



# A GUIDE TO SUPPORTIVE VIRTUAL FAMILY TIME



*A Parent Support Program  
for Child Welfare-Involved Parents*

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# INTRODUCTION

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Anticipating the need for parents and children in foster or relative care to visit remotely, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Partners for Our Children (P4C) at the University of Washington created the Supportive Virtual Family Time program. The Program creates structure, guidance, and training for supervised visitation providers, with the goal of helping them facilitate positive remote supervised visits between parents and their children in out-of-home care.

The Supportive Virtual Family Time program builds upon the foundation and key principles of the *Strive* Supervised Visitation Program and adds a new element, the family time partnership meeting, to help be a bridge to the parent(s) and foster/relative caregiver(s) as they make this transition. *Strive* is a parent education and support program that assists parents in preparing for high quality visits their children, and promotes child safety using a strengths-based, trauma-informed approach to help parents create a positive environment for nurturing their relationship with their children within the context of supervised visitation.

## Overview

As part of this Supportive Virtual Family Time program, supervised visitation providers are provided with structured support, guidance and training to:

- Connect with the caseworker to prepare for remote supervised visits that will, to some extent, include both the parent and the foster/relative caregiver
- Prepare the parent for positive remote supervised visitation with their children
- Prepare the foster or relative caregiver for how to support the children in their care in having positive remote supervised visitation with their parent
- Hold a virtual family time partnership meeting between the parent and foster/relative caregiver prior to supervised visits taking place to plan and prepare for virtual visits by getting to know one another, setting expectations and agreements, and planning for and providing some structure for the remote visits
- Support the parent and caregiver in having positive and productive remote supervised visits
- Create a plan to debrief one-on-one with the parent and the caregiver to celebrate successes and troubleshoot challenges

### **Considerations to think about with the assigned caseworker prior to meeting with the parents and caregivers if possible:**

- How many children are in this family? Are they placed together or separately? Even if they are placed together, would it be better to have family time with children individually?
- Potential considerations around privacy for the children and the parent. Where will the caregiver be during family time? This could also be discussed as part of your pre-family time meetings.

# Using this Curriculum Guide

**The Supportive Virtual Family Time Program has four primary parts that the family time supervisor will facilitate:**

1. A virtual meeting with the parent before virtual family time takes place (30 minutes)
2. A virtual meeting with the foster or relative caregiver before virtual family time takes place (30 minutes)
3. A family time partnership meeting between the parent and the foster/relative caregiver before virtual family time takes place (1 hour)
4. A debriefing with the parent and the foster/relative caregiver after the virtual family time takes place (15 minutes for each)

It is recommended that the family time supervisor print this guide **before** watching the web-based training. Below is a list of handouts included to be used with the parent. These could either be emailed to the parent or screen shared with them during their meeting and debrief.



**Handout:** This symbol indicates when you should share a handout with the parent.

Handouts and other resources can be shared in the following ways:

1. Sent as an attachment to an email, text message, instant message, etc.
2. Hard copy sent through postal mail
3. If you are using a platform that will allow you to share your screen (e.g., Zoom), you can share handouts on your screen during the pre-family time meeting.

## **Handouts:**

1. Resources for Reducing Stress
2. Virtual Family Time Routine
3. Family Time Supervisor Notes
4. Today My Mom/Dad

**Curriculum Guide Script:**  
Sample Script in Gray

This script is meant to be a guide as you work with the parent and/or foster/relative caregiver, and does not need to be memorized word for word.

# 1. PRE-FAMILY TIME MEETING: PARENT & FAMILY TIME SUPERVISOR (30 MINUTES)

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*Family Time Supervisor Tip:* Schedule this meeting to take place prior to the family time partnership meeting with the parent and caregiver.

## Introductions and Purpose of Meeting

### 1. Joining with the parent

- If this is your first meeting with this parent, introduce yourself.
- How are they doing?
- Do they have someone who is a support for them?
- Acknowledge this unique situation we are all in with COVID-19 and that it must be hard not seeing their children.

*Example Script:*

Right now, we find ourselves in a very challenging situation as COVID-19 spreads throughout our communities. We are all experiencing many disruptions to our daily lives and routines, including changing your family time to virtual family time. This will be a challenge for you and your children, and I am going to try to help you the best that I can to maintain a positive connection with your children during this time.

