

Virtual Visits

Recommendations by Age and How to Access Resources

By Rose Wentz

Newborns and Infants

Frequency: Daily contact for 10 to 15 minutes¹

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 to 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. *The caregiver becomes the heart and hands of the parent.* (Rachel Barr and Lerner, 2015)

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
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. (Cynthia Burnson, n.d.) The parent should be sure to look at the webcam rather than the baby's face on the screen. This will ensure better eye contact. (Rachel Barr and Lerner, 2015)
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. (Cynthia Burnson, n.d.)
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

¹Screen Sense: Setting the Record Straight--Research-Based Guidelines for Screen Use for Children under 3 Years Old, Lerner, Claire; Barr, Rachel, *ZERO TO THREE*, v35 n4 p1-10 Mar 2015

² <https://www.nccdglobal.org/blog/successful-video-visits-young-children> Cynthia Burnson, PhD

the baby should explain that the internet isn't working correctly. (Cynthia Burnson, n.d.)

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.³
8. Talk with each other about the baby's likes and dislikes and current routines. (Washington State DCYS, 2020)
9. Give the child a minute to adjust to seeing the parent on the screen. Repeat sessions frequently, especially at first to help the child learn how to interact with the parent. (Rachel Barr and Lerner, 2015)
10. Walk the infant around the room; point and name objects. Parent can do the same with their device. (Rachel Barr and Lerner, 2015)
11. Eliminate or reduce other distractions such as TV or loud music.

Toddlers to preschoolers

Frequency: Daily contact for 15 minutes direct interaction and up to 60 minutes screen time.

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. Toddlers recognize their parents on the screen as well as seeing them in the same room. They are calmed down with video chats from parents versus phone calls or recordings. (Rachel Barr and Lerner, 2015) The child may touch the screen in an effort to touch the parent, this is OK. This may mean reconnecting with the parent and is a good sign the child is making a connection. Children this age have short attention spans and need to move a lot. As the 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 so the parent can see the entire room especially during the play time part of the visit. The child is likely to run back to the screen to interact and then back to playing.

³ <https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/FamilyTimeInterimPolicy.pdf>, WA State Family Time Interim Policy, March 2020.

3. Talk or play with the child if the visit is interrupted due to technical problems. The caregiver can make it a peek a boo type of game.
4. 15 minutes of direct interaction over 30 to 60 minutes is normal. Allow the child to play and the parent to watch the play. (Rachel Barr and Lerner, 2015)
5. 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.
6. Use three or four person virtual visits to include siblings or other important people in the child's life.
7. As with all children eating together is a bonding activity. "Share" a snack or meal together.
8. Children this age are able to learn from the adult on the screen. Teach letters, numbers, names of objects, etc. (Rachel Barr and Lerner, 2015)
9. 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.
10. 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?" (Washington State DCYS, 2020)
11. Go with the flow of what children are doing rather than trying to gain their focus. (Washington State DCYS, 2020).
12. Remember a child this age is becoming independent. They will have good days and bad days, times they want to interact and times they do not want to. This is normal. The adults should continue to have virtual visits even if the child occasionally does not want to interact.
13. 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. (Cynthia Burnson, n.d.)
14. 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. (Cynthia Burnson, n.d.)
15. Caregiver, set out toys for the child at the beginning of the visit, and engage in some pretend play with the child. (Washington State DCYS, 2020)

16. 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. (Washington State DCYS, 2020)
17. 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. (Washington State DCYS, 2020)
18. 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. (Washington State DCYS, 2020)
19. Have a similar toy for the child and parent. Example playing with cars at the same time.
20. Record the parent reading a book. Send the recording and book to the child. Read the book together. Caregiver can play the recording other times when the parent is not available.
21. High quality interactive screen time is not the same as screen time where the child only watches a show. If the caregiver is limiting screen time, virtual visits should not be considered counted as part of the child's daily screen time.

