



NFI | Vermont

Program Participant and Agency Handbook

*Providing Mental Health and Educational Services to
Vermont's Children and Families*

- Trauma Informed, Trauma-Responsive Practices
- Flexible, Creative & Culturally Sensitive Services
- Program Participant Centered Care
- Customized Individual Treatment Plans

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Welcome to NFI VERMONT

This Program Participant & Agency Handbook is designed to provide a general introduction to the agency, important procedures, and resources. We hope you find the Handbook useful. If you need help understanding information in this Handbook, please ask a staff member.

NFI VT is a **Specialized Service Agency** (SSA) within the larger VT State mental health network. We are Center of Excellence (COE) certified by Vermont Care Partners (VCP). And, we are also proud to be a Child Placing agency as designated by the Department for Children and Families (DCF).

The above mentioned status applies to some but not all of our programs.

We have a variety of services and supports available to work with you towards desired treatment goals.

Our Mission Statement

The mission of NFI VT is to embrace strengths and acknowledge struggles as we join with youth, adults, families and communities to promote growth and healing. We are dedicated to providing flexible, creative, client-centered, and culturally sensitive trauma specific services.

NFI Trauma-Informed Statement

Core to our values and mission, NFI VT strives to be a healing agency; trauma-informed, trauma-sensitive, and trauma-responsive. We value a culture that works in relationship with all those who we encounter and promotes belonging and empowerment.

Trauma awareness permeates all that we do. We recognize that the people we serve, those we encounter, and our staff may have experienced adverse events and/or trauma in their lives. We embrace ways to reduce the chance of traumatizing or re-traumatizing individuals, to help program participants and staff feel safe and respected. It is important for us to foster both a working and treatment environment of honesty, trust, calm, flexibility, accountability and support. Work and treatment relationships are centered in transparency, open communication and compassion.

NFI VT integrates knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, practices, trainings, and staff supervision. We invest in opportunities for hiring and growing trauma-aware staff, professional development, and both employee and program participant/family wellness.

Our Programs

❖ Wraparound

Brattleboro Community Alternatives Program (BCAP), Community Based Supports (CBS), Diagnostic and Assessment Program (DAP), ST. Albans Community Alternatives Program (SACAP), Village House Wraparound

❖ Therapeutic Residential

Allenbrook, DBT House, Group Home, and Village House

❖ Educational

East Meadow School, Cornerstone School, Arlington School, Turning Points School

❖ NFI Foster Parent Support Services

❖ Youth Inpatient Crisis Stabilization

Hospital Diversion (HDP) North & South locations

❖ NFI Family Center (Outpatient mental health clinic)

❖ Crossroads - Intensive Outpatient Program using Dialectical Behavior Therapy

Adult, Transition Age Youth, and Adolescent groups

❖ Child and Family Supports program (CFS)

St. Albans- DCF partner

❖ Post Permanence/Post Adoption

Partners in Care – Promoting Healthy Behaviors and Relationships

Health & Mental Health Team

We are your partner in care. It is important for us to be aware of who your primary care physician, dentist, psychiatrist, and any other alternative service providers or settings you may be associated with or have considered. Please let us know whom your community health/mental health team includes.

If you need help in identifying a primary care physician, dentist, and/or mental health provider, our staff can help. If you change or add a health provider, please let us know so we can serve you better.

Mental Health Screens

During the referral and intake process, depending on program eligibility, staff may request to review your prior health/mental health records. Programs will conduct a comprehensive assessment with you.

Programs may also use mental health screens/tools to assess for your experience with or risk of trauma, depression, suicidality, substance use/tobacco use, and individual needs and strengths.

Sharing of Health Information

We participate in routine communication with and collaboration with your community health team (including insurance carrier); specifically for purposes of Treatment, Payment, and Healthcare Operations. In efforts to provide efficient and effective services, NFI VT may share health information via paper or electronic methods as outlined in the *Notice of Privacy Practices*.

Some* of our NFI programs are also required to share certain health data with different departments under the VT Agency for Human Services (AHS) (aka the State) to improve the quality, safety, and cost of patient health and mental health care.