### 2. Purpose of this meeting

*Example Script:*

Because this will likely be challenging for both you and your kids, I want to help set you and your children up for as much success as possible with your family time. This can also be a challenging time for your children's caregiver, and so we are going to want to pay attention to this relationship too. We will discuss some of DCYF's rules and guidelines for virtual family time, some ways to manage and cope with the stress, any barriers you think you might face with being able to participate in virtual family time, and, finally, what you would like to see as a schedule and ideas for activities to do with your children.

Does this sound all right to you? Is there anything else you would like to talk about?

After I meet with you today, I will also be meeting with your children's caregiver, and then we will all meet together before your first virtual visit so we can figure out the best way for you and your children to have your family time.

# Expectations of Parents

**Family Time Supervisor Tip:** *Many of the links in this guide pertain to guidelines and resources specific to virtual visitation in Washington State's child welfare system. If you are outside of Washington State, you will likely need to replace these links with others that will be helpful for family time or visitation providers in your area.*

**State/county rules for family time:** Review all relevant rules for parents during family time and note where there are some modifications for virtual family time.

- Meet your children's emotional needs
- Distract and redirect for behavior challenges
- Get approval before bringing other people to your virtual family time
- Don't threaten or demean your children
- Notify your caseworker and the family time supervisor at least 24 hours before canceling
- Family time won't be rescheduled when the parent is a no-show, cancels with less than 24 hours' notice, or family time is ended because of the parent's behavior
- Three parent no-shows/cancellations require the case to go back to your caseworker
- In Washington State, due to the situation with COVID-19 and the need for virtual visits, there is additional flexibility that allows for 45 minutes (instead of 15 minutes) for all parties to connect before considering the visit to be a missed visit.

For more information on flexibility and modifications of these rules given the current situation, please see:

<https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/FamTimeFAQs.pdf>

Family time can be ended early or cancelled in the following circumstances:

- Being physically or emotionally abusive during family time
- Impaired ability to safely interact with my children
- Not following rules in the DCYF family time plan or violating DCYF agency guidelines
- Threatening the family time supervisor or your child's caregiver

According to Washington State interim visits policy, 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

For more information, please see:

<https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/FamilyTimeInterimPolicy.pdf>

# Resources for Coping with Stress

Dr. Bruce Perry, a specialist in neuropsychology and brain development, has spent his career studying how the human brain develops in close relationships. In response to the COVID-19 outbreak, he developed a video series that is referenced on the bottom of this page. He talks about the idea of “emotional contagion” especially in times of great stress, such as this COVID-19 crisis. The idea behind “emotional contagion” is that we can either help to regulate or dysregulate others emotionally. This is true for our interactions with parents and caregivers and their interactions with each other and with their children. Dr. Perry points out that a dysregulated adult will never be able to emotionally regulate a child or another adult. Given the situation we are all in, we may have to work extra hard right now to keep ourselves emotionally regulated and to help those we work with stay emotionally regulated.

Here are some suggestions Dr. Perry gives for helping to regulate parents, caregivers, and children as you continue to support them in visitation:

- Reflective listening: This involves listening and naming feelings you are hearing and seeing from caregivers and parents you are working with
- Watching your tone of voice: Making sure that you keep a calm, soft tone of voice
- Keeping your body posture relaxed (even over Zoom!)
- Having some regulating or calming practices and activities for yourself.<sup>1</sup> And we can extend this to having some regulating or calming practices and activities to offer to parents, caregivers, and children.

Keeping in mind the fact that having family time virtually will likely create stress for parents and caregivers, it may be helpful to teach, encourage, and/or use some of the relaxation strategies taken from the *Strive* Supervised Visitation Program curriculum. These practices may also be helpful for you too during this time. You can help parents and caregivers understand how important they are to helping their children stay emotionally regulated. They can spread “emotional contagion” in healthy ways too!

## *Example Script:*

COVID-19 is bringing a lot of stress into our lives and into our children’s lives. Your family time is changing suddenly for you and your children. Daily life is also changing a lot for everyone. This may be causing you and your children to feel more stressed.

Children take their cues from us regarding how stressed they feel, and you have the ability as their parent to help them with their stress and ability to cope during this difficult time. The more emotionally regulated (calm and positive) you can be during your virtual family time, the more opportunity your children will have to stay regulated

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.neurosequential.com/covid-19-resources>

themselves. This helps both you and your children be able to do things like problem solve and cope with daily stresses better.

I have some resources for coping with stress and helping with emotion regulation that I would like to share with you. If you're interested, we could actually do one of the exercises together today. If not, that's okay; I would still like to give you the resources.



