

Things to do when you cannot be with your child.
Ways to supplement In-Person visits or
when those are not possible.

Information for Parents

By Rose Marie Wentz
May 11, 2020

Your child counts on you, misses you and can be worried if they do not see you. Here is a list of activities that can help you maintain contact with your child. Check with your social worker if there are any restrictions about how you can have contact with your child.

The goal is for a child to maintain and enhance all their connections while living apart from ALL the key people in their lives. Connections include relatives, friends, pets, culture, the type of food you eat, smells, and routines. In this time of COVID19 and when a child is not living with their parent(s) many of these connections are lost or broken. With creativity and flexibility we can work together to reconnection your child to as many things as possible.

What are the best alternatives to in-person visits? Methods that allow live audio and visual are best. Older children can appreciate receiving written correspondence but should be used as an additional method and not the primary method of the family making connections.

1. Virtual visits using programs that allow live interaction with voice and visual. Skype, Facetime, Zoom are some examples.
2. Audio only – phone calls and internet calling apps
3. Text only – live – SMS, chat apps and even email when done with immediately interaction
4. Recordings – no live interaction – recordings using audio and/or visual
5. Written – US mail, email, and other forms of written communication

Tips for video chats with children

To support children with their video chats:

1. Choose a good time of day. Don't set up for disappointment by picking a time when your child is tired, busy with other activities or restless.

2. Many short chats several times a week are more useful than one long chat.
3. Do not expect a young child to stay in front of the screen the entire time. Let the child run around in the room as they would normally if you were with them.
4. Help your child adjust to this way of talking with you. This will take practice over several visits. When young children interact in person, they pick up communication cues from sight, sound, smell, and touch. Since video chat only involves sight and sound, help your child to concentrate on those senses. Repeat questions, ask your child to ask questions, or point out things your child can see and identify. Depending on the child's age expect the child to change topics frequently or to not respond to your question directly.
5. Be patient!!!! Within a few sessions your child will become accustomed to this. Many children may know more about interacting using video chat apps than you do. **Ask your child teach you.**
6. Have materials ready – storybooks, musical instruments, your child's latest artwork, homework or whatever you plan to share so he doesn't lose interest as you, or the adult helping your child do the chat, scramble to find something.
7. Show your child where you are.
8. Let your child interact with others during the chat (as approved by your worker) siblings, pets, relatives, friends, etc.
9. Prepare your child that sometimes the internet "loses" calls. Let your child know you will call back as soon as possible, if this occurs.
10. **Make it fun, something the child looks forward to doing again.**

Tips for adults chatting with young children:

1. Practice looking at the camera – it is tempting to keep your eyes on your own picture, or the images on the screen – but you really make eye contact when you look at the camera and that is better for interactive communication.
2. If there is an adult with your child you can ask them to help engage the child in activities with you. It is OK to talk to that adult, make sure any conversation is focused on interacting with the child not about adult issues.
3. Keep very young children engaged with you by playing 'peek a boo' – turn the camera away from you, then back to your face – and then sometimes when the camera comes back – you can surprise the kids by showing a book, or toy, or something else that you want to talk about.
4. Make sure 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 they often depend more on smell and touch when meeting a person – so they need more visual and sound cues to recognize you on video chat.
5. Think of new questions for each chat. The questions can be silly. Question like "how are you" can be difficult for younger children to answer. Ask specific questions about what they are doing right now.
6. Avoid talking too much about the virus or why you cannot be together right now. Of course truthfully answer your child's questions about these difficult topics.

Your child may be worried about you and if you will get sick. Reassure your child about your situation and if you are sick give your child the information they can understand based on their age..

7. Use a lot of gestures and facial expressions. Be close to the camera – but not so close that your video partner can't see your hands. Don't be afraid to move – don't be a talking head.
8. Talk to your child about their emotions and fears. Even if you do not have the perfect answer it helps the child to know that you care and are willing to listen.
9. Talk to your child about COVID19. There are many online resources that help explain COVID19. Here are a few. Select an age appropriate resource.
 1. These sites contain written, audio, and visual information for parents of younger children.
 1. <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/coronavirus-how-talk-child.html>
 2. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/health/10-tips-for-talking-about-covid-19-with-your-kids>
 3. <https://zerotothrive.org/covid-19/covid-19-kids/>
 2. My Hero is You, A book in multiple languages for children 6 to 11 years old. <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-reference-group-mental-health-and-psychosocial-support-emergency-settings/my-hero-you>
 3. An activity book for young children. <https://www.unicef.org/jamaica/documents/activity-book-talking-about-covid-19-kids>
 4. Here is a video for pre-school and school age children. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nEYq_Yv9PXY
 5. A book: <https://nosycrow.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Coronavirus-A-Book-for-Children.pdf>
 6. A website about helping teenagers/youth: <https://ylc.org/news/covid19-resources/>

To make video chats more interactive:

1. Try using a smart phone, tablet or laptop so you can both move around to show different views and different activities.
2. Have your child use as large of screen as possible so you are more normal size, i.e. a tablet rather than a phone screen. Check with the adult on the other end about how you look on the caregiver's screen. Sometimes turning the screen will make the picture become larger.
3. Pretend to share snacks. People on both sides of the screen have the same snack and the adults can pretend to hand it off - camera to camera - to a child's delight.
4. Eat a meal together (it does not have to be the same food).
5. Play music and sing – People on both ends of the camera can hear songs and sing or dance together, and join in with instruments or dancing.

