

## **Advocate Refresher**

### **Maintaining Meaningful Connections for CASA Children**

The COVID-19 Pandemic has made us realize how important family and community connections are. Everyone is looking forward to getting back to things that we took for granted; attending church, going to the gym, having dinner with friends, having in person visits with our families, etc. As we transition to the “new normal”, we need to be aware that our CASA children have not just missed attending school and extracurricular activities. Many have not seen their siblings or parents for several weeks. Family and community connections build resiliency!

Below are a few things that CASA Volunteers can do to facilitate reestablishing family connections for their CASA children:

- Maintain your connection with your CASA child. Speak to them as often as possible by phone or video chat and visit as soon as it is deemed safe for you to do so.
- Establish a plan with the child’s caretaker to determine if there are any special conditions that need to be considered when planning in-person visits.
- Ask your CASA child what people and activities that they have missed. The child may feel more comfortable discussing this with you privately.
- Don’t rely on the foster parent or caretaker to find out who the child is missing! Foster parents and caretakers often misinterpret a child not asking to see siblings or parents as an indicator that the child does not miss their family. There are many reasons for a child not to ask a caretaker about visiting with biological family members.
- Understand that infants and young children may have some adjustments when seeing a parent that they’ve not seen for almost two months. Crying or appearing upset is not necessarily an indicator the child does not have an attachment to a biological relative.
- Facilitate collaboration between biological parents and foster parents regarding helping the children feel comfortable when visits resume.
- Remember that maintaining those connections are based on the child’s needs. Foster parents or caretakers being inconvenienced or fearful that contact with the parents may make the children sick should not be reasons for children not seeing their parents or siblings.
- Collaborate with your supervisor and DCFS to develop a safe visiting plan for children and their biological family.
- Communicate any safety concerns regarding family visits to your supervisor and DCFS.
- Be available to talk to your CASA child about their concerns over returning to the “new normal”.
- Provide resources on safe practices to foster parents, children, and parents.

Thank you all for your incredible work during the pandemic. You have displayed great dedication to the children you are assigned to during a very challenging time. As always, your wellbeing is important to us. Please discuss any concerns regarding in-person visits with your CASA child with your supervisor.