



**STATE OF WASHINGTON  
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES**

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March 26, 2020

To: Child Welfare Field Operations  
From: Jody Becker, Deputy Secretary  
RE: Family Time and Sibling and Relative Visits Interim Policy

This memo will serve as interim policy guidance related to policy [4254 - Family Time and Sibling and Relative Visits](#).

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and a declaration of emergency at both the state and national levels, the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) is taking additional steps to safeguard the health of the children and families it serves. Visitation is the right of the family in cases where visitation is in the best interests of the child per RCW 13.34.136(2)(b)(ii)(A). However, visitation may be limited or denied if the dependency court determines that such limitation or denial is necessary to protect the child's health, safety, or welfare per RCW 13.34.136(2)(b)(ii)(C). On February 29, 2020, Governor Jay Inslee issued Proclamation 20-05, which announced a state of emergency for all counties throughout Washington State due to the spread of COVID-19. Proclamation 20-25 at 1 (2020). The Proclamation states that COVID-19 "spreads easily from person to person [and] may result in serious illness or death." Proclamation 20-25 at 1 (2020). In addition, the Proclamation states that COVID-19 has broadly spread throughout the state and continues to threaten citizens' life and health. *Id.* Therefore, in-person parent-child visitation is not within the best interests of the child due to the current concrete threat COVID-19 presents to the child's physical health and safety. As the Governor noted, COVID-19 represents a significant health threat to citizens, including children, in Washington. Proclamation 20-25 at 1 (2020).

The provision of in-person Family Time and sibling and relative visits with children in out-of-home care greatly increases the risk that these children, their caregivers and households, siblings and parents will be exposed to COVID-19 through in-person contacts among multiple people every day. To reduce the risk of exposure to COVID-19, DCYF is implementing remote parent-child and sibling visits, rather than in-person visits. Effective **March 26, 2020** DCYF will suspend in-person face-to-face parent-child and sibling visits until the COVID-19 emergency concludes, and when possible will substitute in-person visits with remote visits, as provided below. The term "Family Time" in this document refers to both parent-child and sibling visits.

#### Order of Priority

When in-person Family Time is in place, if technology is available to the participants, Family Time will be conducted using video conferencing. Platforms that could be used to provide this service include, but are not limited to Zoom, WebEx, FaceTime and

Skype. JPay or telephone contact may be used for Family Time with an incarcerated parent.

If this technology is not available to the visit participants, Family Time will be conducted using another remote alternative, which may include electronic communication (telephone contact, and if not available, email), or at a minimum by mailing pictures, drawings or letter writing.

Tips for Successful Remote Visits

Below are tips that can be shared with caregivers and families on how to make remote visits more engaging, depending on the age and developmental level of the child.

<b>AGE</b>	<b>ACTIVITY</b>
<b>Infants</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Caregiver, put toys in front of the child, and let the parent watch the baby play.</li> <li>• Talk with each other about the baby’s likes and dislikes and current routines.</li> <li>• Older babies can sit in a highchair and eat or play during the visit.</li> </ul>
<b>Toddlers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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?”</li> <li>• Caregiver, set out favorite snacks to help the child stay occupied during the visits.</li> <li>• Go with the flow of what children are doing rather than trying to gain their focus.</li> </ul>
<b>3-5 years</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Caregiver, set out toys for the child at the beginning of the visit, and engage in some pretend play with the child.</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• Parents, read a book to your child.</li> <li>• 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.</li> </ul>
<b>6-10 years</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask the children what they want to do during their virtual visit. Help them brainstorm some things they want to show their parents or things they would like to do together.</li> <li>• Try to figure out an activity parents and children can do together. This can be a shared experience like dual art projects (coloring or drawing together).</li> <li>• Read a book.</li> </ul>
<b>11+ years</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involve the child/youth in planning the virtual visit.</li> <li>• Ask them what they would like the visit to look like, where they want it to occur, etc.</li> <li>• Talk about day to day activities, how learning is going.</li> <li>• Do a learning activity together.</li> <li>• Create a book for each other while contact is limited, like a journal.</li> <li>• Baking or cooking together - parents can talk a child through making a favorite family dish.</li> </ul>

Family Time video conferencing could be suspended if the following exists:

- Unauthorized people appearing in video conferencing and a warning was provided.
- Aggressive language or behavior being exhibited during video conference.
  - Contact the provider and case worker for documentation as to why video conferencing was suspended. Notify the parent, sibling and their counsel (if they are represented), and the CASA/GAL.

If you have comments or questions, please contact

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