6. Ask the child what they want to do. Plan the next chat session with your child as a way of finishing your time together. Remind the child when the next chat will be.
7. For older children consider using apps like ZOOM that allow you to not only see and talk to each other but also to write notes, share computer screens and other interactivities. Example: Your child can show you their homework and you can help them.
8. REMEMBER to say goodbye, kisses and hugs (yes one can hug your phone and pretend you receive the hug) just as you would when ending a face to face visit.

Video chatting doesn't have to be a major event. A quick, spontaneous chat can be a fun way for distant grownups and children to feel close to each other. Several short chats a week may be better than one long chat.

Adapted from: <https://www.naeyc.org/our-work/families/tips-video-chatting-young-children>

Free video chat apps: Skype, Facetime, Facebook messenger, Zoom, Whatsap, Instagram and many more.

Need help obtaining a phone, tablet or internet access: See Handout on "Virtual Visit Resources"

Activities for virtual visits

1. Many organization have resources on the internet to help parents and children: games, learning activities, advice, songs and much more. EX: www.PBSkids.org If you use an app like ZOOM the parent can show the game, book or activity from their screen and the child will see the same thing on their screen.
2. Go on a virtual field trip together. Be sure to use a chat program so you can communicate with each other while looking at the same web site. A couple of places to start would be NASA's Web site at <http://www.nasa.gov> or the PBS Web site at <http://www.pbs.org>. <https://kidsactivitiesblog.com/135714/virtual-field-trips/> is an entire website of trips listed by the child's grade. Many museums, parks and zoos are offering virtual field trips or live viewings.
3. On phone calls/internet chats do imaginary outings together. Imagine we are going to our favorite place to get ice cream...
4. Read a your child's favorite book or tell them a story. There are many free internet books available to read. Libraries have many free downloadable books.
5. Play Internet games together. Ask your child which games they like to play. Many electronic games that your child knows can be played together online. Video chat

apps like Facebook Messenger have games and program that puts hats, faces and other things on the people on the screen. Young children can love playing these games and stay very engaged with the person on the screen.

6. With permission from your worker: invite relatives, friends, siblings, pets to join the call. This can be done from 3 or more locations on most apps.

Other ways to stay connected with your child

1. Make a video or audiotape of you reading bedtime stories. Send it to your child along with the book. Or just send the message. This is easy using your smart phone or computer.
2. Send a package containing all the things your child will need if he or she gets sick or is home bound. For example, send a can of their favorite food, a special blanket or pillowcase, a video or audiotape wishing them a speedy recovery, crossword puzzles, or a stuffed animal.
3. Send your child a picture of you or one of both of you. If you wear a perfume or cologne spray some on a card. Mail it to your child.
4. Find unique things to write your letters on, for example, things your child likes—a favorite color of paper, stickers, or pictures of things they like; fun objects — napkins, paper tray liners, or pictures of you. Cut paper into special shapes (holiday shapes like shamrocks or hearts); or puzzles (cut your finished letter into pieces; try sending one piece at a time).
5. Do a letter each day. Send by mail or email. Start a letter and take it with you throughout the day – (or think about what to put in the letter throughout the day). Add a sentence every now and then and be sure to add where you are when you write the different sentences (i.e., at work, cooking, eating).
6. Begin a life's lessons booklet. Each week write down a few of the lessons you have learned in life and how you learned those lessons. When the booklet is full, send it to your child to use as he or she begins or continues the journey of life.
7. Arrange for flowers or pizza to be delivered to your child before or after a special event (e.g., a play, recital, or sports game, a holiday, birthday). Include a note telling them how proud you are of their accomplishment.
8. Draw pictures of what you do all day. Be sure to include things like what you eat and what you read. Things that you might think are boring, your kids will be very interested in reading about when they cannot see you. Have your child do the same.

9. Write a newsletter (have a regular issue of your own family newsletter with columns about each child, family events, and exciting news). Write about family stories, traditions, special event, past vacations, etc. Ask your relatives to add to the newsletter.
10. Make a package that contains cookie cutters and the non-perishable ingredients of your child's favorite cookie so you can "help" them bake while you are away.
11. Make a top 10 list of what you like about your child. Send it to them; may be one each day.
12. Send pictures of yourself doing different activities, in different places, making funny faces, etc.
13. For older children help with homework or home schooling.

Adapted from: The National Long Distance Relationship Building Institute. (2001). *20 long distance activities for dads at a distance* [On-line]. More suggestions are on this site. www.daads.com

Social Workers and Visit Supervisors:

1. Encourage and support parents to do as many of these activities as possible. Nothing can totally replace in-person visits but having NO contact will be detrimental to the child and the parent.
2. Three way video chats using different applications are easy to set up and allow for a visit to be supervised.
3. Visit supervisors can provide support and guidance using three way chats. A pre chat practice session may be necessary to practice how provide guidance during the call (example: using written instruction that are available on some apps that go just to the parent).
4. Using apps such as Zoom allows for more options like written instructions that the child or caregiver does not see.
5. Involve the child's caregiver in setting up and supporting the different types of connections. In this time of uncertainty anything all the adults can do to help the child maintain relationships will help the child.
6. Most of these apps allow for confidentiality of the caregiver's address and phone number, if this is necessary.
7. Research solutions rather than denying contact.

Questions to ask when considering in-person visits during COVID19

Rose Wentz

May 15, 2020

Given the current situation (May, 2020) and the advice from health and government agencies most in-person (Parenting or Family time) visits have been cancelled in the US. Though this may have been an understandable first reaction it is necessary to consider how and when in-person visits can occur especially now as it is predicted that it will many months before COVID19 policies, such as social distancing, will no longer be necessary.