Another such method of sharing health information is through the Vermont Health Information Exchange (**VHIE**). (See Appendix*). NFI sends designated health information from our electronic health record to Vermont Information Technology Leaders (VITL). VITL is responsible to store this information and manage access to information in the VHIE by the State and other authorized providers.

The VHIE provides up to date information to providers and staff at hospitals, practices and other organizations to help you receive the best care no matter where you are being treated within the state.

If you have further questions about the VHIE or wish to Opt-Out of having your data accessible to providers, you should **contact VITL directly**. (See Resources page for contact)

*Currently DBT House, Village House, Wraparound Programs, Group Home, Allenbrook and Hospital Diversion.

Program participant and Staff Safety

Open communication, mutual respect, and timely exchange of information are important to maintain physical and emotional safety during program participation. Each program site has an emergency/evacuation plan and staff are instructed in Universal safety precautions, CPR, and first aid measures. Additional health and safety protocols are in accordance with Vermont law and guidance.

Program participants assist to develop their individualized safety plan. The safety plan is accessible to direct care staff, management, and the crisis response team to help support the participant in their care.

In order to help prevent and manage situations with imminent risk of physical harm to program participant or others, staff are trained in physical intervention techniques. Although, NFI VT does not endorse physically aversive (See Appendix*) procedures, devices, or treatment, when necessary, **restraint*** may be used. In some situations, local law enforcement and/or emergency management services may be involved.

NFI VT is a No Weapons and No Smoking/No Vaping agency. The possession of a weapon, firearm, dangerous item, possession or use of illegal drugs on agency property is prohibited. Agency policies are in place to respond to violations of prohibited items, however, consequences will differ according to your program and/or as a condition of law enforcement.

Accommodations

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the agency may make reasonable accommodations/modifications to help ensure access to our programs/services. You may also request to see a copy of our Language Access, Telehealth, and Service Animal policies.

- ❖ When needed, the agency may make reasonable accommodations/modifications for a program participant's accessibility to sites/buildings.
- ❖ Case managers/Program Directors may help assist in arranging for adequate, accessible transportation for a program participant, who could not otherwise easily reach the program/services.
- ❖ Upon request, the agency may help arrange for Language Access assistance (interpreter/translation) for a program participant/their legal representative.
- ❖ The agency will make reasonable modifications for a program participant and/or their representative service dog to be allowed in NFI VT sites (public areas). However, service dogs may be prohibited from entering NFI VT sites when they pose a direct threat to the health and safety of others, are not under the control of the handler, are not housebroken, or would fundamentally alter the nature of a service or the program.

Access to Care

Referrals, Waitlist & Intake Process

Many of the NFI VT programs receive referrals directly from the State, school districts, and local Designated Agencies. Program Directors review the referral information with the referral source to determine whether an individual's application for service is accepted, declined, placed on a waitlist or requires further review. Sometimes, program staff will meet (or schedule a tour) with the prospective program participant to help determine program appropriateness and enrollment readiness.

Once accepted, potential program participants participate in a program Orientation and intake.

Intake to the program includes a review of the program's services, program environment, expectations, and assigned staff member(s). Staff will help answer any questions, explain agency resources, consent forms and information in the intake packet.

- ❖ Only NFI Family Center and Crossroads IOP may accept self-referrals

Additional program referral information can be viewed on our website.

Treatment Authorization and Treatment Plan Agreement

NFI VT makes efforts to stay up-to-date with best treatment practices.

Staff creativity and flexibility is intended to help support program participant(s) needs and their goal achievement.

Informed consent from a program participant/their legal representative is required prior to the start of services.

It is also important for you and your support network to have input in developing goals for your treatment planning. The individualized treatment or learning plan is developed and adjusted, as needed. Depending on the program, the treatment plan may include natural supports, supportive community agencies, safety planning, discharge planning, care preferences and treatment or education goals.

Program services and treatment activities may include face-to-face interaction, phone calls, electronic communication, Telehealth sessions, and in-person or virtual meetings.

If at any time you have questions about your treatment plan, ask the program staff.

Privacy and Confidentiality

Following Federal HIPAA & FERPA guidelines (See *Appendix**), NFI VT has policies in place to help protect the privacy, security and confidentiality of your personal health and educational information. We will use and disclose your health information for treatment, payment, and healthcare operations as outlined in the *Notice of Privacy Practices*.

