

Children's Services Agency: COVID-19 Updates

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS RESOURCE GUIDE FOR PARENTS OF CHILDREN IN CARE

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You are the most important person in your child's life. We are here to listen, understand, and work with you to ensure the safety and well-being of your child while they are in care.

Visits - Updated Information

Family contact is critical to:

- Maintain family connections and bonds.
- Lessen trauma.
- Help end a child's time in foster care as quickly as possible.
- Talk about concerns and answer questions.

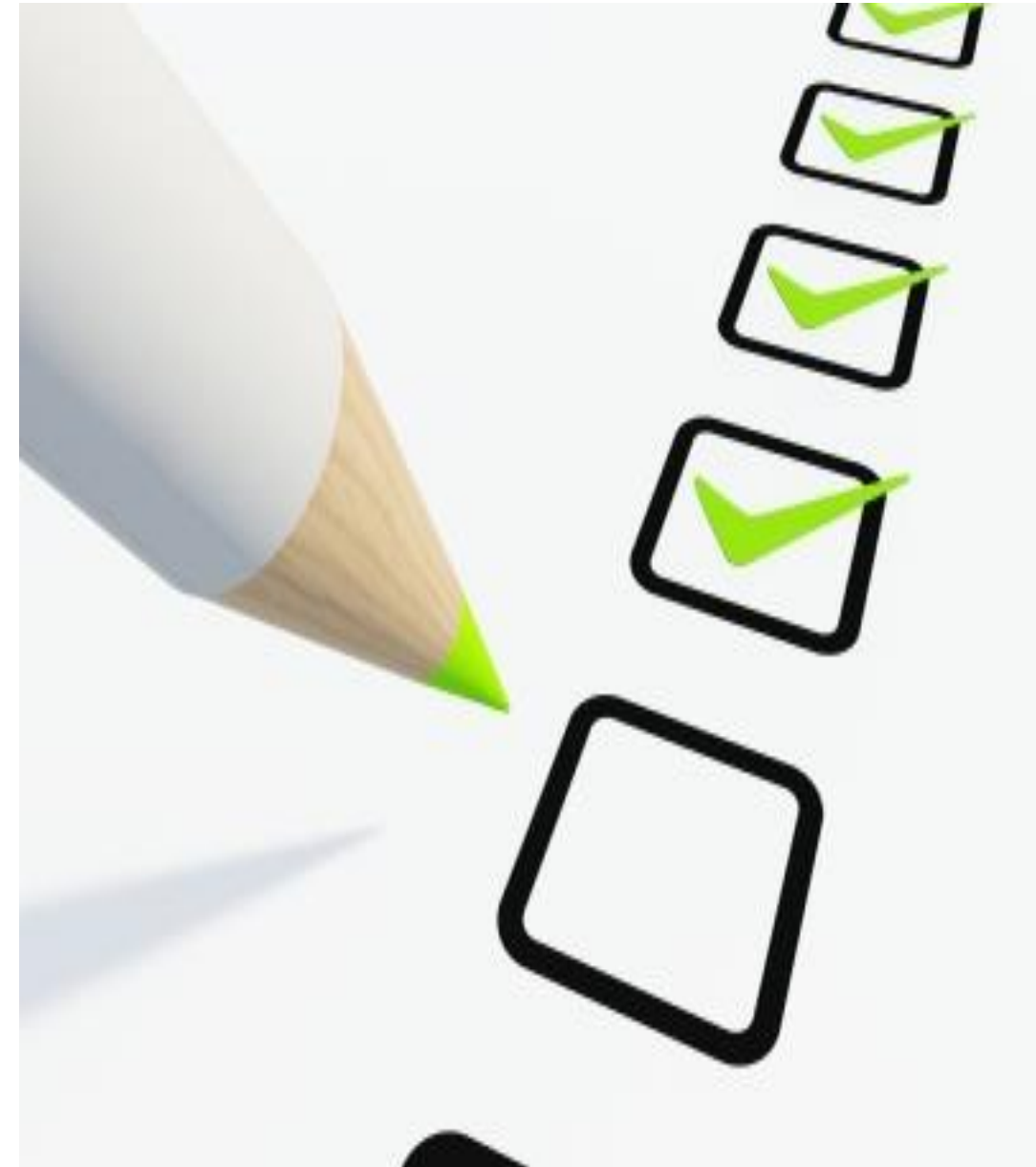


- Based on guidance in [Executive Order 2020-59](#), parent-child visits may resume if certain criteria are met (see *next slide for details*).
- No In-Person Visits
 - Sibling visits
 - Caseworker with Parent
 - Caseworker with Foster Parent/RelativeFacetime, Skype or other available technology should be used.
- No In-Person visits by caseworker with children in foster care. However, caseworkers must see children each month using virtual technology (i.e. Facetime, Skype)
- In-person contact by workers will occur if there is need to address an immediate child health or safety concern.

