

Supporting Meaningful Connections: Family Time Visits During a Pandemic

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Families around the globe have “zoomed” into 2020, and this has brought up a number of challenges, including finding ways to establish and maintain social connection over a distance for children and families involved in the foster care system. In the latest webinar of the Quality Parenting Initiative’s (QPI) “COVID-19: The New Normal” series, Dr. Kate Rosenblum from The University of Michigan discusses the importance of supporting meaningful connections between parents/caregivers and children, emphasizing understanding how “shelter in place” experiences might impact children of all ages and their caregivers and strategies to promote relationships and resilience.

Dr. Rosenblum reminds us that even during unprecedented times, what we know to be true about the importance of birth and foster parents working together to support children still matters...possibly now more than ever. We can and should continue to support meaningful connections, even as we “shelter in place.”

The information below provides a high-level snapshot of the key takeaways from this webinar presentation.

3 Key things we know to be true:

- Resilience requires relationships. Children need to matter to someone, and to have someone who matters to them.
- The small moments spent with children often matter most.
- Parents don’t have to be perfect to be helpful.

Social distancing doesn’t have to lead to disrupted connections:

- Virtual visits are a way for infants and children to maintain consistent contact with bio parents
- Virtual visits are a critical time for bio parents to experience moments of connection with their children
- Virtual visits are opportunities to empower bio parents to attend to their children in ways that show they care
- Siblings can connect via video, too

Virtual visits are a great opportunity to build bridges across families:

- Foster parent can share information so that bio parent knows about the child's daily events, developmental milestones, and has peace of mind that their child is safe and secure
- Birth parent can share information so that resource/foster/kinship parent gains insight into child (may include things such as routines, culture, food preferences, etc.)

Things to consider when planning for virtual visits:

- One size does not fit all!
- Each child is unique: what works best for this child (e.g., time of day, length of visit, etc.)?
- Each family situation is unique: what supports will they need to be successful?
- Development matters: what is the child's capacity to communicate, engage in interaction (thru play or story-telling), regulate emotions during visit transitions?

Strategies to support meaningful connections during virtual visits:

- Understand this is a marathon and not a race
 - Don't let perfect be the enemy of good enough
 - Remember it's okay to go with the flow
 - If at first you don't succeed...try again
- Decide what role you will play in the video chat
 - Active support for interactions/games vs letting the camera roll
 - Often, it's okay to be in the frame, but consider positioning the camera to record without you in the frame
 - Consider possibility of checking in with parents/building a bridge
- Consider the benefits of allowing parents virtually "into your home"
 - Meaningful to parent in being able to see where their children live
 - Opportunity for children to share preferred toys, spaces, pets, etc, with their parents
 - Can schedule visits to include daily routines (meals in the kitchen, playing in the living room, nighttime routine in bedroom)

Activities caregivers can support to maintain connections virtually:

- Help child read books to parent over video or phone
- Send birth parents a photo documentary of the child's day, familiar places, activities
- Help the child leave phone messages for their parents
- Encourage children to draw pictures for their parents and do "show and tell"
- Text photos of activities/places to the birth parent so they can ask their child about them
- Help children create a memory box they can share with their parents
- **Sometimes children don't know what to say, or don't talk. It's ok to for you to fill the space by sharing stories from the child's day.**