

Considerations for Virtual Work

This guide is intended to be used only when access to technology is confirmed and after the decision to engage virtually has been made.

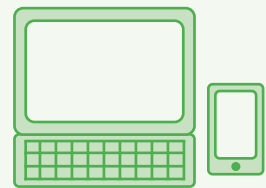
Engaging people virtually, like in-person engagement, must be based on respect, openness, and humility.

Virtual work can feel awkward and there won't be a one-size-fits-all approach. For some, it could be a series of shorter meetings instead of one long meeting; others may prefer the phone instead of video. It might take time, but work it out together.

It may be triggering for some people to engage through online or electronic means. For Indigenous families, consider that virtual contact may be reminiscent of only seeing children through the fences of residential schools. Or, consider the fear of children and youth if they have been previously exploited via technology.

Plan and Prepare:

- Call ahead like you would for an in-person visit to schedule the meeting.
- Let families know that the working relationship remains the same despite this being a different way of connecting.
- Manage boundaries and expectations that may arise from this new way of working. Sometimes connecting on a virtual platform can feel more familiar so it will be important to be clear about roles.
- Use a questioning approach, such as those provided by Signs of Safety (examples [here](#)) to get in depth information about how people are coping during the pandemic.



Think about Technology:

- Provide a choice of electronic platforms, if possible, and use the family's preference wherever possible.
- Provide instructions on how to use the platform and test it out together.
- Plan for what happens if you get disconnected or are interrupted.
- Remember: Everyone's comfort level with technology is different. You may have to provide some 'tech support.' Be honest about your learning and limitations.
- Consider: Many children and youth are tech savvy, give them a chance to teach you a trick or two!

Consider Privacy and Consent:

- Assure people that the meeting is not being recorded but that you will take notes like you always do.
- Discuss and document consent for virtual contact; acknowledge some of challenges using technology and acknowledge the worry of sharing personal information online.
- Confirm they have a private, safe place where you can virtually meet.
- Outline the steps you take to maintain their privacy and confidentiality especially if you are working from home (private space, use of headphones, documents stored safely, etc).
- Be honest if there is chance of interruption (including kids and pets) and review what your plan will be.
- Remember: Your space can be seen too.
- Consider: Breaking the ice. Do a virtual tour of your space to start the visit. Where safe and okay with caregivers, encourage children and youth to take the lead on a virtual tour of their space.

Further Reading:

- ANCFSAO: Virtual Visiting resource, [here](#)
- Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health: Responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, a variety of e-working resources [here](#)
- College of Social Workers and Social Services Workers: Professional and Ethical: Communication Technology Practices and Policies for a Digital World, [here](#)
- Empowered Kids Ontario: Virtual Care Resource Guide, [here](#)
- OACAS: Shared Resources for the Planning of Family Visits during COVID-1 Planning, has many resources for virtual visits, [here](#)