Parent – Child Visits

Virtual visitation remains the safest option for contact, however, in-person parenting time may occur under limited circumstances if such visits are consistent with the court order, case plan and ALL the following guidelines:

1. All participants and their household members are healthy.
 2. Screening is completed for all participants and their household members; all answers are “no.”
 3. Parents, the child placing agency and the child’s temporary caregiver all agree on the plan for visitation to safely occur.
- *Please see Letter dated 4/28/20 for further details.*



Guidance for Planning In-Person Parenting Time

- Outdoors, open windows.
- Bring own gloves, mask, and/or sanitizer, if available.
- Limit exposure to unsanitized surfaces.
- Limit large groups of people when determining location.
- Social distancing (6 feet) for adults from different households.
- Social distancing between parents and children or among siblings is not expected.
- Wash hands prior to and following the visit.
- Cover mouth with a tissue when sneezing/coughing.
- Parents and children over 2 may wear a mask or cloth face covering during the visit, if feasible.
- Change and wash clothes upon return home.



Video Visits

I have heard that screens may be bad for the eyes and brain development of young children. Is video visitation harmful to young children?

- In general, there is no evidence to suggest that screen use is bad for young children's eyes. However, too much screen time is not good for children.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics says that video contact with loved ones, especially when face-to-face contact isn't possible, supports brain development in ways that watching cartoons or playing games on a device does not.
- In general, especially for children age 0-5, video visitation should be short but frequent.
 - Young children are typically not able to focus on video visitation for more than 20 minutes at a time.
 - It may be possible to arrange for several short video visits throughout the week in place of the longer in-person visits you were having.



Video Visits Continued

Are there any suggestions for how to get the most out of video visitation, especially with young children?

- Shorter, more frequent video visits are best for young children.
- Do as much as you can that you could normally do in person.
 - Babies love simple games like Peek-a-boo.
 - Read books
 - Sing songs.
 - Have toddlers point out what they are doing or things around them. Ask if the foster parent can have toys within reach for the toddler to show you and talk about.
- Other resources for making the most out of video visitation include:
 - [Using Media Effectively with Young Children and Virtual Visitation](#), which has tips for making the most of video visits with children age 6 months – 5. very young children from 6 months through 5 years of age.
 - [Successful Video Visits with Young Children](#).
 - [Virtual Parent Time handout](#).



Court Hearings

How are court proceedings being impacted? Will our next scheduled hearing still occur? Are virtual hearings being conducted?

- Many courts have changed their procedures regarding how hearings are being held. Communications regarding court changes can be found [here](#).
- The Michigan Supreme Court Administrative Order 2020-2 deemed Permanency Planning Hearings and 24-hour Preliminary and Emergency Removal Hearings as essential functions. Many of these hearings are being held virtually. Contact your caseworker, attorney or the court for information on how your hearings are affected.



Reunification/Permanency

How is the ability for children to return home being impacted?

- Children should not be in foster care any longer than absolutely necessary. Although we are facing numerous challenges right now, the urgency to achieve permanency for children and their families should not be slowed due to COVID-19. MDHHS is working with the courts to ensure reunification is happening whenever safely possible.

I've heard that sometimes in-home services are required for children to be able to return home. Are those in-home services still available?

- In-home services provided by Family Reunification Program, Families First of Michigan, and Families Together Building Solutions are considered essential services and are still available during the Stay Home Stay Safe order.



Service Continuation

How will my case be affected if I am not able to participate in services because they are closed?

- Parents who were participating in services prior to the Stay Home Stay Safe order will not be considered non-compliant with their treatment plan if they are unable to participate in services that have been postponed or disrupted due to COVID-19. Please contact your service provider to determine if there are alternate ways for you to participate during this time.
- Discuss your treatment plan with your caseworker to determine if there are alternate ways to meet your goals and how compliance will be reported to the court during this time.
- Contact your attorney to keep them informed of your progress and discuss steps that can be taken to have your children returned home.



Family Team Meetings

Will Family Team Meetings (FTMs) continue to be held during the pandemic? Will there be mandatory FTMs to “catch up” team members after the Stay Home Stay Safe order is lifted?

- To the extent possible, virtual FTMs should be occurring. FTMs will be important after the Stay Home Stay Safe order is lifted to address important case plans and decisions. Please direct any questions about your child and your case to your caseworker and/or their supervisor.



