



## How to Support Children and Youth During Remote Supervised Visitation Services\*

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**\*Release Date: August 20, 2020.** The information known about COVID-19 is rapidly evolving. Please be advised that new information is being released to the public very rapidly, and updates to these considerations may need to be taken into account. For additional information on

We recognize that during this time of a global pandemic, there is no clear path or direct guidance on what will happen next. The reality of this uncertainty will require us to be responsive as changes occur in the outbreak, and new information becomes available. Programs should be thinking about a continuum of approaches that can be adopted and implemented as needed. It may not be feasible or safe to create one way in which services are available during this time. Programs may experience closures, re-opening, and partial closures over the coming weeks, months, or years. This reality will require programs to have a variety of service options available that can easily be modified to account for your community's changing needs.

Families will also come to supervised visitation and safe exchange programs with different and often changing levels of risk and concern around safety. Offering remote supervised visitation will continue to be an important offering for supervised visitation providers. We are putting forth this publication to support supervised visitation and safe exchange (SV&SE) programs that continue to navigate remote service delivery and



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want to strengthen their response and support to infants, children, and youth.

Children and youth accessing supervised visitation need trauma-informed, developmentally appropriate approaches to care that center around their safety and well-being. This is true for in-person and remote visits as well. During this unpredictable and unprecedented time, as families navigate quarantine and COVID-19, it is especially important to support children and youth through a new way of visiting their parents.

Though the impacts of the pandemic are felt differently by individual families and communities, we are all experiencing a stressful, traumatic global event. Some people are managing well, and some are really struggling - and many are in between. This goes for children and youth as well. With care, attention, and thoughtfulness, you can bring compassion and connection to the way you monitor remote visits.

Because this time may be one of the most disruptive transitions that most children and youth have ever faced, it's important for supervised visitation services to offer transparency, predictability, routine, flexibility, and adaptability in our service delivery. We want to ensure our approaches aren't changing dramatically, though our methods (remote visits) may be.



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### About COVID-19

Because children and youth may ask questions about COVID-19, you will want to be prepared. During orientations and check-in with parents, you should explore how each family is talking to their child(ren) about COVID-19, and partner with them to support their children.

We are all struggling with finding the right language to discuss this traumatic time. Here is a sample explanation that might be helpful to consider. Please adapt as needed for different developmental stages.

*“A virus is something that can make people sick, like when you get the cold or have a fever. Right now, there is a certain kind of virus, making a lot of people sick. Most people will be ok, especially kids. But we are all being extra careful to not share germs: we’re washing our hands a lot, wearing masks, coughing into our elbows, and keeping distance from each other. The doctors, nurses, and scientists are working extra hard right now to keep us safe and healthy. The grown-ups, including me, will tell you what we need to do to stay healthy.”*

Ensuring our support to families is trauma-informed and responsive is essential during this time. Care and compassion that accounts for the unique needs of each child will be crucial to the resilience and strength they



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will need throughout these challenging times. In addition to the trauma-informed approaches, here are some considerations for remote visits.

### Trauma-Informed Approaches for Remote Visits

- Social and emotional connection is crucial.
- Children and youth may be more clingy, distant, or irritable, with changes in sleeping habits, hygiene, and appetite.
- Children and their parents need information shared in a simple, straightforward manner, especially during this time.
- Predictability and routine may look different during this time, and they still matter.
- As always, you want to ensure that you are calm before you intervene in escalating situations with children and parents.
- Use affirming language:

*“This time is hard for me, too. Many parents are sharing that parenting is hard right now also. We can talk more if that would be helpful.”*

### Preparing Children and Youth for Remote Visits

Just as programs will want to conduct an orientation to help prepare children and youth for in-person visits with their non-custodial parent, it is recommended that you prepare them for remote visits, focusing on the particulars of this new format. Visitation monitors will want to consider the following practices.