### Share [Handout 1 - Resources for Reducing Stress](#)

If the parent is interested and willing, you can ask if they would like to do a relaxation exercise with you now.

**Family Time Supervisor Tip:** *When giving or reading these instructions, be sure to use a quiet and steady voice, speak at a slower pace, and take pauses between the instructions to give the parent enough time to do each step.*

*Alternatively, you can introduce belly breathing through the **Diaphragmatic Breathing Technique video**: <http://bit.ly/StriveSession1-BellyBreathing>. You can share your screen so you and the parent can watch this together. This link can also be shared with the parent for home practice.*

*Some parents may worry that they aren't breathing correctly from their bellies. You can suggest that they try the following instead: Inhale as they count slowly to four, and then exhale slowly to a count of four. Repeat inhaling and exhaling to counts of five and six. Let breathing return to its natural pace when done with the three cycles.*

Just sit here for a moment and pay attention to how you normally breathe. Focus on your breathing for a minute. You may close your eyes if you like.

Okay, now put your right hand on your chest and your left hand on your belly and focus on which hand moves when you breathe in. If your right hand moves, you're breathing from your chest. If your left hand moves, you're breathing from your belly. Try to breathe so your left hand moves but your right hand is still. Use your belly to breathe.

Now put both hands on your belly, right below the navel. Imagine that there's a **balloon** in your belly. When you breathe in, the balloon expands. Push the air into the very deepest part of your lungs, down into your belly. Feel your hands moving out as you breathe in. Now, when you breathe out, the air is going out of the balloon. Your belly should be moving again but in the opposite direction.

If you try this lying down at home, another way to monitor yourself is by putting a **stuffed animal** on your belly and paying attention to it as you breathe. This can be a helpful way to teach a preschooler or school-age child how to do belly breathing.

Let's try taking some breaths using belly breathing. Breathe in slowly through your nose, filling up the balloon; once the balloon is filled up, then breathe out just as slowly through your nose, if that's comfortable. Otherwise, you can breathe out your mouth through pursed lips.

The reason we breathe in and out through our noses for these exercises is that it helps us breathe more slowly, which helps calm us. As you exhale, let your body go limp – relax the muscles in your face, jaw, and stomach, and make sure your shoulders are not hunched up.

Let's take a few more belly breaths. Now, open your eyes if they were closed. How do you feel now?

Breathing this way takes practice, but it's worth it. Research studies have found that taking these deep breaths from your belly sets off a physical reaction in your body that reduces stress and calms you down. You can do belly breathing anywhere. It would be great if you could do even a few minutes of practice each day with belly breathing. Then you'll find you're much more comfortable using it right before your visit or during your visit with your child. I'll remind you to take a couple of belly breaths right before your virtual visit with your children.

Would you be willing to commit to practicing belly breathing for a few minutes each day this week?

## Addressing Parent Barriers

- What are their worries or concerns about having virtual family time?
- Does the parent have reliable technology?
- Does the parent have a place where they can use FaceTime, Skype, Zoom, or other technologies?

### *Example Script:*

Can you tell me about any worries or concerns you have about virtual family time? What is your access to technology? Do you have a phone or computer you can use? Do you have enough data and/or a WiFi connection? Do you have a place where you can be during your virtual family time?

Is there anything you want the caregiver to know before we all meet together?

When we meet with the caregiver, the goal will be to get to know each other, figure out our virtual family time schedule, plan for some activities, and determine who will be present for family time.

Make note of any concerns the parent has, if they need to be addressed by their caseworker, if it is something you can talk about with the caregiver in your meeting with them, or if they are worried about what to do with their children during virtual family time.



Use [Handout 2 - Family Time Supervisor Notes](#) to capture parent responses

**Washington State visitation providers:** Please see DCYF's visitation provider guidance on the following topics:

How to help parents access video conferencing devices and data:

[https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pubs/CWP\\_0051.pdf](https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pubs/CWP_0051.pdf)

General guidance on conducting virtual family time:

[https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pubs/CWP\\_0046.pdf](https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pubs/CWP_0046.pdf)

## Timing and Frequency

Explain to the parent that you want to understand what their wishes and needs are for their virtual family time and that you will also be talking with the caregiver to understand their wishes and needs; then all of you will meet together to work out a plan.

- Review of court order requirements
- Parent's wishes: Would they like shorter, more frequent communication? Does this make sense developmentally for the children?

*Example Script:*

I am going to make note of your wishes here for family time and we will have to work this out with your caseworker and your children's caregiver. We will work really hard to come up with a solution that will work for everyone.