While Virtual Visits (VV) can be a good supplement to in-person visits, it cannot and does not replace what occurs during an in-person visit which fosters and facilitates the continuous parent and child attachment process. Nothing can replace the physical presence (even if 6 feet away) for a child, for even this allows a child to be reassured and calmed in the most ideal situations it is especially necessary during this time of COVID-19. Without in-person visits attachments will be harmed, parents will not be able to practice safe parenting skills and reunification is unlikely to occur.

The questions below were developed to help determine which children should be prioritized to have in-person visits now; while considering the health issues of the children and adults. Given Child Welfare laws and best practice the assumption is that all children will need in-person visits before there is no chance of exposure to COVID19.

These questions are to enable the agency social worker and other parties to the case have an informed discussion about the need for in-person visits. This is not a scored tool.

1. Ask COVID19 health questions of all parties who would be involved in the visit.
 - Yes there is or likely is a person who has COVID19 or recent exposure to COVID19 - Virtual Visits (VV)
 - If any of the parties is currently sick with COVID19 symptoms – Virtual Visits
 - No – consider in-person visits using the questions below
2. Child has a health problem. Check with doctor if there is an elevated risk for COVID19 complications.
 - a. Yes – VV
 - b. No – in-person visits
3. Adult has a health problem that would cause complication for COVID19.
 - a. Yes – Consider options to limit that person’s exposure. Only if there are no options to address these issues than use VV.
 - b. No – in-person visits

4. Was the parent and child having successful in-person visits prior to the COVID19 crisis.
 - a. Yes – in-person visits
 - b. No – parent needs coaching on parenting skills. – in-person visits with visit coach.
5. Was the child close to reunification prior to the COVID19 crisis.
 - a. Yes – return home or continue in-person visits
 - b. No – in-person or VV based on other questions
6. Is the child under the age of three (chronologically or developmentally)?
 - a. Yes – in-person visits
 - b. No – in-person is still preferable whenever possible. Especially for children who can follow safe distancing rules.
7. Has several VV occurred and the child and parent were not able to communicate or relate to each other during the visit?
 - a. Yes - in-person visits
 - b. No – VV can continue but move towards in-person visits
8. Any of the parties involved in the visits cannot access, learn how to access the technology, or is unable to help the child use VV technology?
 - a. Yes – in-person visits
 - b. No - VV can continue but move towards in-person visits
9. Is the child is having severe reactions to VV or new/increased behavior problems?
 - a. Yes – Consider that these reactions may be due to grief, loss or trauma. These types of reactions are normal especially when there is a recent change for the child. In-person visits should be tried to determine if this will reduce the reactions.
 - b. No - VV can continue but move towards in-person visits
10. For children over the age of three: Can the child follow social distancing rules during a visit?
 - a. Yes – In-person visits
 - b. No – VV can continue but move towards in-person visits
11. The child’s caregiving parent is refusing in-person and/or VV.
 Talk to the caregiver about their fears and concerns. Try to address these. Provide current information on COVID19 from public health authorities. Discuss impact of no visits on the child including possibility of the child having increased negative reactions or behaviors. Try a phase-in approach. Have a joint meeting with birth parent and caregiver to develop compromises and ways to decrease the chance of virus transmission. The goal is to support the caregiver to enable them to support visits of all types. Children and parents have the legal right to have visits while in the custody of the agency. The agency is responsible to ensure that this occurs.

Virtual Visits
Recommendations by Age and How to Access Resources
By Rose Marie Wentz
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General Guidelines for Virtual Visits

Virtual Visit definition: Any live interaction between child and parent, when in-person visits cannot occur, that includes visual and audio interaction most common types are Skype, Zoom, Facetime.

In this time of COVID19 it will be necessary to replace some parent/child in-person visits with virtual visits (VV). While Virtual Visits can be a good supplement to in-person visits, it cannot and does not replace what occurs during an in-person visit which fosters and facilitates the continuous parent and child attachment process. Nothing can replace the physical presence (even if 6 feet away) for a child, for even this allows a child to be reassured and calmed in the most ideal situations it is especially necessary during this time of COVID-19. Without in-person visits attachments will be harmed, parents will not be able to practice safe parenting skills and reunification is unlikely to occur.

This paper provides recommendations on how to conduct effective Virtual Visits. As soon as it is possible in-person visits should occur. Virtual Visits can continue to be used as a supplement to in-person visits.

Contents

Planning a Virtual Visit2

How to have conversations with parents and caregivers about virtual visits and their concerns about not having in-person visits 3

How to have a conversation with children about COVID19 and why Virtual Visits are necessary 4

Best Practice Suggestions for Virtual Visits 6

Suggestions on how to conduct Virtual Visits based on the child’s developmental age 7

 Newborns and Infants7

 Toddlers to preschoolers..... 8

 School age 10

 Teenagers to young adults 11

 Special Needs children 12

Resources for engaging parents in virtual visits 12

Technology Resources 13

Phones and computers:	13
Internet programs and apps:	13
Internet/WIFI.....	15
EveryoneOn.....	15
https://www.everyoneon.org/lowcost-offers	15
Free Wi-Fi Service from Educational Broadband.....	16
Wi-Fi Anywhere from US-Municipal	16