We will ask you/your legal representative to complete a Release of Information form prior to the disclosure of your personal information (when indicated under the HIPAA rules).

However, there are certain legal circumstances or **incidents** (See *Appendix**), when your information may be released without your permission, in cases of:

Medical emergency, Suspected Child Abuse and neglect, Communicable Disease/Public Health initiatives, Threats of violence/danger to self or others

We encourage you to speak with the program staff about any state/federal limits to confidentiality.

Together, we can help protect your information by:

- Keeping current with and sharing information according to state and federal guidelines
- Limiting access to and sending information securely (examples: password protection, encryption)
- Practicing safe and responsible internet and network use
- Storing your health information in a secure location
- Understanding risk associated with posting sensitive information on public platforms/ social media, and/or using health & wellness applications on your smart device
- NFI VT will NOT post images or voice recordings of program participants on social media without their consent.

Electronic Communication

As best treatment practice, NFI VT encourages face- to- face and phone contact, whenever possible. However, programs may also use or suggest a variety of electronic communication methods (or treatment tools):

- when they are clinically appropriate,
- when they will expand access to services, or
- they will help to coordinate care.

Your program will discuss the most secure methods of electronic communication with you/your legal representative and provide you the opportunity to permit communication from/with staff via email, text messages, and virtual meetings.

Some programs do NOT allow their staff to communicate through text messages.

Email and text messages, that include treatment information, are considered part of your record. Your clinician may directly attach the contents of the email or text message or they may summarize the content of the message in a clinical note.

NFI is NOT liable for the security of your information, when you choose a less secure form of communication such as text messaging or sending information through an unsecure email or phone application.

Program Participant Rights, Responsibilities & Rules

NFI VT strives to be a welcoming treatment and learning environment; to provide fair and equitable treatment regardless of race, religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, and ethnicity.

Posted at each NFI VT location are the Program Participant Rights & Responsibilities and program specific rules. It is important that you have an opportunity to discuss the rules and responsibilities with the staff, understand and agree to the program expectations, and your treatment plan.

****Program specific rules and expectations are provided by the program****

Program Participant Rights:

- ❖ Right to information on eligibility criteria, funding priorities, available services, programs, practitioners, practice guidelines, utilization management practices, and complaint procedure- including the Grievance and Appeal process
- ❖ Right to an Individualized, Comprehensive Service Plan that includes relevant service agencies and your health team/doctor
- ❖ Right to review your health information, understand your condition and treatment options
*See Notice of Privacy Practices for additional rights regarding access to, amending, or restricting your health information
- ❖ Right to receive respect and dignity; right to receive services from culturally sensitive staff
- ❖ Right to participate in decision- making and treatment choices, consistent with age and ability
- ❖ Right to communicate in your primary language and/or mode of communication
- ❖ Right to provide input, feedback and suggestions regarding your physical, emotional and mental comfort
- ❖ Right to refuse or terminate services (Exception: possible consequences if service is court ordered)
- ❖ Right to request change in a staff assignment
- ❖ Right to information security, confidentiality and privacy of your records; when permitted by law, records may be released without permission
- ❖ Right to be represented by legal counsel or advocate of your choice- right to all legal protection and due process for status as an outpatient and inpatient, both voluntary and involuntary, as defined under Vermont law

- ❖ Right to access basic goods, services and private space in the context of the therapeutic treatment plan
- ❖ Freedom from retaliation, threat, denial, or discrimination
- ❖ Modifications may be made to the physical environment, a task, or mode of communication; (as defined by the ADA) to reduce the unintentional exclusion or barrier of an individual with a disability, to access a service

Program Participant Responsibilities

- ❖ Responsibility to provide complete information needed to the NFI Vermont staff to help develop an appropriate plan of care, appropriate services and supports
- ❖ Responsibility to participate in the treatment plan, report any changes to medications or your health/condition and any changes to your health team
- ❖ Responsibility to follow agreed-upon service and support plan, to the best of your ability
- ❖ Responsibility to report treatment or appointment challenges
- ❖ Responsibility to treat staff and caregivers, property with dignity and respect including others who may be different than you
- ❖ Responsibility to report abuse and /or share concerns

Advance Directives

Adults (18 years old+), who are legally able to make decisions for themselves, may complete an advance directive for their health care instructions.