## Activities to Do During Virtual Family Time






Share [Ideas for Virtual Visits](#) and review some of the ideas for activities with the parent

1. Questions to ask: For kids 5 and older, the parent can ask them what they would like to do during their family time. The following are some questions from the Strive Supervised Visitation Program curriculum (9-14 version) that could be helpful for parents of older children.

- If you could spend the day learning something new, what would it be?
- Do you have some ideas of what you would like to do while we spend time together?
- What is something you are proud of?
- What is something you are worried about?

2. Discuss ideas for activities: Here's an example of a game to play by [Primary Playground](#). The parent could walk around their space with their phone, having their children help them with the scavenger hunt!

## RAINBOW SCAVENGER HUNT

-  Find something red.
-  Find something yellow.
-  Find something orange.
-  Find something green.
-  Find something blue.
-  Find something purple.
-  Name a fruit that is red.
-  Name an animal that is yellow.
-  Name a vegetable that is orange.
-  Name a plant that is green.
-  Name a flower that is purple.
-  Name something outside that is blue.



## Creating a Routine for Beginning and Ending Virtual Family Time



Share [Handout 3 - Virtual Family Time Routine](#)

**Family Time Supervisor Tip:** *If you fill in this handout as you are going over it with the parent, you can offer to send the completed version to them afterward by postal mail or as an attachment to email, text message, etc.*

### Example Script:

Children need routines to help them feel safe and secure. Routines can offer children predictability in these uncertain times. This is a new way of connecting for your children, and it may take them some time to adjust. Really young children may be confused or distracted. Your children may need some time learning this new way of being together with you.

Please be patient. I am here to support you to continue to try to find ways to make the most of your virtual family time.

If it's helpful, let's think through some ways you can greet and say good-bye to your children each time you see them virtually so they know what to expect and what to look forward to. Are there ways of greeting your children and saying good-bye during family time that you have used previously with your children that that will work virtually? If not we can come up with some ideas, and if your children are old enough, they may want to suggest and/or pick from a few options such as a virtual high five, a special wave, etc.

Routines are good for kids (and adults too), and having flexibility will also be helpful. So, today I will support you in creating some ideas for a virtual routine.

# Family Time Partnership Meeting

In this section, you will describe the purpose of the family time partnership meeting to the parent.

*Example script:*

When we meet with your children’s caregiver, the goal will be to get to know each other and to figure out our virtual family time schedule, activities for family time, and who will be present for family time. We will be thinking about what is best for your children and try hard to come up with a solution that will work for everyone.

We are calling this meeting a “family time partnership meeting”. Some child welfare systems have been using these meetings to support relationships between caregivers and parents. These meetings are facilitated conversations that focus on a child’s needs. In our case, I will be your facilitator, and we will be focusing on your children and their needs during virtual family time. This meeting will allow you and your children’s caregiver to share important information about schedules, likes and dislikes, as well as interests. We will work towards creating a family time schedule that will work for your family, the caregiver, and most importantly, for your children.

These kinds of meetings can:

- Help you, your children, and their caregiver to adjust to this new kind of family time
- Help to build relationships and cooperation to support positive family time
- Improve everyone’s ability to help your children in this difficult time

I would like to tell you a little bit about the meeting agenda so you will know what to expect, and if you have any other ideas, we can consider those too.

- We will begin by introducing ourselves. If you and the caregiver are interested, I have some ideas for an activity we can do to begin our meeting. One idea is to share a photo, GIF, or meme that says a little bit about you and your family. If that sounds interesting to you, you can be looking for something to share.
- We will establish a brief agreement about how we will interact and talk with each other during the meeting; for example, we will treat each other with respect.
- We will review the court ordered guidelines for your children’s family time
- Then you and your children’s caregiver will have an opportunity to talk about ideas for family time, we will work out a schedule, and I will do my best to answer any questions.

How does this sound to you? Do you have any other ideas or concerns?

*The family time partnership meeting outlined above comes from the Quality Parenting Initiative: <http://www.qpi4kids.org/pages/bestPractices.html>*

*Example script:*

Next, we will watch a short video of an example of a family time partnership meeting so you will know a little bit more about what to expect when we meet with your children's caregiver. In this video, a family time supervisor helps to facilitate a meeting between the parent and foster parent to help them plan for and conduct a virtual visit between the parent and his five-year-old son and nine-year-old daughter.