Resources for Technology

Are there resources available if I don't have a phone or home wi-fi so I can still have video visits with my child?

- The Lifeline Assistance program provides free or discounted cell phones to families with limited income. Generally, if you qualify for food assistance, Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Section 8, or similar tribal assistance programs, you will qualify. You can click [here](#) to see if you qualify
- If you are not able to get a phone through the Lifeline program, contact your caseworker to ask about whether MDHHS is able to assist you in getting one to use for contact with your child until in-person visits can resume.
- Many internet providers are offering free internet access to new customers and/or low-income households. Families should contact the internet service providers available in their area to inquire about available services.



Communicating about COVID-19

How can I explain current events to the children in my home and support them during this difficult time?

- Parents should share accurate information about COVID-19 with their children. Some children and youth, especially those with access to social media, may see or hear inaccurate information.
- Seek information from **reliable** sources, like the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), the [World Health Organization](#), and [Michigan Department of Health and Human Services](#) for fact-based information.
- The amount of information a child can understand will depend on the child's age and development. In general, follow your child's lead; some children may want to spend time talking, while others may not seem interested or have a lot of questions. *Kids Health from Nemours* offers some general guidelines on [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): How to Talk to Your Child](#).
- As always, if you have concerns about the mental health and well-being of your child, you should contact their therapist or ask your caseworker about a referral for mental health services.



Prior Information Distributed

I missed the first Town Hall. Is there a way I can find out what information was provided?

- Yes, you can access the PowerPoint that was presented [here](#).

Where can I access the letters provided to parents?

- You can access any previous letters addressed to parents [here](#) under *COVID-19 Resources for Parents, Caregivers and CCI Staff*. All future letters and resources for parents will also be posted here.



Addressing Trauma & Mental Health Concerns

What is MDHHS doing to minimize the trauma my child is experiencing due to the disruptions caused by the pandemic, including changes in our visitation plan, the closure of their schools, and the disruption of their everyday routines?

- Your child's caseworker should maintain regular contact with your child's foster parent or relative caregiver, to assess your child's mental and physical health and well-being. Depending on the child's age and developmental capacity, the caseworker will also engage with the child to have these discussions. Most children who were already involved in mental health services have been able to continue those services using telehealth options, and your caseworker can still refer your child for mental health services.

Is there a resource available for addressing mental health crises?

- A "warm line" for mental health needs was recently launched to connect individuals with certified peer support specialists who have experience with behavioral health concerns, trauma, or personal crises. It operates 7 days/week, 10 am – 2 am, at 1-888-733-7753.



Family Well-being

I am overwhelmed by all of the resources. Is there a resource available that lists services I may need to contact or access during COVID-19 in one place?

- MDHHS has developed a [Family Well-being Guide](#) that contains contact information for a variety of resources that may be helpful for families during this time, including:
 - General Support
 - Financial & Other Assistance
 - Food & Nutrition
 - Housing
 - Child Care
 - Crisis & Safety Support
 - Substance Use



Other Supportive Resources

What other resources are available to support children and families during COVID-19?

- Older youth may particularly struggle with being isolated from their friends and adhering to social distancing guidelines. *The Child Mind Institute* has helpful tips for [Supporting Teenagers and Young Adults During the Coronavirus Crisis](#).
- *UNICEF* has tips for [How Teenagers Can Protect Their Mental Health During Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#).
- MDHHS has posted several COVID-19 resources on the [MDHHS Foster Care Forms and Publications](#) public website, including [COVID-19 Resources and Tips for Parents and Caregivers](#).
- [Resources to Support Youth and Families During the Coronavirus COVID-19 Outbreak](#) developed by *Youth.gov* has a list of information and resources regarding childcare, education, employment/unemployment insurance, finances, food and nutrition, and mental health.
- The *National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN)* has published a [Parent/Caregiver Guide to Helping Families Cope With the Coronavirus Disease 2019](#).
- *Common Sense Media* has a list of [Resources for Families During the Coronavirus Pandemic](#), including educational resources and homework help, family-friendly entertainment resources, and tips for helping kids and parents understand COVID-19 news coverage.



Benefits

MI Bridges

www.michigan.gov/mibridges



Apply for Benefits using a simple and easy to understand application



Explore local resources and save them to your MI Bridges profile



View detailed benefit information and print letters sent from MDHHS



Manage your MDHHS case, report changes, renew benefits, and upload documents to your case



Access MI Bridges in English, Spanish, or Arabic from your phone or computer

Need help using MI Bridges?

Visit www.michigan.gov/mibridges and click on Help to find local navigators, answers to common questions, and how to contact the MI Bridges help desk.

