

1.0 HOUR SELF-STUDY

Licensed foster parents can read the following article and earn foster parent training credit by filling out the quiz and returning it to the Alaska Center for Resource Families, 815 Second AVE STE 202, Fairbanks AK, 99701 or FAX to 1-907-479-9666.

Making Digital Visits Go Smoothly*

Written by the Alaska Center for Resource Families

Why Is Family Contact Going Digital (and how to adapt)?

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused the State of Alaska Office of Children's Services to expand family contact through video and phone visitations and extremely cautionary face-to-face. Consistent family contact is vital to reunification efforts and resource families are elemental in making this work! The child in your home needs your help and support to be able to make these visits a success. Remote and digital visits are just doing it a different way! This guide suggests ways to help your digital visits go more smoothly and help you make the most of technology. **This is an abridged version of our publication that hits highlights for our newsletter. Please access the full publication on our website or contact our office for a copy to be sent to you.*

The State of Alaska OCS has provided guidelines asking foster parents to help facilitate and supervise distance and digital visits. Regular daily phone calls between parents and children are recommended. Foster parents are asked to document the date and time of contacts, any issues or concerns raised during the contacts, and send the caseworker a weekly summary.

Some highlights to keep in mind:

- **Familiarize yourself and practice** using multiple types of devices and apps the child or youth may be using during a visit; and have basic understanding of the different communication technologies available- FaceBook Messenger, Skype, Zoom, Facetime, WhatsApp, Phone Calls and Texting are just a few of the popular means to communicate by distance.
- **Remember:** Family contact activities should be personalized and based on the child's personality, social-emotional development, and any specific goals for family contact.
- **Developing Realistic Expectations...** there are going to be bumps in the road. Expect delays and dropped calls. Even with the best planning children will be tired and there will be conflicts in schedules. Birth parent may express disappointment in how the visit went or had to be facilitated. Be ready for that and be flexible. Family contact works when the case team is helping in efforts to make the visit safe and enjoyable.
- **Be creative and patient** with what may seem like limited or challenging options for contact. Keeping a young child or a reluctant youth engaged during a visit is not always going to mean on-going dialogue. It does mean finding topics of interest or creating environments that help with engagement. A birth parent has some responsibility in being engaged, but the communication method may be new for them too. Not every visit will go perfect, but each positive connection builds hope and supports reunification.
- **Bring your trauma-informed lens** into view and be prepared for strong emotions before, during and after a distance visit. Create opportunities and space for the child to express emotions, validate their concerns and help them make a plan for when emotions or triggering situations may come up.
- **Some basic caution** to provide safety and protect your privacy...take in the background and the general environment the visit is happening in. Locate or create a space that the child may be free to move around and still protect you from personal disclosure. If they are moving around, make sure they are free from trip hazards or other items that may block view or sound. Make sure your personal identifying information is out of view.

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