Play the following **video**, which demonstrates a family time partnership meeting: <https://youtu.be/ltN1b9SKAAs> (10:24)

**Family Time Supervisor Tip:** *For better sound quality, mute your mic and ask the parent to do the same while watching the video(s).*

After watching the video, ask the parent if they have any questions or comments so far.

If time allows, you could play the following **video**, which demonstrates a virtual family time between a parent and his two children: <https://youtu.be/AgxMk6FJWkI> (8:11)

*Special thanks to Katie Biron of the [Fostering Connections for Families Program](#) for the development and use of these videos.*



Use the **Family Time Supervisor Notes** to record any concerns the parent has, if they need to be addressed by their caseworker, if it is something you can talk with the caregiver about in your meeting with them, or if they are worried about what to do with their children during virtual family time.

Thank the parent for meeting with you today and ask for times that will work to schedule the family time partnership meeting with their children's caregiver.

## 2. PRE-FAMILY TIME MEETING: CAREGIVER & FAMILY TIME SUPERVISOR (30 MINUTES)

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*Family Time Supervisor Tip:* Schedule this meeting to take place prior to the family time partnership meeting with the parent and caregiver.

### Introductions and Purpose of Meeting

#### 1. Joining with the caregiver

- If this is your first meeting with this caregiver, introduce yourself.
- How are they doing?
- How are the kids doing: Their own kids and the kids in their care?
- Acknowledge that this must be very challenging for them and you appreciate their willingness to meet with you to figure out how to best support the kids in their care.

#### 2. Purpose of this meeting:

*Example Script:*

I have asked you to meet with me today to talk about changing to virtual family time for the children in your care. Right now, we find ourselves in a very challenging situation as COVID-19 spreads throughout our communities. We are all experiencing many disruptions to our daily lives and routines, including changes in family time for the children in your care. This will be a challenge for you and [children's names], and we really need your help to ensure that they can maintain a positive connection with their parent.

This may be challenging for both you and the kids you are caring for, so I want to help set family time up for as much success as possible for you, the children, and their parent. This can also be a challenging time for the parent of the children you are caring for, so we are going to want to pay attention to this relationship too. We will discuss preparing the kids for family time, how you can support them during family time, your safety, your wishes for a family time schedule, and, if you are caring for an older child, their privacy.

Does this sound all right to you? Is there anything else you would like to talk about?

After I meet with you today, then you, the children's parent, and I will meet for an icebreaker/coordination session the first virtual visit so we can figure out the best way for the children to have family time.

# The Role of Caregivers

## 1. Preparing the children for virtual family time

### *Example Script:*

You have very suddenly been put into a new role with the children's family. What is known from research is that a good relationship between a child's parent and foster parent promotes child safety, permanence, and well-being. While this may not be easy, positive interactions between you and the children's parent can help the children feel safer and more secure, especially given how quickly their family time has changed.

Many parents involved in the child welfare system have a history of trauma themselves. Sometimes it can be helpful to know that a parent's anger, resentment, or avoidance may be a reaction to or way of coping with their own early adverse experiences.

We are going to establish an agreement that will hopefully help with communication between you and the children's parent.

***Family Time Supervisor Tip:*** Share any of the following information with the children's caregiver that you think will be helpful.

Dr. Bruce Perry, a specialist in neuropsychology and brain development, has spent his career studying how the human brain develops in close relationships. In response to the COVID-19 outbreak, he developed a video series that is referenced on the bottom of this page. He talks about the idea of "emotional contagion" especially in times of great stress, such as this COVID-19 crisis. The idea behind "emotional contagion" is that we can either help to regulate or dysregulate others emotionally. This is true for our interactions with the children and their parent. Dr. Perry points out that a dysregulated adult will never be able to emotionally regulate a child or another adult.

Here are some suggestions Dr. Perry gives for helping to regulate others, adults and children, as you continue to support them in visitation:

- Reflective listening: This involves listening and naming feelings you are hearing and seeing from the children and their parent
- Watching your tone of voice: Making sure that you keep a calm, soft tone of voice
- Keeping your body posture relaxed (even over Zoom!)
- Having some regulating or calming practices and activities for yourself.<sup>2</sup> And we can extend this to having some regulating or calming practices and activities to offer the children in your care.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.neurosequential.com/covid-19-resources>

Keeping in mind the fact that having family time virtually will likely create stress for parents and caregivers, it may be helpful to teach, encourage, and/or use some of the relaxation strategies in the *Strive* curriculum. These practices may also be helpful for you during this time. You can help parents and caregivers understand how important they are to helping their children stay emotionally regulated. They can spread “emotional contagion” in healthy ways too!

