

COVID-19 Practice Guidance for Youth Justice Engagement & Information Gathering



The COVID-19 pandemic is presenting new challenges for how youth justice professionals are serving children, youth and families. With social distancing recommendations, youth justice professionals have to adapt as they continue the essential work of collaborating with youth, families and system stakeholders to ensure public safety and youth accountability. An unprecedented amount of youth justice work is happening via video or phone conferencing, including engagement and information gathering – all of which are critical components to serving youth and families. DCF is committed to supporting the children, youth and families in our communities, and to keeping our youth justice workforce safe and healthy. In general, there is no substitute for face-to face contact and local child welfare agencies are encouraged to see youth, and families in person, but given the current COVID-19 pandemic it may be necessary and prudent to conduct some contacts virtually under certain circumstances, as discussed in the [Case Practice: Face-to-Face Caseworker Contacts](#). The purpose of this desk guide is to assist youth justice professionals with conducting these virtual contacts. The information in the desk guide pertains to general contacts and information gathering from the time of intake and referral through disposition and ongoing service provision.

Considerations for Face-to-Face & Other In-Person Contacts

The following is intended to support youth justice professionals in being efficient during initial intake and other in-person contacts in order to gather sufficient information so that future contacts, information gathering, and assessment may occur virtually when possible.



Working Smart during Initial & Other In-Person Contacts

- **Be efficient.**
 - Narrow the focus of the face-to-face contact and consider how to safely gather the information you need.
 - What questions will you need to ask and assess?
 - Given those questions, can the contact occur outdoors with appropriate physical distancing? Can it occur via phone or video conferencing?
- **Prioritize information gathering.**
 - Gather relevant information in order to make decisions, then prioritize and start to gather information you need to assess and plan.
 - Thorough information can only be identified through the collection and assessment of information about the youth and family.

Additional Considerations

- Has the youth been able to meet with providers outside of the home during this crisis? If not, what's the plan?
- If the youth has medical concerns or diagnoses, have they been able to have those needs met?
- If the youth has a mental health diagnosis or substance abuse disorder, have they been able to check in with their provider or have medications refilled?
- If any services have been impacted, how has the youth been coping, and has it affected anyone or the dynamics in the household?
- What progress is the youth making on existing plans?
- Are parents/guardians and/or youth able to fulfil court-ordered services?
- Is anything needed from the agency to continue making progress?



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Virtual Engagement

Key Participants for Youth Justice Engagement



Families

- Mothers
- Fathers
- Other Adult Guardians
- Children & Youth



Placement Providers

- Relatives & Like-Kin
- Foster Parents
- Provider Agencies



Tribes

- Tribal Children & Families
- Tribal Caregivers
- Tribal Child Welfare Agencies
- Tribal Courts



External Parties

- Service Providers
- School Personnel
- Medical Professionals
- Law Enforcement
- Clergy
- Courts
- Victims



Virtual Engagement Tips

- **Extend respect**
 - Show respect for the youth's and family's time
 - Honor your commitment to the youth and family by being on time and prepared
- **Speaking pace**
 - Count to 10 (silently) after asking a question to allow the person time to think and respond
- **Be in view**
 - Be close to the camera, but not so close that the other person cannot see your hands
- **Try not to interrupt the person speaking**
 - Allow the person to finish their thought before asking additional questions
- **Make eye contact**
 - Making eye contact by looking at the camera, instead of images on the screen, is better for interactive communication
- **Choose a quiet location**
 - Try to avoid interruptions or being distracted by environmental factors, as possible



Virtual Information Gathering

Virtual Information Gathering Requirements

It is critical to continue to gather information from children, youth, families, providers, and other experts in order to inform your assessment and case planning. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, you may need to make changes to how you gather information.

- You may need to gather new information about how the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency is impacting the youth and family.
- When gathering information via video or phone, be sure to ask to **see** and/or **speak** to the **youth** and **their guardian**.
- Where youth justice professionals would normally use observation to gather information, you should make attempts to gather the same information via video.