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- Explain any new guidelines that will be in place for remote visits. Here is sample language that might be helpful:

*“We probably won’t be having visits like this forever. For right now, while we all work on staying safe and healthy, visits are happening like this. As soon as we know when visits are going back to the old way, we will let you know.”*
- Normalize the situation. For example,

*“Many families who do visits are doing them like this with us - not just your family. It’s one way we are all working together to make sure we stay safe and healthy while the doctors and scientists work on the virus.”*
- Share the logistics of how the remote visits will work. Take time to show children and youth what the new platform can do.
- Practice visits with children and the survivor parent.
- Make it clear that if they want to stop or pause the visit at any time, they can let you know and explain how that will work.
- Share that if they want to pause the visit to talk with you, they may and explain how you can support taking a break during a remote visit.
- Share with kids that this new and temporary way of visiting is different, and there might be things they like and don’t like about it, and you want to hear about both during check-ins.
- Remind children that tech issues are common and may arise, and are not particular to them.



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- Discuss what may happen if there is a tech issue (e.g., when a video freezes or drops, etc.).
- Practice all these new functions with children and youth.

### Strategies for Establishing Routine and Predictability During Remote Visits

It feels like everything is in a state of change as we weather the storm of COVID-19. Not knowing what comes next adds a layer of stress. For all children and youth, routine and predictability help them navigate a world primarily designed for adults. Young people living with trauma benefit even more from routine and predictability, as key features of trauma are feelings of chaos and loss of control. Even in times of change and unrest--like this pandemic--, there are creative ways to build in routine. Even small routines can be meaningful to children and youth. Monitors and parents should explore the following considerations.

- Encourage both custodial parents and visiting parents to adhere to the routines they had surrounding in-person visits as much as possible.
- Before visiting, share with the visiting parent the reason for establishing routine and predictability during remote visitation is important to your SV&SE program (sample script):

*“Stopping the spread of the virus has created a lot of disruption that will be stressful for many children. Routine and predictability help all people experiencing stress, but especially*



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*children. Would you like to talk about some ideas for maintaining routine while we do visits like this?"*

Some parents will have ideas for how to create routines for remote visits. If a parent requests support or asks for suggestions, here are some ideas you can share:

- Someone could ring a quiet bell when the visit starts, five minutes before it ends, and again at the end of the visit.
- Visiting parents establish a routine of asking their children questions about their day or anything else they connect over.
- Everyone could have virtual high fives at certain points (e.g., at the beginning or end of each remote visit).
- Have a scheduled storytime.
- Center staff could always give the same time countdowns during a remote visit (e.g., halfway done, 10 minutes left, five, all done, time to say goodbye, etc.)

### **Intervening with Parents to Support Children and Youth**

One way you can be supportive of children during remote visits is to think ahead about how you will intervene with parents when needed. For example, if a verbal intervention happens in the presence of children (phone or video), keep your language concise and as narrative as possible, being gentle and firm. Here are some sample scripts to adapt:



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*“Mr. Jones, I know it’s easy to forget, but if you recall, we talked about not questioning your kids about ...xyz.” “Ms. Smith, can you talk to me about the frustration you are sharing, and perhaps together we can come up with a solution?” “Mr. Harden, I wonder if you can ask Timmy what he’s feeling right now?”*

### **Planting Seeds with Parents to Encourage Healthy and Safe Relationships with Children**

During this time of increased stress, it is helpful for visiting parents and custodial parents to hear messages of support and affirmation that normalize the parenting struggles they may be experiencing. Planting seeds like this can ultimately support children because it can decrease parental shame and isolation. Here is some sample language you could adapt:

*“Many parents all over the world are sharing that they are losing patience with their children during this challenging time. It’s normal and to be expected. If you worry that your frustration is getting hard to manage, there is no reason to be ashamed. We can talk about ways to cope, or I can help you find some resources you might find helpful.”*

This is an unprecedented time for both families and visitation programs. We are learning together how to adapt and respond to the new conditions and how to provide this life saving and essential service to survivors and children. Remember that your calm and steady presence makes a big





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difference in the lives of the families you serve, especially during this challenging time. Your work matters!

As we co-create a new temporary reality to safely provide supervised visitation services in times of crisis, Inspire Action (in partnership with OVW) is committed to the health and well-being of each of you and your communities, and take our responsibility for supporting you and your programs seriously. Please contact Inspire Action staff for any support or resource needs. For all Office on Violence Against Women funded programs, please reach out to your OVW program specialist if you have questions regarding any changes in delivering services.

For additional information on creative activities to do with infants, children, and youth during remote supervised visitation, please download [“Creative Ideas Parent can do with their Children During Remote Supervised Visitation”](#) posted on Inspire Action for Social Change’s website: <http://www.inspireactionforsocialchange.org/covid-19svsupport>