

# Making the Most of Remote Family Time for Children Living in Foster Care

*A listing of helpful resources to help foster relationships*



In issuing [guidance concerning family visits](#), the New Jersey Department of Children and Families (DCF) indicated that parent-child and sibling visitation is “important now more than ever to reassure children that their parents and/or siblings are safe, and to maintain and strengthen family bonds and positive attachment during an otherwise uncertain time.” The guidance includes a list of age-appropriate activities to help parents and children connect through the screen, and some questions to ask when considering in-person visits. Some suggestions include:

- Put infants in a highchair and give them toys to play with. Talk to them about what they like and dislike.
- For toddlers, go with the flow. Instead of trying to keep their attention, follow their lead. Ask them different questions about what or how they’re doing, like “What are you playing?” or “What did you have for lunch today?”
- Try eating a snack with your child or drawing together.
- Let them have a say in what to do during your next visitation. It can be fun to plan it together.
- For older children, perhaps cook a meal together, or help with their schoolwork.

The [National Association of Counsel for Children](#) (NACC) provides a [list of resources](#) (under “Tech Resources”) with great tips for engaging children during remote visitations. [Rose Wentz, MPA](#), a national trainer with over 40 years of experience in public welfare and child welfare, provides [guidance](#) on how long and how frequent visits should be for different age groups. For infants, 10-15 minutes daily is a good place to start. Older children, however, might benefit from visits three or four times a week for longer periods of time.

Other types of communication, such as phone calls, texts, recordings, mail or email, can supplement video chats. Having on-going communication helps parents and children connect or maintain a connection, and gives both more to talk about during video chats and in-person visits. Since younger kids have a harder time differentiating between Zoom and TV, parents should look at the camera instead of the computer screen to make eye contact. Resource parents need to be engaged to help ensure successful visits.

Other tips from the NACC’s list include:

## Newborns/Infants

- Ask the caregiver to put device at the child’s eye level so they can look directly at parent.
- Be consistent and make the visit a part of the child’s routine.
- Use a phone instead of a computer to minimize distraction.
- If possible, give the child something that has the scent of the parent or home.
- Parents should use the same greeting and tone of voice each time to help the child recognize and get comfortable with the parent.
- Play interactive games like peekaboo.

## Toddlers and Young Children

- Keep in mind:
  - Back-and-forth conversations are really important for kids under three. Otherwise, it might not register for them that they are not watching TV.
  - Play is the child’s main way of communicating, so games and other activities are more effective than just asking questions.
- Choose a good time of day to avoid times when the child is not likely to be sleepy or especially distracted.
- Parents should show their surroundings, especially any pets they may have.
- Sing songs with hand motions, like “Itsy Bitsy Spider” and “Wheels on the Bus.”
- Put on one of the child’s favorite action songs (for example, “Baby Shark,” “We’re Going on a Bear Hunt”) and dance or act it out together.
- Play some games: Simon Says; Red Light, Green Light; Hangman; Charades; I Spy.
- Do a word search or crossword puzzle.
- Go on a virtual field trip together:
  - [NASA Virtual Field Trips](#)
  - [PBS Elementary Field Trips](#)
  - [Many others](#)
- Give virtual hugs to say goodbye by hugging the phone or computer.

### Additional Activities for Older Children/Teens

- Share a meal.
- Watch a movie or show together and talk about it after.
- Do a musical or physical activity:
  - Talent show/Karaoke.
  - Yoga.
  - Dance battle.
  - TikTok videos.
- Ask other people to join the call (with permission from the caseworker).
- Play with the filters or backgrounds on whatever app or platform you're using. Pick a different one for every visit.

[Rise](#), an organization that amplifies the voices of parents with children in foster care, lists [tips and resources](#) that guide parents through other obstacles in virtual visitation. Additionally, Rise provides resources on how parents and children can cope emotionally with remote visits. This includes information on how to explain COVID-19 and remote visits to children and continue to support their development, as well as how to support and process things yourself.

### Additional Resources:

- [Supporting Parent-Child and Sibling Visitation during the COVID-19 Pandemic](#) – New Jersey Department of Children and Families
- [COVID-19 Resource Hub](#) – National Association of Counsel for Children
- [Parent Tip Sheet for Video Visits](#) – Office of Criminal Conflict and Civil Regional Counsel
- [Things to do when you cannot be with your child](#) – Rose Wentz
- [Virtual Visits: Recommendations by Age and Access Resources](#) – Rose Wentz
- [Successful Video Visits with Young Children](#) – National Council on Crime & Delinquency
- [Using Tech to Keep Kids and Parents Connected](#) – Committee for Public Counsel Services
- [Visiting During COVID – Resources for Parents](#) – Rise Magazine



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