NFI VT has resources available for help with completing or changing an advance directive.

Or, if you wish to share with us an already completed directive, staff will retain a copy as part of your clinical record.

Voter Registration Assistance

For those program participants receiving services at the Village House, who are 18 years old+, staff may offer assistance with state of VT voter registration.

Program Participant Satisfaction

Satisfaction Survey

Your input and satisfaction are important to us. Throughout your course of treatment, there are opportunities to review program appropriateness and your satisfaction with our services. Staff generally provide Satisfaction Surveys to program participants annually and/or at discharge. However, we encourage your feedback at any time.

We use your comments and feedback to inform decisions about the types of services we provide, service quality, staff trainings, and overall agency effectiveness.

Complaints, Grievances & Appeals

During the course of your treatment, you may have a complaint with a service or staff member. You are encouraged to express your complaint, as soon as possible. This helps us to address the complaint in a timely fashion.

At any time, you can speak to the staff directly or write to us regarding your complaint.

Most complaints can be resolved quickly with regular feedback. A meeting may be scheduled to address unresolved issues, disagreements with or dissatisfaction with services. It is important that you/your representative participate in this meeting to determine a satisfactory resolution. If unable to determine a resolution, the NFI VT Grievance and Appeal Coordinator reviews the complaint information and provides you with additional assistance or next steps.

If you wish to meet with a staff member not directly on your treatment team, or to file a Grievance or Appeal, you may also contact:

NFI VT Grievance and Appeal Coordinator

Jo Berry, LICSW- Clinical Quality Systems Manager

30 Airport Rd, S. Burlington VT

Phone: (802) 658-0040 Email: joberry@nafi.com

- ❖ Vermont has a NO retaliation policy. Services will not be affected if you file a Grievance or Appeal. No staff member will treat you poorly if you express concerns, and you are entitled to a timely agency decision regarding your concerns and reasons for decision.
- ❖ Related to the nature and level of the concern, NFI VT staff may be required to contact law enforcement, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) or the Department of Mental Health (DMH) or a legal entity for additional reporting.
- ❖ Grievances and Appeals are recorded and submitted to the State of Vermont in the Global Commitment to Health Database

(See [Appendix*](#)) for detailed procedure and timelines to file a Grievance or Appeal.

Discharge

Beginning at intake, you/your representative, our staff, and in many cases, the referral source establish a plan for discharge. The discharge plan may remain the same throughout treatment or it may evolve depending on your needs, program eligibility, and treatment goals.

Most discharges are anticipated (See [Appendix*](#) for additional discharge types). The discharge plan is finalized when a program participant has met their treatment/education goals, and/or when the program participant no longer meets program eligibility requirements.

Relocation (from Staffed Living/Residential Programs)

Relocation is a type of discharge resulting from a behavior, medical condition, an emergency, for respite, or due to inappropriate placement:

Relocating a program participant without consent is not desirable, and generally limited to last resort for instances if program participant:

- Danger to self and others,
- Violates program rules,
- Refuses to participate in goals,
- Intrudes on the rights/safety or well-being of others

The Program Director and Regional Director will meet with the program participant, their legal representative, and referring agency on record (when applicable) to discuss the recommended reason for relocation. They will also discuss placement options/resources, and circumstances if you do not go to the new placement.

A relocation related to inappropriate placement or refusal to participate requires 30d notice so that the program participant/representative has time to transition

Whenever possible, tours or meeting with new placement are arranged prior to the move.

When appropriate, staff and program participant/representative will discuss and plan for a return, including conditions and expectations of that return.

