**VIRTUAL CONTACT GUIDANCE FOR FOSTER CARERS**

It is important that the children in your care still have regular contact with their family members during this difficult time no matter how old they are.They are several ways this can be done safely, phone calls & video calls, text, pictures, email.

We understand this is a difficult time and for many children and carers this is a new way of delivering the family time. However, we are confident as the sessions continue they will become more natural and will flow. Please refer to the guidance and tips outlined below:

**Babies:**



Take pictures regular and short videos where possible

so parents can see the changes in their baby.

Babies grow and develop at a rapid pace they change daily, and it is important the parents see this. You can send these by WhatsApp/email or send picture text messages (text charges apply). Give daily updates by text or phone calls, video calls can also be made as babies still recognise their parents voice and face even if they cannot communicate back.

You could have a list of topics you are going to talk about as you the carer will in this age group will be leading the conversation. Parents are really needing to see their babies and are desperate to stay involved, write down five topics to share.

Example of this below - we will call the child Zoe.

1. Bath time – is Zoe enjoying bath time, what time does she have her bath, what faces does she pull when the water touches her face etc.
2. Sleep – how did Zoe sleep last night, was she settled, did she feed well, has her feed increased.
3. What time did Zoe wake, is this a regular pattern, is Zoe starting to get into a routine?
4. Is Zoe opening her eyes for longer periods, is she starting to recognise sounds around the home.
5. Try to dress Zoe in outfits parents have sent, this could be a conversation around how well it fits, how lovely it looks, how parents have made a good choice.
6. Tell parents you are kissing Zoe on a night and telling her this id from mummy/daddy, it is so important for parent’s wellbeing to feel they are not forgotten at this time and feel as involved as possible. Ask parents to sing a nursery rhyme as voice recognition is so important, you can tell parents you want a different rhyme next time, set them a challenge.
7. Remember some of our parents have not been nurtured themselves you might like to join in song time, teach parents nursery rhymes, be patient some parents need encouragement they really do open up if you take the lead.

**Toddlers:**

Take pictures and short videos so the parents can see how their child is developing and what kind of things they are doing, send by WhatsApp/email or send picture text messages (text charges apply). Keep parents up to date with daily texts or phone calls.

Video calls maybe the best for this young age as it is confusing to toddles as they can hear their parents voice but not see them also at this age their speech varies widely some can chat away, others only have basic words if any, if they can see them it may encourage them to verbally interact more.

You could have a list of topics you are going to talk about as you the carer will in this age group will be leading the conversation. Parents are really needing to see their babies and are desperate to stay involved, for example write down five topics to share.

For this example, we will call the child Zena. You can also take topics from the baby session that apply to your toddler.

1. Bath time – is Zena enjoying bath time, what time does she have her bath, what faces does she pull when the water touches her face etc.
2. Sleep – how did Zena sleep last night, was she settled, did she feed well, has her feed increased.
3. What time did Zena wake, is this a regular pattern, is Zena starting to get into a routine?
4. Is Zena opening her eyes for longer periods, is she starting to recognise sounds around the home.
5. Try to dress Zena in outfits parents have sent, this could be a conversation around how well it fits, how lovely it looks, how parents have made a good choice
6. Is Zena crawling or pulling herself up on the furniture, can you show parents Zena doing this, getting parents to verbally praise Zena.
7. Has Zena tried a new snack or food, did she like it, ask parents what foods they like dislike,
8. Set the seine put toys out if parents have provided any toys include these say if Zena likes any toys parents sent.
9. Please be mindful toddler’s developmental milestones change daily, this can be upsetting for parents to miss the firsts, so if Zena has started to crawl, walk say a new word, show parents but involve them, say wow Zena hasn’t done it that good before be enthusiastic with parents make them feel this is for them act surprised.
10. Get Zena to draw a picture for parents, can you show parents, possibly put this on the fridge, sideboard, say Zena is saving pictures for when she can see parents again, maybe a scrapbook or daily diary of activities for parents to keep.
11. Song time encourage parents to join in, this can be uncomfortable for some of our parents but with time and encouragement they will join in.
12. Have you managed to get out in the garden or for a walk what did you see whilst out any animals how Zena reacted. Do you have outdoor play equipment swing, slide, does Zena enjoy this? Are any flowers, plants coming out. Are you waving to your neighbours?

**School Children:**

Daily phone calls or video calls so the children can see and speak to their parents. Not all children are happy talking for long periods so a short call is ok, when the child as had enough end the call but you also can talk to the parent and let them know how things are going and what the child has been up too. Pictures and short videos should also be taken and sent to the parents via WhatsApp/email or send picture text messages (text charges apply).

