

Maintaining Your Connection

On behalf of Child Advocacy Services, we hope that you and your family are well and have everything that you need to shelter at home. Who knew that when our state started social distancing that we would be doing this through April? CASA staff and advocates across the nation are struggling with the task of making sure that the children we serve are not only safe but that permanency is not delayed. Below are some suggestions and guidelines to help you with this task.

Ways to Contact Your CASA Child:

- Utilize technology! If you have the capability to Skype, Facetime, Zoom, etc., please try to see the child. Please talk to your supervisor if you need assistance.
- Texting or calls are appropriate if the child is older.
- Mailing cards or letters. Remember to use CASA's address to avoid sharing personal information.
- Visual contact is preferred; you are a familiar face to your CASA child. They are cut off from many familiar faces right now. Seeing you is important to them. Caretakers can hold infants and toddlers while speaking to you so you can "see" them.

Tips to Engage the Child:

- Talking to a child virtually may feel a little awkward, but we are hearing from many of you that the kids are accustomed to this. Relax! Chances are, the kids are expecting this type of contact from you.
- Read a book or color together. You can have caretakers provide paper and crayons.
- Sing songs if this is age appropriate.
- Ask them to take you on a tour of their homeschooling spot or favorite place to play at home.
- Ask open ended questions. Avoid giving them the opportunity to give you one-word answers. You will likely get more information if you ask children things like "What did you learn today?" versus "How is school going?"

Preparing for Your Child Visit:

- Please schedule your "visit" with the caretakers just as you would for an in-person visit. Many caretakers are working remotely while trying to homeschool the children. Don't assume that they are instantly available.
- Discuss their comfort level with Facetime, Skype, Zoom, etc. Work together in figuring out what works.
- Discuss what their capabilities are. Some caretakers may not have unlimited data plans or equipment.
- Give the caretaker time to talk to you outside of the child's presence.

Caretaker Contacts:

- Spend some time talking to them! They are probably just as overwhelmed and anxious as the rest of the world.
- Ask them open ended questions – try asking them things like "What is going well with home schooling?" instead of "How is the homeschooling going?"
- Don't talk "about" the child in front of the child. Request that they move to a more private setting to discuss concerns.

We Should Know the Following:

- How parent, sibling, and other family connections are being maintained? (Sources: DCFS, caretakers, and the child)
- Are necessary services such as medication management, counseling, etc. ongoing? (Sources: DCFS, the provider, the caretaker, the child, etc.)
- How services are being delivered? (Sources: DCFS, the provider, the caretaker, etc.)
- What type of learning is being provided to the child? (Sources: the caretaker and child)

A Few Things to Remember:

- Frequent (but not intrusive) contact is encouraged. Stressful situations and children being isolated are sometimes triggers for child abuse. We have to make sure our kids are safe! Please try to make at least two child contacts and two caretaker contacts.
- Confidentiality still applies! Conduct your visits in a private setting within your home.
- Maintain boundaries; it is okay to show kids your pet but it is not a great idea to take them on a tour of your home or let your spouse or children say “hello”.
- Maintain regular contact with your advocate supervisor. This is a challenging time for our kids and for you. Your supervisor is available to support and advise you.
- Take care of yourself and your family.
- If a situation arises that prevents you from monitoring your CASA child, please let us know as soon as possible. We will make a plan to monitor until you can resume your duties.
- Share your successes and challenges with us. We can learn from one another during this time!

Your work during this time is both important and appreciated!