School age

Frequency: 30-60 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 available options and activities. 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 yourself about what you will do until your next visit.
8. Advocate that your child have contact with siblings and friends during this time. Have joint visits with siblings. Allowing them to have virtual visits with friends.
9. Many of the ideas for younger children also work for this age. Read to the child or have them read to the parent. Share meals. Tell stories.
10. Talk to the child about their emotions and fears.
11. Dance or play a physical game together with your cell phones moving with the person.
12. Have the child share their screen and show the parent what they do on the internet, apps they use, music programs, games, chatting with friends, etc.

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, research indicates that connections with friends is strongest at this age. 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. Advocate that the youth can have time and resources to maintain connections with their friends.
4. Create a book for each other while contact is limited, like a journal.
5. Cook together - parents can talk a child through making a favorite family dish. Or do other learning activities together via the internet. Household tasks, hobbies, languages, music, repairs, sports, etc.

6. Check with the youth about their therapy and how it is going (or not). Advocate for the youth to have therapy. There can be virtual visits with their therapists or treatment group.
7. Do a three way call with the youth's caregiver to check in with each other.
8. Be open about your concerns, health and how you are handling the current situation.
9. Have the youth teach you something or show you how to use internet apps.
10. Check if the youth has the resources they need: food, housing, money, etc.
11. Youth may be in denial that they are vulnerable to the virus. Their desire to see friends is strong. Their need for independence and privacy is strong. The caregiver and parent need to talk to the youth about making safe decisions. The youth can literally walk away. Talk about the tough subjects: smoking, drug use, sex, and just hanging out with friends may be dangerous at this time.

Engaging the Caregivers and Parents

Support and help the caregiver and parents be able to have successful virtual visits. Both groups are essential to ensuring virtual visits will occur. This type of visits emphasizes that co-parenting is essential when child live in out of home placements.

1. Access to the equipment and internet.
2. Knowledge on how to use.
3. Confidentiality is possible on virtual visits
4. Benefits to all the parents/caregivers to support visits
5. Engage them in planning the time and activities that will occur
6. They will be modeling good parenting during the visits
7. PLAN, PLAN, PLAN – the professional should connect parents and caregivers before the first virtual visits. Discuss when and how the visit will occur. Practice using the program that will be used.
8. Show them examples of virtual visits. Discuss various options of types of virtual visits.
9. Determine if the professional will be part of the virtual visit (support, monitoring, coaching). Explain your role and agree on how coaching or advice will be shared during the visit (or afterwards).

Resources for engaging parents in virtual visits

Engaging relative caregivers: general ideas on engaging these caregivers

https://www.aecf.org/blog/engaging-kinship-caregivers-with-joseph-crumbley/?utm_source=eblast&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Child-Welfare/

Video examples of Virtual visits (These are simulations. The children in these videos are NOT children in the child welfare system.)

1. Reading an online book to a toddler. The grey image of a person on the screen is the professional observing the visit. The worker is deliberately not showing her face. <https://youtu.be/x-B7Tvd-Egc>
2. A Visit Supervisor helps a birth father and foster father meet and discuss what is happening with the children and then having a virtual meeting with two siblings. <https://www.fosteringconnectionsforfamilies.com/post/supportive-remote-visitation>

RESOURCES: Low or No Cost Technology Options for Virtual Participation and Contacts. Many new resources are being made available as the “stay at home” orders are lengthened. The list below does not include all options. Continue to check with your worker and check the internet for resources.

It is critical that ALL our families (birth, resource, relative, etc.) have access to some level of internet access. Having a cell phone does not equal having internet access and a data plan larger enough to support virtual visits.

Phones and computers :

Title IVB and IVE funding can be used to purchase phones, equipment an internet access. Check with your office what is available.

The child’s school may provide computers and visitation service providers maybe providing internet access to their clients.

Internet programs and apps: Each program has pros and cons. Check the program for details.

- 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.

Internet/WIFI

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

April 1st Google announced that they will set up 100,000 wifi spots and free broadband in California. Check ongoing news for how this will be made available. Check with your state to see if there are similar programs occurring.

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 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](#) (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. Unfortunately this usually means leaving one's home to get to a hot spot.