been working to get the best information for families,” said Sandra.

She encourages young parents to think about creating their own strong family units, and to think about the future and how they will make plans for their lives going forward.

While some moms have dealt directly with the virus, others struggle financially.

“One family was unable to work,” Sandra said. “Everything stopped. They had no money.

“I gave them addresses for where they could go to food banks, but demand was so high that a lot of times they



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would get there and the food that was left was really terrible, old and expired. So, I brought them food and dropped off gift cards provided by the Visiting Nurse Association of Central Jersey so they could go to the store. I brought masks for them, too, and they were so grateful. COVID is very isolating.”

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After social distancing restrictions were put in place nationwide, Nurse-Family Partnership nurses rapidly shifted from providing in-home visits to communicating with their clients by phone or videoconference. Already skilled at using telehealth technology, the nurses used these virtual visits to maintain a lifeline for new moms needing support throughout the pandemic.

To make sure every client had access to the technology, the Nurse-Family Partnership National Service Office partnered with Verizon and Action Technologies Group to provide iPhones at no cost to moms in need.

When she discovered that one client didn't have a phone, Sandra was able to provide her with an iPhone to be able to stay in touch with her throughout the pandemic.

“NFP has been great about making sure families have what they need to keep in touch,” Sandra said. But she misses the one-on-one meetings that were the heart of her practice before the pandemic.

“Of course, I feel the loss,” she said, “not just in the personal relationships but especially in the technical aspects – using the scale and measuring the babies. I have to ask the moms to take measurements like head circumference and length and weight, and I'm not sure about them since I'm not there.”

Nurse-Family Partnership has provided scales, blood

pressure monitors and other tools to families. Sandra said she was able to give blood pressure cuffs to two moms who needed to keep a close eye on those readings. The moms also are encouraged to ask for the data gathered at regular doctor's visits so they can relay it to their nurses on their telehealth visits.

Sandra said she also misses the opportunity to observe family dynamics. But she feels good about her ability to respond quickly to moms who are going through a difficult time or just need answers to common questions.

"For me, most of the time it's simple," she said. "For them it's urgent. The best thing is that I'm able to respond right away and those who need extra support know they can text me on an encrypted site and I'm there for them."

Sandra is in her eighth year of working at Nurse-Family Partnership. She had been a high school science teacher for 20 years before she decided to return to school to become a registered nurse.

Working with Nurse-Family Partnership is the perfect job, she said. "There is a big education component working with the new moms, and a lot of attention has to be paid to the mothers to make sure they are receptive to advice and understand what's going on.

"For somebody who loves to teach and loves working with people, the one-on-one aspect of this work is perfect."

Sandra knows that even by phone she's able to intervene in some urgent situations.

In one case, a client's father was very sick with COVID, but was afraid to go to the hospital.

"He didn't want to die alone," Sandra said. She finally convinced the family to call an ambulance. "He almost passed, but he was treated and has recovered."

One mom brought her baby home from the hospital only to find out that the COVID test administered on her there came back positive. She had no symptoms.

Sandra monitored her condition by phone, and both mother and child ultimately were fine, despite the scare.

The stress of coping for six months with a continuous, fast-moving public health crisis has taken a toll on nurses as well as families.



Sandra continues to help her clients through the challenges of parenting during the COVID-19 pandemic. She sees their resilience and strengths.

"We have to learn to take care of ourselves or this can really eat you up inside," Sandra said.

She takes walks on the beach, exercises and watches funny movies at home to unwind.

"It's important to take time to breathe and relax," she said. "You have to have the spirit to help others. If you're suffering from depression, they are going to hear it through the phone."

Sandra said she also tries to focus on the successes.

She's been able to get families reluctant to accept public assistance to enroll in WIC so they can get the support they need and has convinced others to seek medical care for someone who was sick and afraid to see a doctor.

And she loves to see the resilience and excitement of new moms in the face of sometimes overwhelming challenges.

"I have a mom who's very, very, very good at setting up a learning environment for her child," she said. "When I call and she puts the video on, I can see the child has a whole area of the living room set up for him. It's very colorful and she took the phone and had me follow her into the bedroom she shares with the child, and it's colorful and has toys for him.

"It was a very good moment for me to see that, even though we all were in crisis mode, she was able to create a place inside her home that was stimulating and fun and very, very special."