*Example Script:*

Given the situation we are all in, we may have to work extra hard right now to keep ourselves emotionally regulated and to help those we work with stay emotionally regulated. You may already have strategies, but if you are looking for ideas, one suggestion is to simply **take three deep breaths** when you notice yourself feeling stressed. Even one deep breath can help. You can pretty much do that anywhere or anytime. As the children’s caregiver, not only can you help the children to regulate their emotions during virtual family time, but your own calm emotional state can be contagious for the parent as well.

Here are some things the National Child Traumatic Stress Network notes that caregivers can do when working with parents:<sup>3</sup>

- Monitor your voice tone, body language, and eye contact; the calmer you are, the more likely the parent will stay calm
- Showing you genuinely care by complimenting their efforts at engaging their children
- Share your observations rather than opinions
- Judgment will likely make the situation worse, rather than motivating change.

## 2. Caregiver support during family time

*Example Script:*

Your support during this transition to virtual family time is critical for the children in your care.

Babies, toddlers, and preschoolers will need your presence. Parents are being provided with a list of activities, and we can provide those to you as well if that would be helpful.

The following are some ideas for caregivers to think about with babies, toddlers, and preschoolers:

- Share the child’s routine and, if comfortable, the child’s room

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[http://www.qpi4kids.org/documents/2017\\_newSitesConference/Parents%20with%20Trauma%20History%20-%20NCTS.pdf](http://www.qpi4kids.org/documents/2017_newSitesConference/Parents%20with%20Trauma%20History%20-%20NCTS.pdf)

- Share activities the child likes to do
- You can put a bunch of toys out so the parent can watch the child play

With older children, it will be very helpful for you to prepare them for their virtual family time. You can help them understand how and why the virtual family time will be happening. You can ask them if they would like you to leave them in a private space when they are with their parent. You may also need to help them work through their emotions after their virtual family time. I will be supervising and can support you with the children after the family time if needed.

Do you have any questions or concerns about preparing the children in your care for their virtual family time?

## Addressing Caregiver Safety

- What parts of their home do they feel comfortable sharing?
- If they have other family members, where will they be during family time?

## Timing and Frequency

What are the caregiver's thoughts and hopes about frequency and timing of visits?

*Example Script:*

Can you tell me about any worries or concerns you have about having virtual family time? What is your access to technology? Do you have a phone or computer you can use? Do you have enough data and/or a WiFi connection?

**Family Time Supervisor Tip:** We know that you are expected to help the caregiver and parent troubleshoot technology challenges. Washington State's Department of Children, Youth, and Families has resources for helping caregivers and parents access devices and data through concrete goods:

[https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pubs/CWP\\_0051.pdf](https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pubs/CWP_0051.pdf)

## Family Time Partnership Meeting

In this section, you will describe the purpose of the family time partnership meeting to the caregiver.

*Example script:*

When we meet with the children's parent, the goal will be to get to know each other and to figure out our virtual family time schedule and who will be present for family time. We will be thinking about what is best for the children in your care and try hard to come up with a solution that will work for everyone.

We are calling this meeting a “family time partnership meeting”. Some child welfare systems have been using these meetings to support relationships between caregivers and parents. These meetings are facilitated conversations that focus on a child’s needs. In our case, I will be your facilitator, and we will be focusing on the children you are caring for and their needs during virtual family time. This meeting will allow you and the parent to share important information about schedules, likes and dislikes, as well as interests. We will work towards creating a family time schedule that will work for your family, the parent, and most importantly, for the children.

These kinds of meetings can:

- Reduce the trauma associated with placement and, in this case, the abrupt change to family time
- Help to build relationships and cooperation to support positive family time
- Improve everyone’s ability to help the children in this difficult time

I would like to tell you a little bit about the meeting agenda, so you will know what to expect and if you have any other ideas, we can consider those too.

- We will begin by introducing ourselves. If you and the parent are interested, I have some ideas for an activity we can do to begin our meeting. One idea is to share a photo, GIF, or meme that says a little bit about you and your family. If that sounds interesting to you, you can be looking for something to share.
- We will establish a brief agreement about how we will interact and talk with each other during the meeting; for example, we will treat each other with respect.
- We will review the court ordered guidelines for the children’s family time
- Then you and the parent will have an opportunity to talk about ideas for family time, we will work out a schedule, and I will do my best to answer any questions.

How does this sound to you? Do you have any other ideas or concerns?