Planning a Virtual Visit

- Develop Visit Virtual Plan
 - a. Caseworker talks to all parties to help them understand the need for visits
 - b. Paper: *Long Distance Visits* is a resource to help parents understand VV and other contact options.
 - c. Everyone is involved in planning
 - d. Older children and youth have input in planning visits
 - e. Setting up times, dates, etc.
 - f. Establish boundaries and rules. Similar as might occur during an in-person visit.
 - g. It is the caseworker’s and the agency’s responsibility to provide the services and resources needed.
 - i. Visits, of all types, are a Reasonable Effort Service and thereby are required by law.
 - ii. Not providing in-person visits and not supporting frequent and successful VV is not meeting this requirement.
- Application/Platform – select what meets the needs for the parties
 - a. Show them examples of virtual visits.
 - b. Discuss various options of types of virtual visits.
 - c. Select the platform – zoom, skype, etc.
 - d. Confidentiality, if needed
 - i. Virtual background screens. Parent can choose a family photo, picture of an interesting place and others that gives the child something to talk about.
 - ii. Google phone numbers, email addresses not related other emails
- Equipment
 - a. Smart phone, tablet, or computer
 - b. Internet access
 - c. Data plan
 - d. Knowledge on how to use equipment and apps

- Planning a Virtual Visit
 - a. Goal: Meeting the emotional and attachment needs of the child
 - b. Practice with apps
 - c. Discussion between adults to plan prior to visits: what will happen, who needs to do what, how to handle technical problems.
 - i. Provide the parent with age appropriate ideas on what they can do on a VV. Handout for parents: Long Distance Activities for Parents
 - ii. Talk about emotions, fears and concerns anyone has.
 - d. Discuss how to help younger child understand that technical issues can occur. Ex: The adults can make a game of it.
 - e. Gather props—games, books, building or drawing materials, online apps, food
 - f. Expect that children will not focus on parent/screen 100% of the time
 - g. Minimize other distractions: Turn off TV and cellphones not being used for the visit. Have in a room that allows privacy and quiet.
 - h. Take a screen shot of the parent and child together. Allow both to have a copy of the photo.
- Supervised or coached VV
 - Determine if the professional will be part of the virtual visit (support, monitoring, coaching).
 - Explain your role and agree on how coaching or advice will be shared during the visit (or afterwards). A signal, using the chat feature, etc.
 - Develop a safety signal for the child. This is to allow the child to ask for a break or to end a visit early.
 - Have a method of talking to the child alone. Chats break out room, muting others.
 - Coaching sessions: There should be a specific learning goal shared with the parent before the VV. Provide feedback to the parent after the visit.

How to have conversations with parents and caregivers about virtual visits and their concerns about not having in-person visits

- Acknowledge the feelings of the parents, how important it is for their child to hear your voice, ability to see your baby, see your face, both the parent and child will gain from the visit.
- Have a goal for the conversation. Ex: Determine what types of visit and contacts the child can have with his family that will help the child.
- Remind yourself and others that COVID19 is exceptional and temporary, circumstances are changing regularly, we need to work together to determine what is best for your child.

- Fear drives many decisions. People may make decisions based on that fear not a desire to inconvenience other people. We must listen to understand not to dismissing their fears. Ask about their emotions and fears. Validate their feelings Probe when someone says it is not possible if that is true or just very inconvenient.
- Explain the benefits of the visits to all the parents/caregivers.
- Work towards solutions rather than focusing on what cannot happen right now.
- We have all lost things, routines, or people during the crisis. Show empathy and help the parent; this may require therapeutic support. Everyone wants to have control in their life and this virus has can caused us to lose control and not be able to predict the future. Given this some people may dig in their heels when asked to do “one more thing”. Keep talking to them, push past reactions to determining the emotions that are beneath what they are saying. Develop options. When people help to develop those options and when there are 3 or more options people feel that they truly had a choice. Choice means having control and allows people to change their minds.
- LISTEN, LISTEN, and listen more.
- Have the conversation in-person or virtually. Being able to see each other allows for better communication.

How to have a conversation with children about COVID19 and why Virtual Visits are necessary

- You can ask the parent to explain this to their child. It will help the child to hear this information from their parent. Explain to the parent that is part of their role of being a safe parent in these times. Of course, the caseworker can also use these resources to talk to a child.
- There are many online resources that help explain COVID19. Here are a few. Select an age appropriate resource.
 - These sites contain written, audio, and visual information for parents of younger children.
 - <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/coronavirus-how-talk-child.html>
 - <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/health/10-tips-for-talking-about-covid-19-with-your-kids>
 - <https://zerotothrive.org/covid-19/covid-19-kids/>
 - My Hero is You, A book in multiple languages for children 6 to 11 years old. <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-reference-group-mental-health-and-psychosocial-support-emergency-settings/my-hero-you>

- An activity book for young children. <https://www.unicef.org/jamaica/documents/activity-book-talking-about-covid-19-kids>
- Here is a video for pre-school and school age children. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nEYq_Yv9PXY
- A book: <https://nosycrow.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Coronavirus-A-Book-for-Children.pdf>
- A website about helping teenagers/youth: <https://ylc.org/news/covid19-resources/>
- Talking to the children about their emotions¹
 - One thing kids and teens need to hear is that all emotions are okay. There is no right or wrong way to feel about this global pandemic. Parents should get in the habit of checking in with each child privately regularly to give them an opportunity to verbalize feelings and talk about triggers the child's emotions. A simple, no-cost way to manage unhealthy emotions is to breathe deeply. Say: 'Pretend you are smelling a flower, and then slowly blowing out a birthday candle.' Other helpful coping strategies include visualization, where the child gets into a relaxed position and the parent tells slow, calming story rich with details while reminding the child to breathe. Or try having children reframe thoughts (state their worry, catch the negative thought and flip it into a realistic, more positive thought).
 - Ask for, and seriously consider, your kids' ideas about how to solve the problem.
 - One thing I hear day after day during my sessions with kids: I just want my parents to understand me. the best thing a parent can say is, "That sounds hard. I understand. How can I help?" Kids of all ages tell me that they just want their parents to listen without giving them solutions or feedback.
 - They simply want to feel heard and seen. It can be difficult to resist the urge to fix things when kids are struggling, and parents often jump right into problem-solving mode. The good news is that kids tend to offer a lot of second chances.

