

TIPS FOR FOSTER PARENTS TO SUPPORT REMOTE INTERACTIONS

April 8, 2020

Thank you for your continued commitment to serving children and families during this stressful time. We honor the work you have been doing and continue to provide during this crisis period. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and a declaration of emergency at both the state and national levels, the Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS) is taking additional steps to safeguard the health of the children and families it serves.

NOTICE

If you have a fever of 100.4 or above, or an emerging cough, you must stay home, contact your supervisor, and contact your healthcare provider. Inform your healthcare provider that you are essential workforce working with vulnerable individuals. Please indicate you work for the Department of Human Services, request a COVID-19 test processed by the State Hygienic Laboratory and report this information to your supervisor. If you are denied a test, report this information to your supervisor.

In-person family interactions are transitioning to virtual options, except in situations where a judge orders it or DHS approves an “exceptional request”. We need your continued cooperation as you may be asked to facilitate additional telephone and/or video contacts due to in-person family interactions being temporarily suspended. If an in-person family interaction is approved, personal protective equipment (PPE) such as a face mask, must be used. It is the responsibility of the family to supply and use their PPE. If the family does not have PPE equipment, there will be no in-person visit.

The DHS Social Worker Case Manager will be informing foster parents, kin care givers, and fictive kin of the interaction plan.

VIRTUAL VISIT

Child welfare contractors providing interactions will be using an online application to conduct remote visitations. Check with your child welfare contractor to learn what online application they are using for the interaction.

We know a virtual interaction will be different from an in-person interaction. Below are some suggestions on how to make a virtual interaction successful:

- ▶ **Infants:** Put out a bunch of toys and let the parents watch the baby play. Talk with each other about baby’s likes and dislikes and current routines. Older babies can sit in the high chair and eat or play during the visit.
- ▶ **Toddlers:** Since toddlers are SO active, most of these interactions are going to be the foster parent following the child with the phone or computer. If it’s nice outside, go outside so the parent can watch the child play.

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- ▶ **Preschoolers:** Set out some toys from the beginning of the visit. Preschoolers love to show things off such as a favorite toy, their room, artwork, etc. Set out favorite snacks for the children to enjoy.
- ▶ **Ages 6-10:** Ask the youth what they want to do during their virtual interaction. Help them brainstorm some things they want to show their parents or things they would like to do together. Try to figure out an activity parents and kids can do together. This can be a shared experience like dual art projects (coloring or drawing together). Read a book.
- ▶ **Ages 11 and older:** Involve the youth in planning the virtual interaction. Ask them what they would like the interaction to look like, where they want it to occur, etc. Talk about day-to-day activities, how learning is going. Do a learning activity together. Create a book for each other while contact is limited, like a journal. Baking or cooking together – parents can talk a child through making a favorite family dish.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

Providing for child safety is part of DHS's core mission. Video conferencing may have different safety risks to consider than in-person interaction. Below are a few safety considerations while a remote interaction is occurring:

- ▶ Ensure identifying information is not visible while doing a video conference. This includes addresses or phone numbers, passwords, SSNs, or full names (first middle last).
- ▶ Conduct video conferences in areas that are hazard-free.
- ▶ No recording of the interaction is permitted.

QUESTIONS

- ▶ Communication during this time is essential. If you are unable to participate in a virtual interaction or have questions or concerns, please talk with your caseworker. If you have a FSRP Services worker assisting with these interactions, you can also talk with them about your concerns or questions. We will continue to provide support to you during this time. Thank you for your patience and cooperation.