*The family time partnership meeting outlined above comes from the Quality Parenting Initiative: <http://www.gpi4kids.org/pages/bestPractices.html>*

*Example script:*

To give you an idea of what to expect at our family time partnership meeting, let’s watch a short video. In this video, a family time supervisor helps to facilitate a meeting between a parent and a foster parent to help them plan for and conduct the first virtual visit between the parent and his five-year-old son and nine-year-old daughter.

Play the following **video**, which demonstrates a family time partnership meeting: <https://youtu.be/ltNIB9SKAAs> (10:24)

**Family Time Supervisor Tip:** For better sound quality, mute your mic and ask the caregiver to do the same while watching the video(s).

After watching the video, ask the caregiver if they have any questions or comments so far.

If time allows, you could play the following **video**, which demonstrates family time between a parent and his two children: <https://youtu.be/AgxMk6FJWkI> (8:11)

*Special thanks to Katie Biron of the [Fostering Connections for Families Program](#) for the development and use of these videos.*



Use the **[Family Time Supervisor Notes](#)** to record any concerns the caregiver has. Is there anything they want the parent to know before you all meet together?

Thank the caregiver for meeting with you today and ask for times that will work to schedule the family time partnership meeting with the parent.

### 3. PRE-FAMILY TIME MEETING: FAMILY TIME PARTNERSHIP MEETING (30-60 MINUTES)

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## Introductions and Purpose of Meeting

### *Example Script:*

Thank you very much for meeting today to talk about how we will coordinate virtual visits together. The purpose of us getting together today is to get to know each other a bit before beginning virtual visits and to create an agreement together for how we will do these visits.

We will talk about:

- When to have visits and for how long
- Who will be present; what support the children need while in family time
- If helpful, planning for activities

Next, let's take a few minutes to introduce ourselves. Please share a little bit about yourselves and what your days look like during this time. Please also share any information you want to about [children's names], their routine, their favorite toy or activity, and something you enjoy doing with them. We will hear from the parent first and then the foster parent.

I have a couple of activities we can do after our introductions if you're interested.

**Family Time Supervisor Tip:** *Feel free to suggest any of the below activities if you feel it would help the parent and/or caregiver to feel more relaxed or comfortable during the meeting. These activities come from [www.themuse.com](http://www.themuse.com) and are adapted for this family time situation:*

- **Mini meditation:** Tell the parent and the caregiver that you want to give them 2-5 minutes to reflect in silence. Afterward, ask them to share one goal they have for this family time partnership meeting. You can participate too to help break the ice.
- **Personal best:** Ask everyone to share a recent success story, something they are proud of, or a recent accomplishment. Hearing about things each person is proud of can create compassion and positivity. Again, you can share too.
- **Share a photo/GIF/meme:** Have everyone pick (ahead of this meeting) a photo, GIF, or meme they encountered recently that says something positive about themselves or their lives.

**Family Time Supervisor Tip:** *Use the following script to discuss creating an agreement between the caregiver and parent in order for this meeting to be as safe and comfortable as possible. If they need a suggestion or two to get this conversation started, here are some common, helpful guidelines:*

- *Speak calmly and respectfully*
- *Listen to each other's ideas*
- *Keep focused on the children*

*Example Script:*

Thank you both for sharing about yourselves. Now I would like to ask [caregiver's name] to share a little bit about how [children's names] are doing.

Thank you. [Parent's name], do you have any questions about how your children are doing?

Now let's talk about our virtual family time and create an agreement for the way we will talk with each other today in our meeting. Do either of you have a suggestion about how to talk with each other so everyone feels as safe and comfortable as possible?

If you need an example or two, I can get us started. The goal is to make sure we are respecting each other as we try to figure out this new way of supporting [children's names].

## Family Time Agreement and Responsibilities

**Family Time Supervisor Tip:** *As you work through this script, give the parent and the caregiver a chance to share their ideas. If their ideas are not close enough to reach an agreement, you can tell them that you will take each of their ideas back to the caseworker, and you and the caseworker may need to set the schedule for now.*

*Example Script:*

Today we need to come up with an agreement about how to have family time with [children's names]. The reason for creating a family time agreement is to keep everyone safe and have family time go as smoothly as possible. This agreement will help your virtual family time be fun and safe for everyone.

Next, ask the caregiver and parent for some thoughts about guidelines:

- When will family time be, and for how long? For younger children, we may need to consider shorter, more frequent family time.
- Who will be present for family time?
- How will we exchange information, if needed?