¹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2020/04/16/how-parents-can-protect-kids-mental-health-during-pandemic/?utm_campaign=wp_must_reads&utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter&wpscsrc=nl_mustreads

Best Practice Suggestions for Virtual Visits

- Each family is unique thereby each virtual visit will be unique.
- All our children are being impacted and some traumatized by COVID19. Interruption of in-person visits, recent removal from family, recent change to a new caregiver, missing school and more. Given this a child having reactions before during and after a visit is to be expected.
- PRACTICE is necessary for everyone to become comfortable with the new circumstances. Do many VV at the beginning to help everyone gain the skills and learn to be comfortable with VV. Persist.
- Do NOT expect a perfect visit. Just as with in-person visits things will happen that are not expected, or it may not be a good day for the child/parent.
- Small moments matter most, parents do not have to be perfect to be helpful. Short visits are difficult to accept but that does not mean they are meaningless.
- Do not expect that the child will look at the parent, on the screen, every moment or talk to the parent every moment. When families are in-person they do not talk every minute and do not look each other in the face every minute.
- Keep talking, it does not have to be planned, meaningful or even have a response from the child.
- Allow the child to ask for a break or to end the visit early.
- Children and adults can move and may not always be seen on the screen.
- Parents should be allowed to watch their child play, eat, or interact with the caregiver during the virtual visits. There does not have to be direct interaction between the parent and child for every minute of the visit.
- It takes practice to learn how to become comfortable with virtual visits.
- Know where the webcam is. Look at the webcam so the child feels you are looking at them.
- For younger children: the adults will need to agree on the activities and who will do what. E.g. the birth parent reads a book, the caregiver holds the infant and device so the child can see the book.
- Parents and caregivers need to communicate about how the child: emotions, developmental and health status, education, events in the child's daily life, etc.
- Communication is needed between parents and caregivers during the visit when the child is struggling with emotions, distractions, or just having a bad day. How to help the child or if the visit should end early and maybe calling later the same day.
- Allow the older child to have private time with parent. Have some or all of the visit in the child's bedroom, unless unsupervised visit is not allowed.
- Make the visit fun.

Suggestions on how to conduct Virtual Visits based on the child's developmental age

Newborns and Infants

Frequency: Daily contact for 10 to 15 minutes²

Newborns first recognize their parent by their eyes, voice, and smell.

Have the caregiver hold the infant and direct the screen so the child can see the parent's face.

While holding the infant in a way that allows him to hear the parent talk or sing. This encourages the infant to remember the parent and will help to maintain or enhance their connection to their parent. Feeding the child during the visit also helps the infant relate nourishment to both the caregiver and the birth parent. *The caregiver becomes the heart and hands of the parent.* (Rachel Barr and Lerner, 2015)

1. Prepare everyone. Talk about what will happen, how long the visit will be, and how you will say goodbye. Answer children's questions in simple, developmentally appropriate ways. Make sure everyone is on the same page. For young children, hellos and goodbyes are especially important to provide context and closure. Sesame Street has developed good materials, available in English and Spanish, to help with language to use with young children in [foster care](#) or [experiencing the incarceration of a parent](#). The parental incarceration toolkit includes some information about how to talk to children about visits, which may be adapted.³
2. **Get at eye level.** The caregiver should position the baby so that they can make eye contact with the person on the screen, making it as normal an interaction as possible. (Cynthia Burnson, n.d.) The parent should be sure to look at the webcam rather than the baby's face on the screen. This will ensure better eye contact. (Rachel Barr and Lerner, 2015)
3. **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. (Cynthia Burnson, n.d.)
4. **Work with the technology.** Choose mobile rather than desktop for the baby. All the buttons at a desktop computer can be distracting to the baby and take away from the interaction. Lag time and glitches in technology can also hinder the experience for the infant. If Grandma is frozen on the screen, whoever is holding the baby should explain that the internet isn't working correctly. (Cynthia Burnson, n.d.)
5. When the infant is old enough to sit in a chair or highchair the caregiver can set the phone/tablet in front the child. Giving the child something to eat. This allows the child and parent to interact with close facial contact.

²Screen Sense: Setting the Record Straight--Research-Based Guidelines for Screen Use for Children under 3 Years Old, Lerner, Claire; Barr, Rachel, *ZERO TO THREE*, v35 n4 p1-10 Mar 2015

³<https://www.nccdglobal.org/blog/successful-video-visits-young-children> Cynthia Burnson, PhD

6. If the caregiver has some item that has the scent of the parent or the child's home place that item on the child.
7. Caregiver, put toys in front of the child, and let the parent watch the baby play.⁴
8. The adults talk with each other about the baby's likes and dislikes and current routines. (Washington State DCYS, 2020)
9. Give the child a minute to adjust to seeing the parent on the screen. Repeat sessions frequently, especially at first to help the child learn how to interact with the parent. (Rachel Barr and Lerner, 2015)
10. Walk the infant around the room; point and name objects. Parent can do the same with their device. (Rachel Barr and Lerner, 2015)
11. Give the infant a transitional object for comfort.
12. Eliminate or reduce other distractions such as TV or loud music.
13. Play games like pee-a-boo, sing songs, read a book, tell stories. The child wants to hear the parent's voice even if the child is not looking at the parent every moment.

