



Australian Children's Contact Services Association Inc
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Advancing The CCS Sector
Australia's Founding CCS Association

Children's Contact Services and Virtual Visits

The Covid-19 pandemic presents a number of challenges for the CCS sector. This includes evaluating and acting upon the safest way to deliver any services offered.

ACCSA has been disseminating information on this issue amongst the sector and facilitating on-going communication amongst ACCSA Affiliated CCSs.

Feedback received indicates that many services are considering the use of cyber platforms by way of offering virtual visits.

ACCSA encourages all CCSs to refer to the *Children's Contact Services Guiding Principles Framework for Good Practice (2018)*, particularly in regard to safety, risk and intake assessment and 1.4 Telephone/Internet Based Supervised Visits when assessing whether to offer and provide Virtual Visits to a family.

The following considerations may also be considered, especially in the context of service provided to families where family violence, or the risk of family violence, is in question:

Assessment Considerations

- Review each individual family to determine if virtual visits are safe to offer. Look at the presenting reasons for being referred or ordered to a CCS, review the current and historical patterns of visits, gauge your capacity to provide safe, trauma informed virtual visits.
- Determine what ages of children are appropriate for virtual visits (e.g. 5 years old minimum)
- Advise both parties that virtual visits are considered low vigilance. CCS staff must be clear with all service users that, while everything will be done to promote the privacy and confidentiality of conversations and contacts, we cannot guarantee that this will not be contravened by parties.

- All virtual meetings will be password protected to prevent unauthorised parties from logging in or accessing the session.
- Consider requiring all involved be required to wear headphones to minimise any audio spillage to those not involved in the visit.
- Discuss the possibility of virtual visits with family members who are survivors of abuse. Listen to their feedback, concerns and fears. Are there operational responses that can address any concerns and fears? Understand that the parent makes the decision as to whether they will proceed with virtual visits. The CCS's role, if a determination has been to offer virtual visits, is to assess whether this can occur for this family in a safe manner.
- Online invitations to join the virtual meetings will be sent by CCS staff to all parties via BCC email, sent separately to each party. This is to ensure privacy and confidentiality of email addresses and contact details.
- Is there adequate bandwidth to enable the virtual visit to proceed smoothly? Buffering and drop-outs might only increase anxiety – test prior to any virtual visit.

Supervision Considerations

- CCS staff will be the sole host of the contact and will manage all participants in the VVs. No other party will be able to join, host or facilitate these contacts without pre-approval from CCS staff.
- Who is in the rooms at each house/site at the time of the call? Have any 'visitors' been vetted and approved as per usual procedures?
- What is in the virtual visit ? What is in the background ? Is there anything that may breach confidentiality, identify location or trigger any trauma ? Has the service conducted an initial virtual visit with each family member prior to bringing the two parties together to assess what is in the visit?
- Don't use a 'virtual background screen' option as this may hide other people in the visit.
- Participants in the virtual visits are not permitted to take photos or screenshots of the visits

- Conduct a familiarisation session for the child(ren) to assess how the format may work for them. Can any issues for them be resolved? Many children are active and move around a lot – can confidentiality and family security be maintained if a child is moving around a room during the virtual visit?
- How will any interventions occur? Has this been explained to and discussed with all involved?
- How will any suspension or termination of a visit occur? Has this been explained to and discussed with all involved? CCS staff have the right to discontinue the virtual visit and review the use of service if child(ren) are consistently unwilling to participate, are distressed or thought to be at risk of physical, psychological or emotional harm.
- Is there adequate bandwidth to enable the virtual visit to proceed smoothly? Buffering and drop-outs might only increase anxiety – test prior to any virtual visit.