



Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Executive Office of Health and Human Services

Department of Youth Services

EMERGENCY GUIDANCE RE: VIRTUAL FAMILY VISITS

This guidance is issued to respond to the emergent issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic that may impact family visits to DYS state and provider operated programs. This guidance is intended to be time limited and will be reviewed two weeks from the effective date. This guidance was issued given the current best practices for containment of COVID-19 issued by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and the Centers for Disease Control. DYS reserves the right to rescind or modify this guidance at any time if it determines that the public health or health and safety of youth and staff are at risk, or to comply with state and federal guidance.

Virtual Family Visit Procedure

DYS is committed to maintaining a connection between its youth and their family in the community, during this difficult time. Efforts should be made to allow for such “virtual family visits” when possible. However, the scheduling of a virtual family visit is subject to the operational realities of each individual program. The safety and security of youth and staff are paramount.

Devices and User Accounts:

- Visits must take place on a DYS or Provider issued device. iPads are the preferred device; however, DYS or Provider issued smart phones and computers (laptops or desktops) may be used when necessary. DYS and Provider employees are not permitted to use personal devices to conduct a virtual visit.
- Visits must only take place using an approved video conferencing program. The approved programs are: FaceTime, Skype, and Webex. No social media apps (e.g. Facebook live) are to be used.
 - o If a program is going to use Skype or Webex, the Program Director or Clinical Director should set up one account to be used by the program. To maintain uniformity and transparency, the username should be the program name. No personal names or phrases or inappropriate language should be used when creating a username. If you need technical assistance, please contact Raul Delgado at raul.a.delgado@mass.gov or 617 835-9620,
 - o Youth and staff are not permitted to sign-in to any approved platform using a personal account.

Youth Eligibility for a Virtual Family Visit:

- Consistent with the DYS Policy #.03.04.04 (c), Residential Visitation Policy Incorporating Family Engagement Principles (“Residential Visitation Policy”), all youth shall be eligible for virtual family visits unless there is documentation demonstrating there is a safety risk to the youth or there is a concern of a

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serious detrimental effect to the youth's well-being, positive growth and skill development including that youth is not sufficiently stable to have the visit

- Visits shall never be withheld as a disciplinary measure and should be available to all youth, regardless of repair status.

Documenting a Virtual Family Visit:

- All virtual family visits shall be documented as a family visit in JJEMS. This is not a clinical visit and clinical concerns should not be discussed.
- If there are any concerns or issues with the virtual family visit (i.e. it is terminated due to inappropriate behavior), it must be documented in an incident report.

Scheduling and Initiating a Virtual Family Visit:

- Approved program staff will schedule and initiate the virtual family visit. Approved program staff are: Clinical Director, Program Director, Program Clinician, Assistant Program Director and Shift Administrators.
- No visit shall last longer than an hour.
- Consistent with the existing Residential Visitation Policy, youth should have at least 3 opportunities per week to visit with their family with at least 1 of those opportunities on the weekend.
- Consistent with the existing Residential Visitation Policy, staff conducting the virtual visit shall confirm the identity of the family member over the age of 12 with whom the visit is being held; however, the cancellation of a family visit cannot be based solely on the failure to produce an ID
- Family members must be informed at the start that any unauthorized individuals seen or heard on the virtual visit will result in termination of the virtual visit and may result in suspension of virtual visits.
- Family member must be informed at the start that they cannot take pictures or record any portion of the virtual visit. Failure to follow this rule will result in termination of the virtual visit and may result in suspension of virtual visits.

Conducting a Virtual Family Visit:

- Only one virtual visit shall be scheduled and conducted at a time on a unit.
- The visit will take place in an office where it can be monitored on a 1:1 ratio with an approved staff member. No other youth or staff shall be present during the visit.
- Staff monitoring the visit should be mindful to balance the privacy of the youth and family member with the safety and security of visit.

- The device being used shall be placed on a desk or table. The youth is not allowed to hold or touch the device.
- Youth shall not congregate or “line-up” to wait for their turn to have a visit.
- Eligibility and approval of visitors shall remain consistent with the existing Residential Visitation Policy
 - The definition of “Family” shall remain consistent with the existing Residential Visitation Policy.
 - Family is defined as individuals who may include but are not limited to a youth’s biological, adoptive or step parents, legal guardians, grandparents, biological or step siblings, children of the committed or detained youth, or others as approved by the location who play a supportive role in the youth’s life.
- Denial or Limitations to Visits shall remain consistent with the existing Residential Visitation Policy, including, but not limited to:
 - Any individual who is the named plaintiff in an active 209A Restraining Order or 258E Harassment Prevention Order, or who is listed in a Court Order such as Bail or Probation Conditions or a DCF order, which prohibits the youth from having contact with such individual(s), shall not be included on the list of approved visitors.
 - Any virtual visit may be terminated immediately by the staff member supervising the visit if that staff determines that youth or family member is acting inappropriately. Such behavior may include:
 - Unauthorized individuals appear or can be heard on the virtual visit.
 - Use of inappropriate language by the youth or family member (including, but not limited to the use of profanity, sexually explicit language, drug or criminal behavior).
 - Individual appears to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
 - Individual is identified by the youth as someone he/she does not want to visit.

Termination of a Virtual Family Visit:

- If the staff monitoring the virtual visit needs to terminate the visit for inappropriate behavior or due to the presence of unauthorized individuals, the following steps shall be taken:
 - The youth and his/her family member shall be given one warning to modify their behavior.
 - If the behavior reoccurs, the staff member shall verbally inform participants that the visit is being terminated.
 - Staff shall then sign-off from the device being used to conduct the visit.
 - An incident report must be written documenting the reasons for the termination.
 - Incident must be reviewed to consider whether virtual visits should be suspended.

If you have any questions or require additional information, please contact DYS Director of Residential Operations, Nancy Carter, 857-225-0199.