Toddlers to preschoolers

Frequency: Daily contact for 15 minutes direct interaction and up to 60 minutes screen time.

Children this age have a lot of experience with seeing things on a screen. At first, they may not recognize the difference between a TV show and a live interaction with the parent. With repeated visits the child will learn the difference. Toddlers recognize their parents on the screen as well as seeing them in the same room. They are calmed down with video chats from parents versus phone calls or recordings. (Rachel Barr and Lerner, 2015) The child may touch the screen in an effort to touch the parent, this is OK. This may mean reconnecting with the parent and is a good sign the child is making a connection. Children this age have short attention spans and need to move a lot. As these young children are developing fast the adults will need to try different activities as what works one visit may not work on the next visit.

1. Have many different activities planned. Be willing to allow the child to change activities. They are seldom able to sit for an entire book or story.
2. The child may run out of the view on the screen. As much as possible ask the caregiver to follow the child. Or have the phone/tablet placed so the parent can see the entire room especially during the play time part of the visit. The child is likely to run back to the screen to interact and then back to playing.
3. Talk or play with the child if the visit is interrupted due to technical problems. The caregiver can make it a peek a boo type of game.
4. 15 minutes of direct interaction over 30 to 60 minutes is normal. Allow the child to play and the parent to watch the play. (Rachel Barr and Lerner, 2015)
5. The caregiver, parent and child will probably need to have a three-way interaction to keep the child engaged. Some of the joy at this age is watching the child play, learn and

⁴ <https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/FamilyTimeInterimPolicy.pdf>, WA State Family Time Interim Policy, March 2020.

- having fun. A good visit is not measured by how much the child talks directly to the parent. Just as with in-person visits much of the time is just allowing the child to play.
6. Use three or four-person virtual visits to include siblings or other important people in the child's life.
 7. As with all children eating together is a bonding activity. "Share" a snack or meal together.
 8. Children this age can learn from the adult on the screen. Teach letters, numbers, names of objects, etc. (Rachel Barr and Lerner, 2015)
 9. Some apps like Zoom allow the parent to select an activity from the internet (a book, a game, a virtual field trip) and this will also be displayed on the device that the caregiver is using.
 10. Parents, try asking children questions about what they are doing, such as: "Where are you going?" "What are you doing right now?" "That looks like fun!" "Where are you running to so fast?" (Washington State DCYS, 2020)
 11. Go with the flow of what children are doing rather than trying to gain their focus. (Washington State DCYS, 2020).
 12. Remember a child this age is becoming independent. They will have good days and bad days, times they want to interact and times they do not want to. This is normal. The adults should continue to have virtual visits even if the child occasionally does not want to interact.
 13. Come up with some playful activities that can be done over video beforehand. Some FaceTime apps have silly games and filters. Classics like telling [jokes or riddles](#), singing songs, [finger plays](#), peek-a-boo, and puppet shows are fun with all ages. With the caregiver's help, the child can gather things to show their parent or worker, such as art projects or favorite stuffed animals. Children and adults can "share" a snack over video. [Storytelling](#) is a powerful way to engage children. These do not need to be elaborate, pre-planned stories but can be as simple as an imaginary trip to the park. See our "Resources" section below for links to useful websites. For older children (approximately 5 years and up): Verbal games for verbal children can help avoid stale questions. Examples are, [Would You Rather](#), 20 Questions, Two Truths and a Lie, I Spy, and charades. [Pencil and paper games](#) such as Pictionary, tic-tac-toe, or Bingo are also fun for older children.⁵ (Cynthia Burnson, n.d.)
 14. Look for apps that allow interaction. EX: <https://caribu.com/>
 15. Follow the child's lead. If the child loses attention while listening to a book, switch to something more interactive. If you're using something mobile, like a phone or tablet, try a change of scenery by moving into another room or even outside. (Cynthia Burnson, n.d.)
 16. Caregivers set out toys for the child at the beginning of the visit, and engage in some pretend play with the child. (Washington State DCYS, 2020)

⁵ Cynthia Burnson, PhD. **Successful Video Visits With Young Children**. March 25, 2020

17. Caregiver, set up a teddy bear picnic and set the phone or computer with the parent up on a small chair so the child can serve them tea and those delicious pretend cookies. (Washington State DCYS, 2020)
18. Caregiver, keep in mind that remote visits will require your continued involvement to keep the interactions going, but try to watch for opportunities where you can fade into the background and let the parent engage with their child. (Washington State DCYS, 2020)
19. Children this age loves to show things off. Maybe the child can give the parent a tour of their room, their artwork, or their favorite toys. (Washington State DCYS, 2020)
20. Have a similar toy for the child and parent. Example playing with cars at the same time.
21. Record the parent reading a book. Send the recording and book to the child. Read the book together. Caregiver can play the recording other times when the parent is not available.
22. High quality interactive screen time is not the same as screen time where the child only watches a show. If the caregiver is limiting screen time, virtual visits should not be considered counted as part of the child's daily screen time.
23. Use age appropriate resources to explain COVID19 to the toddler.
24. Children this age have magical thinking. They will often blame themselves for why their parent cannot have in-person visit. Remind the child frequently why the visits have changed.

School age

Frequency: 30-60 minutes 3 to 4 times a week. Daily calls are better.

School age children will be impacted by the lose of school, teachers, friends, and the routines created by this. They will know about the virus and some of the impacts it is having on the people in their lives. Being asked to stay inside or at home will be difficult for most children this age. They know about smart phones, the internet and often know more about available options and activities. Get the child involved in planning the virtual visit. Answer their questions about the virus, your health and what is happening. Children this age usually do not understand death as we do as adults. What seems like a short time to adults seems like FOREVER to school age children.