Resources

Vermont Legal Aid Office or
Office of Health Care Ombudsman
(800) 917-7787

For Residential Licensing and Special
Investigations:

Residential Licensing & Special
Investigations
Department of Children and Families
Family Services Division
280 Street Drive, HC 1 North
Waterbury, VT 05671-2401
Phone: (802) 241-2131

For Disability Rights Vermont:

141 Main Street, Suite #7
Montpelier, VT 05602
Phone: (800) 834-7890

For Human Rights Commission:

14-16 Baldwin Street
Montpelier, Vermont 05633
Phone: (802) 828-2480

Office of Professional Regulations (OPR)

89 Main Street, third Floor
Montpelier VT 05602
(802) 828-1505
www.sec.state.vt.us/professional-reg

Department of Mental Health (DMH)

280 State Drive NOB 2 North
Waterbury, VT 05671
(802) 241-0090
<https://mentalhealth.vermont.gov/>

Vermont Agency of Education (AOE)
1 National Life Drive, Davis 5
Montpelier, VT 05620
(802) 828-1130

Department of Vermont Health Access (DVHA) -
(Grievance/Appeal)

280 State Drive
Waterbury, VT 05671
(802) 879-5900

<http://dvha.vermont.gov/>

Health Access member services (fair hearing)
(800) 250-8427

Department for Children and Families (DCF)

280 State Drive, HC 1 N
Waterbury, VT 05671

http://dcf.vermont.gov/main_contacts

Vermont Health Information Exchange (VHIE)

(802) 861-1800 or (888) 980-1243
vhiesupport@vitl.net

Office for Civil Rights

Centralized Case Management
Operations: U.S. Department of Health
and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Room 509F HHH Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Tobacco Cessation

802quits.org

Suicide Prevention

Call 988 for the 988 Suicide and Crisis
Lifeline or text VT to 741741 for
the Crisis Text Line.

APPENDIX*

Legal Definitions

Authorized Representative

An individual, either appointed by the program participant or authorized under state law, to act on behalf of the program participant; whom has all of the rights and responsibilities of the program participant they represent

Aversive Procedure/Event

One that uses unpleasant physical or sensory stimuli in an attempt to reduce undesired behavior; cannot be avoided or escaped, unpleasant, and/or is pain inducing.

Federal Education Privacy Laws (FERPA)

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) is a federal law that affords parents the right to have access to their children's education records, the right to seek to have the records amended, and the right to have some control over the disclosure of personally identifiable information from the education records. When a student turns 18 years old, or enters a postsecondary institution at any age, the rights under FERPA transfer from the parents to the student ("eligible student").

Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA)

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (**HIPAA**) is a federal **law** that required the creation of national standards to protect sensitive patient health information from being disclosed without the patient's consent or knowledge.

Incident

Threats or actions which may result in significant harm to the health and/or welfare of our program participants, staff, facilities, public, or may bring about adverse publicity.

* May include criminal activity involving law enforcement, abuse, neglect, exploitation, serious injury, medical emergency, death, missing person, restraint, or information security

Informed Consent

Informed consent means that a person understands their health condition and what the proposed treatment is and results in the person's authorization or agreement to permit a specific intervention, treatment, or service.

Notice of Privacy Practices

HIPAA-mandated notice that covered entity (NFI Vermont) must give to program participants that describes how a covered entity may use and disclose their protected health information, and informs them of their legal rights regarding protected health information (PHI).

Restraint

Physical restriction or containment of an individual until individual is able to regain composure

Specialized Service Agency (SSA) may operate in more than one geographic area of the state and provide a distinctive approach to service delivery and coordination or provide services that meet distinctive individual needs.

Vermont Health Information Exchange (VHIE) An organization that collects patient health information electronically, manages it, and makes it available across the health care system, according to national standards. In Vermont, there is one HIE referred to as the Vermont Health Information Exchange (VHIE), which is operated by Vermont Information Technology Leaders (VITL).

Grievance and Appeals Procedure:

COMPLAINT is defined as an unresolved issue, “unprofessional or unsafe conduct” of a program staff member, disagreement with or dissatisfaction with services.

Complaints may be expressed orally or written to the staff, at any time. They are reported to the Program Director and/or senior management and information is gathered to help address the issue. Within 1 - 5 days, you/your representative will be invited to participate in a meeting to determine a potential action plan and resolution. An Action Plan form is completed/signed to indicate that the complaint is either resolved or further action is required for a satisfactory disposition:

- ❖ Immediate action and/or separation of program participant and staff member may be necessary; related to the nature of the complaint. DCF, law enforcement and/or legal entity may be contacted for direction and next action steps, or
- ❖ Further action may include filing a Grievance or Appeal

GRIEVANCE is defined as dissatisfaction with the quality of treatment or services, accessibility of services, program management, a program or policy decision, service provider, or you feel your “rights have not been respected”.

