

Tips for Virtual Support of Parent-Child Interaction

A **parent-child interaction** is *any moment of shared attention between a parent and child*. This includes how the child experiences the parent, how the parent experiences the child, and how those experiences impact the relationship. PCI takes place during playtime as well as during daily routines of the day.



Where in the family environment

- Encourage families to **set up the visit where the child is comfortable**. Before the visit, work with the family to decide where they and their child feel most comfortable trying out this new way of visits.

When

- **Playtime interactions, both previous and real time**, to promote parents' reflection of their children's development and skills, and their own behaviors and skills as a parent.
- **Routines and everyday life activities**. Adapt to the family schedule when possible.

Who is on camera

- **Have the parent adjust the device and camera angle** so it can capture everyone on the screen (at least for part of the time).
- **Remind the parent to move the device as needed**. Positioning the camera four to five feet away from the parent and child interaction can provide a broader view and relieve the tension a child might experience.
- Encourage the parent to **"take me with you,"** take the device if the child/children leave the room.
- Give gentle reminders to the parent at the start of the call, or even at other times during the call, that **other family members are welcome** to join or rejoin the session.
- **Your own personal and family needs may occur** during visits. Think through what steps may take place and share those possibilities with family (such as, will you turn off camera/audio briefly? Will the family observe your family interaction?).

Why direct the visit to PCI

- **Development and relationship patterns continue** regardless of family circumstances and ongoing situations.
- **Pivoting discussion towards parent-child interactions** and child development is important to do without disrespecting or disregarding the context and content of the family's story, toward engaging parents in being fully present and aware of their children.
- **Listening to the content and context of the family's story is a first step**, then asking questions such as, "How do you think this situation is affecting Jose?" or "Have you noticed any changes in Maria since this happened?" are ways to bring the child into the conversation so parenting can be supported.

- **Connect a goal to bring the focus to interactions.** For instance, you can say something like, “It’s really hard for you right now to manage the kids, the house, and being pregnant. I know you care deeply for your kids and want them to succeed in school and life, so let’s make sure we spend a few minutes together interacting with them and focusing on their development. Deep breathing can be a great way to help re-focus our mind and body; let’s take a few deep breaths together and then try out the activity.”

How to coach and support parents during a virtual visit

- **Norms of the experience** – knowing what to expect helps family become more comfortable
 - **Screen as a window** – that the FSP can see part of the interactions
 - **Device out of anyone’s hand** – propped with a broad angle is preferred
 - **Different screen interactions** than video calls with family and friends. The parent and child are encouraged to interact with each other, not as much with the FSP on the screen.
 - **Children can move around the space.** “Take me with you” – encourage the family to take the device if they are changing location
 - **Amplified/exaggeration of self** – consider encouraging family to close self-view of camera to minimize self-conscious reactions
- **Observe and comment** just as you would in an on-ground visit.
 - **Positive parenting strategies** - “I notice that you smiled at both of your children when they were playing together so they know you like it when they do that.”
 - **Parent’s interests and ideas** - “I notice that you enjoy cooking. What cooking activities have you tried with your child?”
 - **Parent’s values** - “I noticed that you redirected him from hitting his brother. It seems important to you that they learn to get along well with each other.”
 - **Parent knowledge** - “It’s interesting that you notice your child putting words together because that’s an important change in language development.”

Supporting parent-child interaction outside of the visits

- **On phone calls ask a variety of questions to explore current and recent parent-child interactions:**
 - “What are some things your family especially enjoys doing together?”
 - “What have you noticed about your child’s language development?”
 - “How do you feel about how your child is developing? What do you think is the most important thing for her to learn?”
 - “What are other things you do to help them learn to get along?”
 - “What’s fun for you to do with your kids?”

Verbal Video

A **verbal video** is a description of what a person sees, hear, and feels in the moment. It helps you imagine the moment, like a video clip playing in your mind, even when you’re not present with the family.

Prompt Parents

“What are Tanisha’s hands doing with the blocks? Have you noticed her doing this before?”
 “What is Malik doing with the cars? How is he using his body? Have you noticed him doing this before?”
 “What do you think they’ll do next?”

Coach Parents

“Sounds like Tanisha and Malik’s play caused Tanisha to get upset. Dad, how would you describe it? I noticed how you quickly tended to Tanisha’s emotions. Take the time you need with her to help.”

- “I notice that you enjoy cooking. Have you tried doing cooking activities with your child?”
- **Guided discussion prompts to think through possible responses.** Encourage the parent to reflect on a way they interacted with their child or even on a specific goal for interaction (e.g., responding to the child during play or a family routine, like meal time).
 - “Let’s say that you’re trying to get dinner ready and also trying to text back your supervisor at work, and your child wants your attention. How might you respond?”
 - “What about if you’re working from home and your child comes to play with her toys next to you. What might you do?”
 - “What about if you’re making the bed [or another chore] and (child’s name) comes and pulls the sheets/pillows off the bed or hands you the pillows. How might you respond?”
 - “Let’s say you hear (child’s name) crying from another room in the house. How might you respond?”
 - “What about if you’re busy making dinner and (child’s name) comes running to you and hugs your legs. What might you do?”
- **Open-ended and reflective experience** remains a tool in this work and can be used to support PCI, especially during this time.
- **Summarize the parent's response or dialogue.** This will help the parent to hear their thoughts and know you are seeking to understand.
- **Parent might send email/text/voicemail** updates between sessions about interactions
- **Parent can share thoughts and observations** about interactions or continued activities between visits.
- **FSP might share worksheets**, resources, check-in between sessions
- **Review of screenshots or video recordings of a visit.** The FSP might take a screenshot of an interaction to share with the family or the family may video an interaction or activity to share with FSP.

*Keep your eyes on the child.
When the child leads, and you and the parent follow,
your work together will find its way back on track.*

This document was collaboratively developed by practitioners and experts from the field of home visiting at the following organizations: ABC, Families Forward Virginia, the Institute for Advancement of Family Support Professionals, The Ounce of Prevention, Parents as Teachers National Center, Parent Child+, and PAT USC Telehealth Project. Some content was sourced from *Developmental Parenting: A Guide for Early Childhood Practitioners* by: Lori A. Roggman, Lisa K. Boyce, and Mark S. Innocenti.