1. There are many activities on websites that are designed for children of different grades. Make the visits fun.
2. Check with the child's teacher or caregiver about how the online teaching is occurring for the child. Support the child to do their homework. Apps like Zoom allow the child to share their screen with a parent so they can view the homework. Or the parent may be able to obtain information for parents being shared by the school. Or have the caregiver or child take a photo of the homework and send it to the parent.
3. Teach the child a new skill during the call: learn a song, play a musical instrument, a dance, a religious prayer, etc.

4. Plan for the next visit together. What does the child wish to do? What can the child teach the parent?
5. Have visits with other relatives, siblings, friends, or pets involved.
6. Show the child where you are, their bedroom, their yard so they can see that these things are still there.
7. Set up a contest or game between the child and yourself about what you will do until your next visit.
8. Advocate that your child has contact with siblings and friends during this time. Have joint visits with siblings. Allow them to have virtual visits with friends.
9. Many of the ideas for younger children also work for this age. Read to the child or have them read to the parent. Share meals. Tell stories.
10. Talk to the child about their emotions and fears.
11. Dance or play a physical game together with your cell phones moving with the person.
12. Have the child share their screen and show the parent what they do on the internet, apps they use, music programs, games, chatting with friends, etc.
13. Talk to the child about COVID19. See resources listed above.
14. Even at this age children may regress in their developmental abilities as a reaction to the stress and trauma. Help the child understand why this may be happening and that you love them.
15. Crazy hat or T-shirt – plan to wear something crazy on the next visit.
16. Memory box: Child or parent collects items or takes notes between visits. They share their memories during the visit.
17. Allow time for free chat – nothing is planned.

Teenagers to young adults

Frequency: Once or twice a week for as much time as the youth needs. Allow the youth to have a say in frequency, length and when the virtual visits occur.

Youth can understand the concerns and issues related to COVID19. The adults need to explore with the youth the questions and concerns they have. Do not assume if they do not bring up the issue that there are no issues. Losing connections with school and friends have a large impact on youth, research indicates that connections with friends is strongest at this age. Some youth may have lost a job, income, or housing. Past traumas may increase the stress of how to handle today's issues. They are looking for stability, concrete actions to address problems and reassurance that they have a support system that will help them through this time.

1. Talk about day to day activities.
2. Ask about school and how online learning is going. Support the youth's learning. If appropriate contact the youth's teacher.
3. Advocate that the youth can have time and resources to maintain connections with their friends.
4. Create a book for each other while contact is limited, like a journal.

5. Cook together - parents can talk a child through making a favorite family dish. Or do other learning activities together via the internet. Household tasks, hobbies, languages, music, repairs, sports, etc.
6. Check with the youth about their therapy and how it is going (or not). Advocate for the youth to have therapy. There can be virtual visits with their therapists or treatment group.
7. Do a three-way call with the youth's caregiver to check in with each other.
8. Be open about your concerns, health and how you are handling the current situation.
9. Have the youth teach you something or show you how to use internet apps.
10. Check if the youth has the resources they need: food, housing, money, etc.
11. Youth may be in denial that they are vulnerable to the virus. Their desire to see friends is strong. Their need for independence and privacy is strong. The caregiver and parent need to talk to the youth about making safe decisions. The youth can literally walk away. Talk about the tough subjects: smoking, drug use, sex, and just hanging out with friends may be dangerous at this time.

Special Needs children

These children have difficulties regulating their behaviors and reciprocal exchange can be challenging. VV is not a passive process. Help the child be able to have interactions with parent on VV. They can learn to become familiar with VV, but it will take more time and patience. It is matters and still worth trying.⁶ American with Disability Act may apply to visits for these children: The requirement to make reasonable accommodation.

1. Consult with an expert on the child's needs to gain insight on how to make VV work for this child.
2. They need more active engagement and support.
3. When parent also has developmental disabilities that make it hard for them to engage.
4. We need to be creative and help the pt.
5. Help prepare the parent to have a plan on how be successful on VV.
6. Ask the child what they see and hear.
7. Relax the should nots.

Resources for engaging parents in virtual visits

Engaging relative caregivers: general ideas on engaging these caregivers

https://www.aecf.org/blog/engaging-kinship-caregivers-with-joseph-crumbley/?utm_source=eblast&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Child-Welfare/

Video examples of Virtual visits (These are simulations. The children in these videos are NOT children in the child welfare system.)

⁶ QPI webinar. May 5. Dr. Kate Rosenblum University of Michigan

1. Reading an online book to a toddler. The grey image of a person on the screen is the professional observing the visit. The worker is deliberately not showing her face. <https://youtu.be/x-B7Tvd-Egc>
2. A Visit Supervisor helps a birth father and foster father meet and discuss what is happening with the children and then having a virtual meeting with two siblings. <https://www.fosteringconnectionsforfamilies.com/post/supportive-remote-visitation>

Handout for parents to learn about VV and other non in-person contacts. Long Distance Activities for Parents. <http://www.wentztraining.com/>

Technology Resources

Low or No Cost Technology Options for Virtual Participation and Contacts. Many new resources are being made available as the “stay at home” orders are lengthened. The list below does not include all options. Continue to check with your worker and check the internet for resources.

It is critical that ALL our families (birth, resource, relative, etc.) have access to some level of internet access. Having a cell phone does not equal having internet access and a data plan larger enough to support virtual visits.

Phones and computers:

Title IVB and IVE funding can be used to purchase phones, equipment and internet access. Check with your office what is available.

The child’s school may provide computers and visitation service providers maybe providing internet access to their clients.