Initially, the process for reporting/filing a Grievance follows the process for reporting a Complaint. However, we recommend reporting your Grievance within 30 days so as to address the Grievance as quickly as possible. Post the meeting, the Action Plan form is reviewed by the

- a) NFI Grievance and Appeals Coordinator; who then forwards program participant information to (b), or
 - b) You may directly contact the Medicaid Grievance and Appeal (G&A) Manager, through: <http://dvha.vermont.gov/appeals-and-fair-hearings> (Attachment 3.D)
- ❖ The Medicaid (G&A) Manager acknowledges the Grievance, in writing, within 5 days of receipt of notification from program participant or representative
 - A file is opened in the State Grievance and Appeal database
 - ❖ The Medicaid (G&A) Manager provides a disposition to the Grievance, in writing, within 90 days

APPEAL is defined as a disagreement with a decision or action or proposed changes to type of, amount of services, offered as part of the treatment plan.

Program participant will be informed, either directly from the Medicaid program or from the NFI program staff, regarding an upcoming termination, suspension, or reduction of a service. Reason for the potential change is based upon a Notice of Adverse Benefit Determination. If program participant /representative disagree with this change, the program participant then has **60** days to request an Appeal, verbally or in writing.

For an “Expedited Appeal” you must submit an appeal before the effective date of the proposed action or within 11 days of the Medicaid Program sending the Notice of Adverse Benefit Determination.

Similar to reporting a Complaint, the staff would help you complete an Action Plan form. The request to file an Appeal is reviewed by

- a) the NFI Grievance and Appeal Coordinator; who then will forward information to (b),
- Or

- b) You may directly contact the Medicaid Grievance and Appeal (G&A) Manager, through: *Office of Health Care Advocate at (800) 917-7787*. The Global Commitment to Health (Vermont) <http://dvha.vermont.gov/appeals-and-fair-hearings> (Attachment 3.D)
- ❖ The Medicaid (G&A) Manager acknowledges the Appeal request, in writing, within 5 days of receipt of notification from program participant or representative
 - A file is opened in the State Grievance and Appeal database
 - ❖ The Medicaid (G&A) Manager provides a disposition to the Appeal, in writing, within 30 days (may be sooner if Expedited Appeal was requested)

Grievances and Appeals are recorded and submitted to Global Commitment to health Appeals and Grievances database. <https://www.ahsnet.ahs.state.vt.us/GCAppeal/gcpword.cfm>

At any time you may revoke a Grievance or Appeal, orally or in writing.

If NFI does not respond within the timeframes stated in the Complaints, Grievance and Appeals procedure or you need further assistance, contact DMH (802) 241-0090

Types of Discharges/ Changes to Location

Planned / Anticipated Discharge is based on progress, attainment of goals, established reasons, program participant condition, and includes program participant/representative and staff, referring agency and/or any referrals made

Early Discharge is a planned discharge in response to an inappropriate placement to program. NFI VT must provide notice at a minimum of 30days to allow sufficient time to implement a discharge plan for the program participant and family to a more appropriate setting.

Emergency Discharge or Emergency Removal by NFI or by the State is based on the presence of an immediate danger of physical or psychological harm to self or others that conflict with the treatment needs of the child/youth to remain at NFI. In this case, program participant would need to be

- Screened by a Mental Health professional and determined in need of more intensive treatment setting
- Decision made as soon as possible, contingent upon avail appropriate housing

Respite is based on a planned break for parents/guardians, as supportive services for non-custody children/youth that are living in their own home/residence (biological, adoptive, kin-care).

**NFI Vermont
Administrative Offices
30 Airport Road, South Burlington VT 05403
ph: (802) 658-0040 fax: (802) 658-0216**

**Standard Business Hours
for the Administrative Offices
are M-F 8:30am-4:30pm**

Please see our website for program specific information www.nfivermont.org