

Tips for Effective Virtual Contact with Children and Families

Preparing for the Visit:

- The person supervising the visit or the Child and Family Services specialist (CFSS) should ensure everyone who will be present for the visit (person supervising, child, parent, etc.) has access to technology to support virtual contact.
- Consider and prepare for any special circumstances:
 - Multiple siblings of different agencies
 - Safety issues
 - Language barriers
- Length of time and frequency of visit:
 - It is likely that the virtual visits will be shorter in length so they should occur more frequently.
 - The length of the visit will depend on the age of the child or any specific court orders. The length of the visit should be determined prior to the visit and by all participants.
- Make sure all who will be present for the visit have a private space that is conducive to virtual visits.

Preparing the Supervising Individual for the Visit:

- The CFSS should remind the person supervising the visit of the rules of visitation, including who may/may not participate in the visit and what conversation topics are not permitted.
- The person supervising the visit should send a reminder to the parent shortly before the visit via phone.
- Discuss the need to supervise young children with the person in charge of the visit. The presence of young children can change the visitation dynamic for attendees.
- If the young child has toileting needs, the person supervising can decide whether to pause the visit and give them the opportunity to check in with the parent or to take the parent with them to the restroom.
- The person supervising should discuss with the caregiver how a child's request to show the parent the caregiver's home should be handled (e.g. child's bedroom, kitchen, etc).
- For infants, the person supervising should position the baby so that they can make eye contact with the person on the screen, making the interaction as normal as possible.
- Older children and the visit supervisor can discuss how a virtual visitation may be different than seeing their parent face to face, and how this may be difficult for the child.
- Participate in the visit in a space that is private and comfortable for both the caregiver and the child. If there are pets, determine if they will be a disruption to the visit and make a plan for them. Also keep in mind the child or parent may want their pet to be a part of the visit.

Preparing the Child and Parent for the Visit:

- Older Youth:
 - Discuss with older youth different things they may want to talk about with their parents:
 - ◆ How online classes are going
 - ◆ What kinds of activities they have been doing since being home
 - ◆ 20 questions
 - ◆ Would you rather
 - ◆ I spy
 - ◆ 2 truths and a lie
 - ◆ Make a meal or dish together
 - ◆ 3-way call between parent, child and teacher to discuss how school is going
- Younger Children:
 - Play ‘peek a boo’ – turn the camera away from you, then back to your face, and then sometimes when the camera comes back to your face you can surprise the kid(s) by showing a book, toy, or something else you want to talk about.
 - Share food. Babies also like to share things through the screen, particularly food.
 - Tell bedtime stories. Read a book to the child while their caregiver on the other side is holding the same book for them to see the pictures. Describe the pictures the baby is seeing in detail.
 - Be consistent. Make video chat a regular event so it becomes part of the baby’s routine. Make it seem normal, not over or undervalued, but something that is a regular part of their life.
 - Ask the parent to practice looking at the camera as it is tempting to look at one’s own face or the images on the screen. It is important to make and maintain eye contact with the child.
 - Inform parents that it is important to use the same greeting each time and in the same tone of voice when chatting with infants and toddlers. Infants and toddlers learn to recognize and feel comfortable with a real person on the screen when they hear that same sound each time they see the person. This is important because infants and toddlers often depend on smell and touch when meeting a person, so they need more visual and sound cues to recognize you on a video chat.
 - Inform the parents that they should use a lot of gestures. Be close to the camera, but not so close that the children cannot see their hands.
 - The child can gather things to show their parent or worker, such as art projects or favorite stuffed animals.
 - Parents and children might want to read a book together, sing songs, watch TV or take a virtual walk together outside.
- Parents:
 - Discuss with the parent what to expect during the visit and ensure they know how to use the technology for the virtual visit.
 - Review the rules of the virtual visit and what the parent should do if the child is not engaging or acting out.
 - Identify possible activities to do with a young infant or older youth.
- If there are multiple siblings, review with each child how the visit will go and how the process will work if each child needs to take turns speaking with the parent.
- Discuss with parents and children the need for the virtual visit and ensure they understand why they can’t see each other in person. Parents and children may be confused or not understand why they can’t see each other. Remind them that it is not their fault that virtual visits must take place during this time.





During the Visit:

- At the start of each session, seek verbal consent from the parent and the caregiver that they are comfortable with the platform you are using to connect. If they provide consent to continue on the chosen platform, you may do so. Prior to starting the session, staff should ensure clients and families are in a comfortable space.
- Provide encouragement and guidance to the parent or child as needed.
- Provide a gentle reminder when there are 5 minutes left in the visit (or other length of time depending on age of child/prior agreement with parent).
- For older children, towards the end of the visit, discuss the schedule for the next contact as appropriate and ask if there is anything that would be helpful for the next virtual visit.
- Situations which may call for ending the visit early:
 - Child refuses to remain in audio or visual range for significant periods of time
 - Child is upset by the visit and unable to be calmed
 - Child falls asleep and all parties don't wish to remain on the call and want to reschedule
 - Illness of the parent, child or person supervising
 - Technology issues which are unable to be resolved
- Situations which may call for the person supervising to end the visit prematurely and discuss with CFSS the plan for future visits include but are not limited to:
 - Parent and/or caregiver refuses to stop talking about topics not permitted or using profane language
 - Parent and/or caregiver refuses to stop other behaviors that are not appropriate for the visit
 - Parent and/or caregiver allows an unapproved participant in the visit

After the Visit:

- Provide a quick phone call to the parent (or remain on the call/video after the caregiver leaves the call/video) to check in about how the call went and to plan for the next visit.
- Ensure the parent knows how to get in touch with the person supervising or the CFSS if anything is needed between sessions.
- Document each visit based on any received direction regarding how to document virtual visits.
- CFSS and foster parents should be prepared for the parent or child to show a variety of emotions after the visit. These are normal and may include the following:
 - Anger
 - Sadness
 - Crying
 - Withdrawal