Internet programs and apps: Each program has pros and cons. Check the program for details. Most programs have an online video tutorial.

- Facetime - Video Calling
 - o Get it on: Apple Products from the Apple App Store
 - o Cost: Free
 - o This is a video calling app that can only be downloaded from the Apple App store for video calling other Apple products
- Snapchat - Video Calling, Text Messaging, Video Messaging
 - o Get it on: Android and Apple mobile devices.
 - o Cost: Free
 - o This is a video messaging app that allows all messages and conversations to not be saved.
- Whatsapp - Video Calling, Text Messaging
 - o Get it on: Computers, and Android and Apple mobile devices.
 - o Cost: Free
 - o Whatsapp is an internationally used messaging app that is widely popular globally.

- Skype - Video Calling, Text Messaging o Get it on: Computers, web browsers, and Android and Apple mobile devices. o Cost: Free o Skype is a widely known video calling platform that uses Microsoft's AI technology for features such as live translations.
- Hangouts - Text Messaging, Video Calling o Get it on: Web browsers, and Android and Apple mobile devices. o Cost: Free o Google Hangouts is a robust communication platform on the web.
- Duo - Video Calling o Get it on: Android and Apple mobile devices o Cost: Free o This is the Google analog to Apple Facetime. But can be used on Android phones and iPhones.
- Signal/Telegram - Encrypted Text Messaging o Get it on: Android and Apple mobile devices o Cost: Free o Both Signal and Telegram are messaging applications that use end to end encryption.
- Facebook Messenger - Video Calling, Text Messaging o Get it on: Computers, web browsers, and Android and Apple mobile devices o Cost: Free o This is a communication service tied to Facebook's social network.
- Microsoft Teams - Video Calling, Text Messaging, Community Management, Productivity o Get it on: Computers, web browsers, and Android and Apple mobile devices. o Cost: Free o Teams is Microsoft's chat productivity application. It allows for collaborating and staying in contact with multiple people within the team.
- Discord - Video Calling, Text Messaging, Community Management o Get it on: Computers, and Android and Apple mobile devices o Cost: Free o Discord is a robust community management tool. Create servers or rooms for different interests or teams to communicate and keep in touch.
- FreeConference/FreeConferenceCall/FreeConferenceCalling - Conference Calling Service that is Free o Get it on: Create the account online using an email address and use the service with a phone. o Cost: Free o Each of the listed above are not typos. Each is an individual company that provides conference calling for free.
- Google Voice - Cloud Based Phone Number o Get it on: Computers, and Android and Apple mobile devices o Cost: Free if used to make calls within the United States. Calls to other countries have a cost per minute. o Google Voice is a cost-effective way to have a phone number and make phone calls so long as you have access to the internet.
- GotoMeeting o Get it on: Computers, and Android and Apple mobile devices o Cost: Free for two weeks. o Video conference calling for many people
- Marco Polo o Get it on: iphone and ipad o Cost: free o "video walkie talkie," a video chat app that lets you send quick messages back and forth.

- Zoom o Get it on: Computers, and Android and Apple mobile devices o Cost: Free. o Video conference calling for many people, allows screen sharing, and white board.

Internet/WIFI

In response to COVID-19 developments, some internet providers are offering free services to low-income families and households with students.

April 1st Google announced that they will set up 100,000 wifi spots and free broadband in California. Check ongoing news for how this will be made available. Check with your state to see if there are similar programs occurring.

Free Comcast Xfinity internet Comcast Xfinity is currently offering its Internet Essentials program free for two months to new customers. The internet provider is also automatically increasing speeds for all Internet Essentials customers.

Comcast Xfinity Wi-Fi hotspots are also open and free to use by anyone. Free internet for students from Charter Spectrum Households with students K–12 or university students can sign up for a new Charter Spectrum internet account to get the first two months of internet with speeds up to 100 Mbps for free. Installation fees will be waived for those who qualify for the offer. Call 1-844-488-8395 to enroll. Spectrum Wi-Fi hotspots are also currently open and free to use. Free internet for students from Altice internet providers Suddenlink and Optimum are offering 60 days of free internet service for households with K–12 or college students. Internet speeds are up to 30 Mbps if you do not already have access to a home internet plan. To sign up, call 1-866-200-9522 if you live in an area with Optimum internet service, or call 1-888-633-0030 if you live in an area with Suddenlink internet service.

Free low-income internet from Cox Until May 12, 2020, Cox is offering the first month of its low-income internet program, Connect2Compete, for free. The internet service is also providing free phone and remote desktop support for technical support during that time. For more information from the college, go to: www.highspeedinternet.com/resources/are-there-government-programs-to-help-me-get-internet-service

EveryoneOn

<https://www.everyoneon.org/lowcost-offers>

EveryoneOn is a non-profit program launched to provide basic Internet connectivity to American households, especially those with school going kids. Many local internet companies are who offer free or cheap service are listed on this site.

EveryoneOn works in collaboration with major ISPs, educational institutes, and communities to bridge America's digital divide.

Free Wi-Fi Service from Educational Broadband

Educational Broadband Service is an initiative by [Federal Communications Commission](#) (FCC), communities and educational institutes to provide free Internet at home.

Under this system, lots of schools, colleges, and universities are providing free WI-FI to students.

Check with the child's school if they are providing internet access.

Wi-Fi Anywhere from US-Municipal

Most municipalities in the US provide something called Metropolitan Area Network (MAN) or simply Municipal Wi-Fi. Access to MAN is free. Check with your local government if they have this. They often have a map where there are hot spots. Unfortunately, this usually means leaving one's home to get to a hot spot.