This is the age bracket were the children are more socially aware with what’s going on at this time, children are going to be fearful of parent’s wellbeing, children will become emotional during the conversation as they will want to see parent’s siblings in person. This will ease in time the more the children become settled with the new way of family time and the consistency of family time it will become easier. Please do not be deterred with the prosses as it could appear your child is too upset, this will settle, the anxiety of no family time with have a greater impact in the long run so please be aware we have an experienced contact team who can call you and advice. Its good to have a plan ready for the call you can ask the children to plan this themselves.

1. What have they done today did they sleep well, have they had dinner, what have they eaten.
2. Have they done school work, are they struggling with anything, can parents answer any questions regarding there work, make it fun, if parents don’t know ask the children to set parents a challenge for the next session,
3. Have you been baking or cooking with the children, what did you make was it nice, did you share, did you wash up, are you keeping your room tidy, have you got any chores around the house do you like this?
4. Have the children got outfits parents have bought or toys, can these be incorporated into the sessions.
5. Are the children getting out in the garden, or for walks do you have any pets.
6. Start a family time scrap book for children and families, children can write down questions for parents they want to ask, they could do a daily diary of activities.
7. Keeping fit and active is always fun, ask child/children to do a short 5-minute exercise routine they could get parents to join in this were sure will create lots of laughter.
8. Share a joke ask the children to tell parents a joke and the children can ask parents to think of a new joke for the next call.
9. Do the children have an interest, for example a favourite animal, children can set parents tasks to find three facts for the next session, this can change after each session.



**Teenagers:**

Daily phone calls or video calls, these must be monitored you do not have to be visible in the video calls but in the same room. Pictures and short videos are just as important at this age and can be sent via WhatsApp/email or send picture text messages (text charges apply).

Teenagers as we all know can at times push boundaries, some teenagers are not as open to showing their emotions openly and will struggle with the verbal affection sharing we could think about music and poems, to help. We also must be mindful of the children home life before they came to your care, if this is a relatively new placement no amount of training will give a full insight into the children’s previous homelife and your child/children will revert to communicating with parents in a way which will shock and surprise you. Don’t be alarmed the child/children who have adapted into your house/rules will often revert to old ways of communicating, this could result in some unacceptable language whilst communicating, we would advice if were ever possible for the first few sessions finding a quite space with just carer and child/children. Your reaction will be to correct the child/children during the conversation this is understandable but be mindful to pick your battles, any inappropriate conversation must be stopped at all times, if child/ children has a slip of tongue you could discuss this after the call. Children are very loyal to parents regardless of history, children may play down fun activities as not to upset parents, please don’t take this to heart.

Ask children to prepare some questions this will help the flow of conversation.

1. What have they been doing to keep busy.
2. What have parents been doing
3. Have they got any school work parents could help with
4. Have the children been in the garden/walk
5. Have the children managed to take on new chores are they helping out in the house, bedroom tidy.

There is some great exercise sessions on line maybe the children and parents could attempt this together this will create some laughter, if not could children make there own short routine and get parents to join in.

1. Music is always feel good, if parents and children struggle to communicate they could listen to a song together, take turns to choose the song for each session with a promise to each other no matter what decade they will listen.

**Key points to Remember:**

This is a new way of delivering family time for all involved and with any new system there will be concerns anxiety’s and sadly inappropriate sessions. While we are trying out the new system we are all learning what works best for our children and families, we will achieve this together, we can all share experiences and what works well, the plan above is just a guide to assist and is not set in stone it is flexible

We must try our very best to promote this kind of contact, if the child is reluctant to talk you can still inform the parents, and send pictures, encourage the child to talk to their parents but do not force them, routine is good for children so prepare them set a time each day and try your best to stick to it.

We are working with some of the most vulnerable in society with drug and alcohol addiction’s, mental health and a vary of other personal issues. Now more than ever parents could fall into a dark place and with no communication available for parents and children this could have a detrimental effect on their health and wellbeing. If for any reason you feel that the parents are under the influence end the session, if the parents are slurring their words or rambling. inform your family time worker.

During the virtual contact if a parent becomes abusive or begins to talk about topics that are not acceptable tell them to stop or you will end the call if they carry on just end the call you had warned them. Report it to the family worker, contact worker or Social worker.

If you have not already withheld your number when making the calls and the parent becomes annoying i.e. constant calls, texts etc block their number and again report it to who set the virtual contact up.

We can fully understand at this time your reservations around virtual family time and your worries and fears for you and your family’s safety. Parents at this time have been assessed with regards to risk level and no high-risk case would be compromised. The children’s safety is paramount. If you are still worried or have any questions we have a team of experienced family time workers who are happy to advice, if you wish we could do a practice call with one member of staff, you can then discuss which room in your home works well from what the worker can see etc.

We are here to support you so please feel free to get in touch with your child’s family time worker if you need any help or guidance.

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