Information Gathering Tips

- Work with what you already know in order to determine what critical information you need to gather
- Be prepared – have a plan for what you need to say and what information needs to be gathered before starting the conversation
 - Make and share an agenda for the conversation
- When starting the conversation, state your intended purpose and goals, including how much time you have
- Ask adults and youth if they have questions or topics they'd like to discuss
- Try to keep questions short and the allow the other person to do most of the talking
- Use open-ended questions as much as possible
- Ask follow-up or clarifying questions
- When ending the conversation, summarize the content, follow-up items and next steps
- Set a time for a follow-up conversation or meeting
- Break up conversations into multiple contacts – don't feel like you need to be on the phone or video for the same time you'd be at a home visit

Information Gathering Considerations for Youth

- A youth's age and development may impact if or how they interact via video or phone. Special considerations may be needed for youth with disabilities or other special needs in order to minimize frustrations and manage expectations.
- Make it a social, interactive experience – consider using aids to engage with youth (i.e. showing pictures, playing music, using scaling questions, etc.).
- Manage your own expectations for how you will interact with the youth via video or phone and what information you'll be able to gather. Be patient, go slowly, go one step at a time, and try not to get frustrated.
 - The youth's attention span will vary and impact how long they are able to interact via video or phone.
- Consider the time of day that you're interacting with the youth; try to avoid times in the day where the youth may be more distracted, such as during mealtimes.

Information Gathering Considerations for Adults

- Collaborate with parents and guardians in order to coordinate information gathering. Inquire about the best times and length of time for a phone or video conversation.
- Inquire about concerns parents or guardians may have about privacy or other worries they may have when speaking to you via phone or video.
- Recognize that parents or guardians may have unavoidable distractions as they are talking with you – be patient.



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Virtual Information Gathering

Information Gathering Preparation

Youth Justice professionals should consider the following questions to prepare for gathering relevant information. Gathering a lot of information that does not have a purpose for your initial intake is time consuming. Gathering relevant information ensures you have gathered factual and purposeful information that you can use for your intake. Your information gathering process should have structure and purpose.

- What questions need to be answered?
- What decisions need to be made?
- What information do I need? What is the purpose of seeking the “need to know” information?
 - Evaluating treatment progress?
 - Evaluating case plans and goals?
- How much information do I need? When will I know that I have enough information?
- Who do I need to gather information from?
 - Youth?
 - Household members (regular and intermittent)?
 - Collaterals?
 - Providers?
- How do I need to gather the information?
 - Via technology (phone, video)?
- How will I prioritize my limited time in order to gather the information I need?

Families may be experiencing different circumstances during COVID-19 pandemic. In order to support the family, you may need to understand how current circumstances are impacting them.

Questions for Parents and Guardians

- **Is everyone in your family able to get what they need (food, clothing, housing, medical care)? Have there been any problems?**
 - Are you able to access what you need to care for your family? What would help?
 - Who can help you? Do you have supportive family, friends, or neighbors to help you and your children?
- **How is everyone in the family getting along with each other? Is anyone having a hard time?**
 - How is everyone passing the time? Do you have activities you do together? Do you need ideas?
 - Are you worried about anyone? Why?
- **What’s it like parenting right now? How is it different? What’s going well? What are some of the challenges?**
 - Have you noticed changes in your child’s behavior? Are you concerned?
 - Who were your youth connected to outside of the home? How are they staying in touch to their friends?
 - What have you most appreciated about yourself during this time? What have your children most appreciated about you?
- **How are you and your family holding up?**
 - How are you dealing with maintain social isolation? How are you managed thus far?
 - How is everyone coping with stress? Are you finding it difficult to bounce back or manage?
 - Is anyone having a hard time? What seems to be bothering you the most? What makes it better/worse?
 - Have people in your family had to face crises before? What did they do?

Questions for Youth

- **Tell me about how things are going at home. How are things going for you?**
 - Are you feeling okay?
 - Are you worried about anything?
- **Who is taking care of you? What are they doing?**
 - Who makes sure you have everything you need? What do they do?
 - Where do you sleep at night? Do you sleep well?
 - Who wakes you up in the morning?
 - Are you getting enough food?
- **How is everyone getting along with each other? Is anyone having a hard time?**
 - Who lives and stays in your home (including pets)? Who visits?
 - Are you worried about anyone? Why?
 - How can you tell when someone in your home is having a hard time? What do they do? What makes them feel better?
- **Tell me about what you do all day.**
 - What things do you like to do at home? What do you like to do?
 - Do you have responsibilities at home? What are they?
 - What is everyone doing all day? Do you have activities you do together?
- **What do you like most about staying at home? What do you like least? Why?**
 - What are the rules in your house? What happens when someone (sibling, pet, parent) breaks a rule?
 - What are some of the best things about being at home?
 - What are you doing for fun?
 - What do you miss the most about school? Why?