*Do they agree or do they disagree? Make decisions, when possible by consensus.*

For example, we may want to have a guideline about being on time, but one of you may be worried about being ready on time.

What are the reasons that would make it hard to be on time? How long should the caregiver wait if the parent is running late? Are there times of day that are better for each of you?

We can check in on how things are working for everyone from time to time as well.

Next, I would like to ask [parent's name] to share some of the family time routine and activity ideas we discussed in our previous meeting. Then [caregiver's name] can let us know if those activities will work and if they have other ideas for activities.

**Family Time Supervisor Tip:** *The goal of the above conversation is to have an agreement in place between you, the caregiver, and the parent that covers the following:*

1. *When will family time take place (days and times)?*
2. *Who will be present for family time?*
3. *How do the parent and the caregiver want to communicate around family time? Do they want to have a debrief all together afterward, do they want to meet with you individually? How will they exchange needed information?*

*Once you feel like you have a good agreement to move forward or you have come to a place where you need caseworker input, you can end the family time partnership meeting.*

*Example Script:*

Thank you very much for being willing to meet today in order to support [children's names] to have a positive family time. I am looking forward to continuing to support you as we figure out how to best work together. Please don't hesitate to reach out to me if you have questions or concerns regarding virtual family time.


## FAMILY TIME DEBRIEFS: 10-15 MINUTES FOLLOWING FAMILY TIME

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**Family Time Supervisor Tip:** *If the parent and/or caregiver agree to debrief after family time, you can use the debrief format below which comes from the Strive Supervised Visitation program but is also relevant here.*

*This can be done with just the parent, the caregiver and the parent together, and/or with just the caregiver, depending on what you, the parent, and the caregiver feel would work best and be the safest.*

*If a parent is really emotional, it may be best to debrief with them one-on-one, unless the caregiver can be very supportive.*

1. Ask how the parent and/or the caregiver are feeling. Validate all feelings. Ask the parent if there was anything challenging in their visit today. If the parent is upset, ask if they'd like to do some belly breathing to calm down.
2. Facilitate a discussion of **specific ways** in which the parent feels they were successful in staying calm and positive with their children.
3. Ask permission to add to what the parent did well. If the caregiver was present for family time, ask the parent if they would like to hear some positive feedback from the caregiver. If so, invite the caregiver to share their **positive observations** of the parent.
4. Select some things you would like to note that the parent did well in today's virtual visit. Write the specific descriptions of what the parent did well on  [Handout 4 – Today My Mom... or Today My Dad...](#) For example: “Your child was smiling a lot while you read them a story using a fun and animated voice.” Also, make note of anything the parent mentions they felt went well. You may send the original to the parent if they would like a copy.
5. Tell the parent if there was anything of potential concern that occurred during family time that you will need to document on the **Parent-Child Visit Report Form. If the caregiver is present**, call the parent later to discuss concerns privately.

## Handouts

Handout 1 - Resources for Reducing Stress: <https://bit.ly/VirtualVisits-Handout1>

Handout 2 - Family Time Supervisor Notes: <https://bit.ly/VirtualVisits-Handout2>

Handout 3 - Virtual Family Time Routine: <https://bit.ly/VirtualVisits-Handout3>

Handout 4 - Today My Mom... / Today My Dad...: <https://bit.ly/VirtualVisits-Handout4>

## Other Resources

**The following resources may be helpful in working with families virtually:**

Coronavirus (COVID-19): How to Talk to Your Child:

<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/coronavirus-how-talk-child.html>

Tips for Video Chatting with Young Children – Staying Connected While Far Apart:

<https://www.naeyc.org/our-work/families/tips-video-chatting-young-children>

Ways to Support Children’s Well-Being While Adjusting to Virtual Family Time:

<https://bit.ly/VirtualVisits-SupportChildren>

Ideas for Virtual Visits:

<https://bit.ly/VirtualVisits-Ideas>

Tips for Safer Virtual Visits via Zoom:

<https://bit.ly/VirtualVisits-SaferZoomVisits>

Additional Technology Options to Share with Parents and Caregivers:

<https://bit.ly/VirtualVisits-Tech>

For Washington State Family Time/ Visit Supervisors, this webpage contains links to resources created by the child welfare system that may be helpful in your work with families: <https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/coronavirus-covid-19/child-welfare>

## Contact Us

Please feel free to contact the *Strive* team at [strive@uw.edu](mailto:strive@uw.edu) if you have any questions, concerns, or feedback.

Thank you!