



April 03, 2025

Additional considerations when incorporating virtual parenting time and other family contact in to the Family Contact Plan:

Pros

- Provides opportunities for more regular contact
- Can help support establishing or re-establishing a normal parent-child relationship
- Permits face-to-face interaction
- Offers more flexible scheduling
- Allows parents the flexibility to attend important appointments or other events that they may not be able to attend in person
- Allows the parent to interact with the child in the child's natural setting
- Supervision may feel less obtrusive than during in-person supervised contact

Cons

- Lack of physical contact
- May be difficult to keep a child engaged during the contact
- Technical issues can create challenges
- May feel impersonal

Planning Virtual Family Contact and Parenting Time

Guidance and Resources to Support Virtual Parenting Time and Other Family Contact.

In-person parenting time, which allows for physical connection, is essential for forming strong bonds and strengthening relationships. However, virtual contact opportunities can make the periods between in-person contact easier and can strengthen the bond between the parent/caregiver and their child.

Additionally, contact through virtual means may be an option for families who live far from each other, have busy and/or conflicting schedules, or are not able to engage in in-person contact due to court orders or in some instances of hospitalization, treatment, or incarceration.

Keep in mind that in-person contact is the priority, and virtual contact should only be used in the following circumstances:

- To supplement in-person contact;
- In cases where distance is too great and costly to provide regular consistent in-person contact;
- When the parent or child is hospitalized, detained or incarcerated and virtual contact is the only option;
- When virtual contact is the only approved contact per Court Order.

Preparation is Key for Successful Virtual Parenting Time and Family Contact

Prepare the parent for the virtual contact:

- Prior to contact, work with the parent and out-of-home caregiver in developing talking points on what to say and do to support a child who wants in-person contact and is sad or angry.
- Encourage the parent to talk positively about the situation, and sound energetic and excited about having contact with the child.
- Talk with the parent after the visit so he/she has a time to express emotions of sadness, disappointment, or anger about the situation.
- Provide information on how bonding occurs, including the importance of hearing and/ or seeing parent(s), to encourage the parent's participation in virtual contact.
- Discuss the child's developmental stage to assist the parent in identifying activities and/or topics to discuss.
- Acknowledge that virtual contact will feel different and may be awkward. Discuss in advance that the child may have a hard time staying engaged.

Prepare the child to make the most of their virtual contact:

- Identify the person who will explain the virtual visits to the child, and what the person will say. Be reassuring, nurturing and empathetic.
- Before each visit, in a way the child will understand, tell the child that they are about to see/ talk to their parent! Answer all of the child's questions to the best of your ability.

All relationships need some in-person, physical contact—particularly those between a parent and young child. Virtual visitation simply cannot meet this need.

Tips and Guidelines for Planning Virtual Contact

Family Contact Plans, including parenting time specific plans and plans that include virtual contact should be developed with the child's needs in mind, including social, emotional, and developmental needs. All contact between the parent, child, and other family members should be planned in the best interest of the child.

Arrange virtual contact to feel natural while occurring at a length and frequency that matches the child's developmental level.

- Consider shorter and more frequent virtual visits for younger children.
- Consider whether contact needs supervision to ensure safety during virtual contact.
- Determine the most appropriate person to facilitate contact to meet the needs of the child, such as an Out-of-Home Caregiver or DCS Case Aide.

Ages of children	Time of day that parenting time may feel natural	Possible Activities
Infants	Tummy time	Encouragement through Tummy Time; make silly faces and sounds; ask the caregiver of the baby the last time the baby ate and what they ate; talk to the child through a diaper change; talk to the baby about their development "oh look you almost rolled over!"
Toddlers and young children (ages 2-6)	Getting ready for bed	Play Show and Tell; play Eye Spy; play with toys; read books together; color or draw pictures; have the child share about their routines; practice colors, shapes, letters, and numbers.
Children (ages 7-12)	After-school time or bedtime story routine	Talk about how their school day went, friendships, activities they are engaged in; play video games; help with homework.
Teens (ages 13-18)	Late evening after school and activities/work	Talk about school and relationships, plan as they are getting older, work or other activities; engage in an interest the teen has such as music, doodling, creating content.

For Information on activities and resources to support virtual contact please review [Child and Youth Activity Resources \(CSO-2390\)](#).

Review the following guidelines to develop a thorough plan for virtual parenting time and other virtual contact for the families you are working with:

Guidelines to consider when establishing a virtual parenting time and other family contact plan:

What platform will be used?	Determine the best platform for the parent and child to connect virtually (i.e. TEAMS, FaceTime, WhatsApp, phone call, etc.) and ensure that all parties understand how to log in and use the platform. Work with all parties to provide the most cost-effective access to a virtual platform as possible. Ensure that the platform chosen is secure and compliant with all necessary legal requirements.
Who will facilitate the virtual session?	Determine if the Out-of-Home Caregiver, responsible adult, or DCS case aide will facilitate the virtual contact. Make sure to ask about the identified facilitator's scheduling needs when developing a virtual contact plan.
Schedule: when and how often will this contact take place?	Consistency is key for relationship building. Determine a consistent schedule between all parties, including the days of the week contact will occur, and the frequency and duration of the virtual contact.
What happens when there's a technical issue?	Develop a plan between all parties to address technical issues that may arise, including assisting the child to resolve the issue on their end as needed.
How do we maintain privacy for the parties, while also ensuring that the child is safe during the virtual contact?	Work with all parties involved to ensure that their privacy needs and boundaries are identified prior to establishing the virtual contact plan. Make sure to respect all parties privacy and boundaries throughout virtual contact, and adjust as needed. Further, if supervision is required, the reason supervision is needed should be discussed (i.e. to ensure that the conversation is not harmful to the emotional needs of the child) along with specifics of how supervision will be provided on the child's side of the virtual contact.
What happens if the child does not stay engaged?	Discuss the reality that it may be difficult for the child to stay engaged during the entire virtual parenting time session. It is important for all parties to be patient and flexible and willing to try again another day.
What happens if the child's behaviors need to be addressed?	Discuss the plan between the parent and the facilitator regarding how to address the child's behaviors during a virtual contact session.
Should siblings be scheduled together?	Consider separate virtual visits tailored to the age and developmental level of the child. Younger and older children may have different needs and preferences during the virtual parenting time session.

Additional guidelines when needing to incorporate supervision into virtual contact:

Establish a virtual waiting room	A virtual waiting room can help the facilitator of the virtual contact ensure the parent's readiness for the virtual contact, which can help to manage the safety of the child during the contact.
Allow for mute capability	Allow the facilitator of the virtual contact the ability to mute participants as needed to prevent harassment, threats, or legal case discussions. Ensure that all parties are aware that these topics are not to be discussed, and doing so may prompt the use of the mute button.
Emergency Termination	Discuss what may prompt early termination of virtual contact such as continued inappropriate discussions (as mentioned above) after attempted redirection, or other situations involving the safety of the child.
Privacy Features	Discuss the use of virtual backgrounds or photos to protect the home from view as needed.
Room Scanning	Develop a plan for the visiting parent or caregiver to scan their room for the facilitator of parenting time to ensure the contact is taking place in a safe and appropriate environment and there are no attendees present that have not been approved to attend.
Media Restrictions	Discuss whether or not pictures or videos are allowed to be taken during virtual contact. Ensure that any and all court orders regarding pictures and video are discussed and followed.

You can support parents and out-of-home caregivers towards shared parenting principles, using the DCS curriculum here: <https://dcs.az.gov/sharedparenting>.