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Governor Tony Evers
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Division of Safety and Permanence

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Dear Foster Parent,

The Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF) applauds and appreciates your continued commitment to supporting the children and families in our communities while ensuring their ongoing health and safety. It is important to share information with you and again seek your partnership as we prepare to reinstate, facilitate, and support increased family interaction as community reintegration progresses.

COVID-19 and Child-Family Interaction

As the circumstances of COVID-19 continues to evolve, it has become apparent that total elimination of the risks of infection with this disease will not happen soon. While many family interactions moved to a virtual platform at the onset of this pandemic, the total cessation of in-person family interaction is not possible for months on end. We know that face-to-face contact between parents, siblings and children in out-of-home care is essential to the welfare of both children and their parents and contributes to timely and positive permanency outcomes for children.

Children in foster care have two homes, much like children in shared custody agreements. As such, and in recognition of the need to bring children, parents and siblings together, some agencies have restarted, and most are preparing to resume face-to-face family interaction. Foster parents are a critical component in our system, and a crucial partner in supporting family interaction.

In determining the best course of action as to how to proceed with face-to-face family interaction, multiple sources of information must be considered, including individual circumstances, continued county or local orders in effect, community public health advisories, and CDC recommendations. With some additional precautions, many children and families will be able to, and should, resume face-to-face contact.

There will continue to be circumstances specific to individuals and communities which may necessitate continued virtual contact to ensure the health and safety of children, parents, you and your family. Likewise, local communities may experience spikes in community spread or other unique circumstances, which need to be further considered as well.

While each local agency will establish procedures for decision-making, DCF has issued guidance to child welfare agencies that identifies increased precautions for considerations as outlined in the Family Interaction During the Covid-19 Pandemic (<https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/press/2020/covid/f2f-update.pdf>) document. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>) also offers additional guidance and resources for consideration.

Foster Parent Support in Family Interaction

Many foster families have gone to great lengths to support family interaction between children and their families. You have supported virtual interaction and many of you have even facilitated in-person contact. Thank you for your commitment and support to families.

Foster parents may be called upon for additional support as face-to-face family interaction resumes. Some possible supports may include:

- Helping to identify what supports, protections, and reassurances children need in seeing their families face-to-face again.
- Preparing children for the possibility that they, their parents, or their siblings may be wearing masks or other protective gear during the visit.
- Providing transportation and visitation supervision when applicable and appropriate, to reduce close contact between multiple people.
- Sending additional clothing or being asked to wash clothing before or after visits to reduce possible contagion risks.
- Wearing masks during interactions with child welfare agency staff and families.
- Assisting in ensuring accessibility of masks for children over the age of two.

Foster parents are encouraged to maintain open communication with the child(ren)'s caseworker, foster home licensing worker, or their supervisor(s) about any concerns related to resuming face-to-face family interaction, including any additional individual, family, or household member circumstances which may require further consideration and precaution. Foster parents should also communicate about any additional exposure risks that they or individuals in their household may present and report any instances of suspected or confirmed COVID-19, or close contact with a person diagnosed with COVID-19 in the past 14 days.

*If you or someone in your family or household is exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19, please contact your personal healthcare provider **immediately**. They will provide you with further guidance, including information about getting tested as necessary.*

As a reminder, Ch. DCF 56.06 Admin. Code requires foster parents to *immediately* report all serious incidents to the supervising and licensing agencies. This includes serious illnesses or injuries that require services of a licensed medical professional under [Ch. DCF 56.06\(1\)\(b\) Admin. Code](#). Following receipt of this information from a foster parent, the licensing agency is required by [Ch. DCF 56.16\(1\)\(k\) Admin. Code](#) to notify the placing agency of any serious incident.

As we continue to navigate the uncharted territories that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought upon us, we appreciate your continued partnership and service to the children and families in Wisconsin. DCF continues to regularly update guidance and recommendations on our [COVID-19 website](#) and welcomes continued questions be sent to the DCF COVID-19 mailbox: DCFMBCOVID19@wisconsin.gov.