



To: DCS All Staff

From: Mike Faust, Director

Re: Requirements for Monthly DCS Specialist Contact with Children

Date: March 19, 2020 (revised March 30, 2020)

The Department of Child Safety is required to make monthly contact with children in out-of-home care and their caregivers to provide for child safety and well-being. In current practice, the DCS Specialist contacts the child and the caregiver every calendar month through an in-person contact at the caregiver's home.

Given the continued necessity to ensure child safety, and the growing need to practice social distancing for the health and well-being of ourselves and these same children, the Children's Bureau has issued updated guidelines regarding monthly child contact: During specific time-limited circumstances, such as a declaration of an emergency that prohibits or strongly discourages person-to-person contact for public health reasons, the Department may waive the in-person requirement of the monthly contact and instead accomplish this through use of videoconferencing.

Effective immediately, and lasting through **Thursday, April 30th, 2020**:

For children in out-of-home care:

- The Department will make the required monthly contacts with children in out-of-home care and their caregivers using virtual technology (video conferencing). If video conferencing is not available for one or both parties, the Department will make the required contacts by telephone. The use of virtual contacts does not change the Department's duty to ensure child safety; the child must still be closely assessed. This directive is time limited and will be revisited on a weekly basis to determine if a continuation is required beyond April 30th, 2020.
- The DCS Specialist shall contact the child's caregiver to arrange the virtual contact to occur through Department provided technology. Acceptable technology for use is currently available on the DCS Specialist's laptop, tablet, or Department issued telephone: Skype, WebEx, and Google Duo.
- If a concern about child safety arises during a monthly contact, or the child cannot be reached via virtual technology, or the child is non-verbal and video conferencing is not available, the decision of whether the child must be seen in-person will be determined through a Supervision Conference with the Program Manager.

For children in-home assessed safe (no safety plan necessary to manage dangers):

- The Department will make the required monthly contacts with safe children living in-home and their parents or guardians virtually using video conferencing. If video conferencing is not available for one or both parties, the Department will make the required contacts by telephone. The use of virtual contacts does not change the Department's duty to ensure child safety; the child must still be closely assessed. This directive is time limited and will be revisited on a weekly basis to determine if a continuation is required beyond April 30th, 2020.
- The DCS Specialist shall contact the child's parent to arrange the virtual contacts to occur through Department provided technology. Acceptable technology for use is currently available on the DCS Specialist's laptop, tablet, and Department issued telephone: Skype, WebEx, and Google Duo.
- If a concern about child safety arises during a monthly contact, or the child cannot be reached via virtual technology, or the child is non-verbal and video conferencing is not available, the decision of whether the child must be seen in-person will be determined through a Supervision Conference with the Program Manager.
- In-home service providers will make the required monthly contacts with safe children living in-home and their parents or guardians virtually using video conferencing. If video conferencing is not available for one or both parties, the provider will make the required contacts by telephone. The use of virtual contacts does not change the provider's duty to support child safety and well-being; the child must still be closely assessed. This directive is time limited and will be revisited on a weekly basis to determine if a continuation is required beyond April 30th, 2020.
- If a concern about child safety arises during a monthly contact, or the child cannot be reached via virtual technology, or the child is non-verbal and video conferencing is not available, the service provider will notify the DCS Specialist or DCS Supervisor.

For children in-home assessed unsafe (safety plan necessary to manage dangers):

- The Department will make the required monthly contacts with children in-home and assessed unsafe, and their parents or guardians, in-person.
- The requirement that the assigned DCS Specialist must conduct the in-person contact is waived, but should be followed whenever possible. If the DCS Specialist conducting the child contact is not the assigned DCS Specialist, the assigned Specialist must communicate the following to the Specialist conducting the contact: dangers in the home, diminished protective capacities, safety plan, and behavioral goals.
- If a contracted service provider staff other than the previously assigned provider staff is making the child contact, the provider staff must also be given the information about dangers in the home, diminished protective capacities, safety plan, and behavioral goals.

Documentation of the contact using virtual technology shall be entered into case notes:

- Follow the Child and Caregiver Visitation Note Outline to document all contacts with the child and caregiver, using the Case Notes window designated as Child Contact type.
- Select the "In Person" contact type radio button.
- If the virtual visit occurs while the child is in the caregiver's home, select "In Placement Contact."
- Highlight the names of all parties, including the DCS Specialist, in the "Contact With" list on the Case Notes window.
- Begin the note with the following statement, "This contact was completed using virtual technology as a result of an in-person waiver during a declared public health emergency to protect against COVID-19."

This directive is effective March 19, 2020, and replaces any prior directive or policy on this matter until April 30, 2020 or until further notice is provided.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Faust". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Mike Faust
Director