

Virtual Visits

Recommendations by age and Access Resources

By Rose Wentz

Newborns and Infants

Frequency: Daily contact for 10 to 15 minutes

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 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.

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.*
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.*
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.*
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.*
5. When the infant is old enough to sit in a chair or high chair 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.
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.#
8. Talk with each other about the baby's likes and dislikes and current routines.#

Toddlers to preschoolers

Frequency: Daily contact for 15 to 30 minutes

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. The child may touch the screen in an effort to touch the parent. This may mean recalling the parent but 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 plan. 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 to see the entire room.
3. 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 them play, learn and having fun. A good visit is not measured by how much the child talks directly to the parent. Just as in face-to-face visits much of the time is just allowing the child to play.
4. As with all children eating together is a bonding activity. "Share" a snack or meal together.
5. 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.
6. 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?" #
7. Go with the flow of what children are doing rather than trying to gain their focus.#
8. 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.*

9. 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.*
10. Caregiver, set out toys for the child at the beginning of the visit, and engage in some pretend play with the child. #
11. 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.#
12. 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.#
13. 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.#

School age

Frequency: 30-45 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 options and activities on the WWW. 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 you to do until your next visit.
8. Advocate that your child have contact with siblings and friends during this time.

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 are capable of understanding 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. 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. Create a book for each other while contact is limited, like a journal.
4. Baking or cooking together - parents can talk a child through making a favorite family dish. Or do other learning activities together via the internet.
5. Check with the youth about their therapy and how it is going (or not). Advocate for the youth to have therapy.
6. Do a three way call with the youth's caregiver to check in with each other.
7. Be open about your concerns, health and how you are handling the current situation.
8. Have the youth teach you something or show you how to use internet apps.

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

Washington State DCYS Family Time and Sibling and Relative Visits Interim Policy, March 2020

RESOURCES: Low or No Cost Technology Options for Virtual Participation and Contact

Phones:

Check this website for phones

<https://www.freegovernmentcellphones.net/states/washington-government-cell-phone-providers>

Do you know of any resources in WA state for free or reduce costs for smart phone or tablets specific for foster care families?

Internet programs and apps:

- 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.

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

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 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 it's 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-internetservice

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](http://www.fcc.gov) (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.