

Guidelines for Parent-Child Visitation During COVID-19 Outbreak

The novel coronavirus, COVID-19, poses an unprecedented challenge to the day-to-day operations of the Department of Children and Families and the children and families we serve. In order to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 during this state of emergency, we will need to be innovative in the ways parents and children can maintain contact and connection with one another, while limiting in-person interactions as much as possible. Parent-child visits are important for child well-being and to strengthen the parent-child relationship. This can be an especially stressful time for children in placement and for their parents who may be worried how they are doing. The following guidelines provide recommendations on how to facilitate parent-child visits through video conference and precautions to take when an in-person visit must occur.

Talk to the Child's Caregiver and the Parents

Reach out to both the child's caregiver and the child's parents about visitation. Because this is such an unprecedented situation, it is important to spend time discussing how video conference visits help to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and offer more flexibility in how frequently and when visits can occur. You will encounter situations where parents would prefer an in-person visit or caregivers express worry over facilitating a visit alone. Talk with your supervisor, manager, and the DCF attorney assigned to the case about this. Together you can devise a plan to work through any challenges and determine if an in-person visit is needed.

Video Conference Visits

Depending on the type of phone/computer/tablet parents or caregivers have, the level of supervision needed during visitation, and the caregiver's comfort level in facilitating visitation alone, you can determine if FaceTime or WebEx will work best. If you have children placed in Departmental Foster Care, the foster family's family resource worker can also help prepare foster parents for a video conference visit. To ensure video conference visits go smoothly, talk to parents and caregivers beforehand about:

- who is participating
- utilizing a quiet space in their home if possible
- any case specific rules or guidelines, if applicable

This type of visit may feel different for parents and children. Talk to them about ways they can engage and interact during a video visit, like an activity they can do with their child to encourage engagement.

In-Person Visits

In talking with children and parents, you may identify situations where an in-person visit is requested or needed to support the emotional well-being of children. Talk to your supervisor, manager and the attorney assigned to the case and together you can develop a plan.

If you identify that an in-person visit needs to occur, talk with the child's caregiver and anyone who will be participating in the visit. Ask the following screening questions regarding the caregiver's household and the parent's household:

- Are you or anyone in your household sick with fever (Higher than 100.3° F) or a newly developed respiratory illness such as cough, shortness of breath, or sore throat?
- Have you traveled internationally or domestically (i.e., within the past 14 days) to a COVID-19-affected geographic area?
- Have you had close contact with a person diagnosed with COVID-19 in the past 14 days?
- Have you or has anyone in your household been [directed to self-isolate or quarantine](#)?

If someone in either household answers yes to one of these questions, talk with your supervisor and manager. We also recommend reaching out to the DCF Medical Team to discuss the situation further. You may need to reschedule visitation, offer an extended make-up visitation at a later date, or do a video conference visit instead. When this occurs, let the DCF attorney assigned to the case know.

**Safety
Precautions to
Take During
Parent-Child
Visits**

When visits occur at a DCF office, make sure all participants have been asked the screening questions listed above. Talk to participants about universal precautions they can take before and after the visit, like washing your hands and not touching your face. Whenever possible, have visits occur in rooms with adequate space to ensure social distancing (keeping a physical distance of a minimum 6 feet) is practiced. Utilize personal protective gear, when appropriate.

If visits are occurring in the family home, talk with the caregivers about universal precautions they can take before and after the visit.