

## Transitioning to PCI in a Difficult Situation



Just like on-ground visits, transitioning to PCI during a virtual visit can be a challenge when the family is navigating a difficult situation or stressor. Strong emotions accompany difficult situations. As family support professionals, our job is to help the parent think through the situation, share appropriate resources and encourage positive parent-child interactions.

Before thinking through some possible steps to supporting the family through a challenging situation and encouraging PCI, consider why shifting focus from the challenge to PCI can be so hard.

- Parent may be experiencing a high level of stress in particular, given the current (and historical) trauma related to racism, health, finances, childcare, etc., and leaving a crisis without full resolution feels insensitive. We may want to fix things.
- FSP's role in observing and reading those cues of discomfort may be more challenging virtually. The things you typically hone in on (tone of voice, specific statements) may be hard to see or hear.

Knowing that development does not stop during difficult times and believing that all parents want the best for their children, our role is to help them learn strategies to parent and cope in the midst of whatever life throws at them. We must work toward parental resiliency and attachment.

Preparation is key to transitioning to PCI. The following steps might be helpful.

### Steps to PCI Transition

1. Address the issue (as appropriate to your role)
2. Use reflective questions and motivational interviewing techniques to work toward solutions
3. Share resources as appropriate
4. Transition to positive parent-child interaction

If a parent presents with a true mental health crisis, such as suicidal or homicidal thoughts or believing they're in danger, then that's a different situation. Follow your agency's procedure for handling a mental health crisis.

Here, we are addressing when your client wants to keep talking about how her anxiety is affecting her, yet does not respond to getting services for help from your resources.

It's important to know our role. FSPs are not counselors, so setting boundaries is important for yourself and the parents. We can use reflective questions and

motivational interviewing techniques to encourage families to think about solutions and actions to take. FSPs are well versed in local resources to share with families.

### Transition Statement

Sometimes a transition can be as simple as an invitation to taking a 10 minute break from navigating the stressor to enjoying a playful moment with their child. Other times, FSPs may decide to plan a transition statement to help with the shift into parent-child interaction. Taking the time to write out a statement and saying it out loud several times before the visit can build the FSP's confidence.

One way to shift the focus is to connect the parent's hopes for their children to the visit.

*"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 interacting with them and focusing on their development."*

*"Deep breathing can be a great way to help re-focus our mind and body, so let's take a few deep breaths together and then try out the activity."*

Or you might use the child's actions to make the transition. When adults are deep in discussion, children frequently do something to get attention. You might notice some boisterous activity in the background that might be a nice transition.

*"I'm wondering if Sylvia is telling us she wants to play with you! What does she do when she wants your attention? How about if we take a break from talking about this issue right now and spend some time playing and laughing? Her development is progressing and we can look for what skills she's working on."*

*"What are your favorite games to play now?"*

Creating a transition statement can be a group effort too! Ask for partners in your team meetings and consider talking about transition statements in supervision. Processing and brainstorming with others will individualize and enhance your work.

### Supporting Parent-Child Interaction

Once parent-child interaction is occurring, FSPs have the opportunity to support and sustain the interactions.

- Supporting and sustaining is influenced by the FSP energy. Smiles and sparkles in the eyes can convey an appreciation and joy in watching the parent and child interact. Parents know when they are being appreciated so are likely keep the behavior going. Children know when their parent is enjoying the moment.
- Mention their efforts, positive assumptions, and strengths you are noticing.
- Use eye contact with the screen with an inviting facial gesture and breathing deeply so your face and shoulders are relaxed. Smile at the camera.

- Ask the parent to position the device so they do not have to hold it and can move about talking with you, caring for and playing with their child.
- If the parent is still hesitant, invite them to take the device with them while they do a chore with their child.

**When the parent-child interaction is positive, responsive, supportive, fun, and ongoing, ask yourself...**

- What nonverbal cues can I give to let the parent know they are doing great—smiling, nodding, thumbs up, quiet clapping?
- I wonder how long they can sustain this interaction?
- What do I notice the parent is doing to keep the child engaged?
- What is the parent doing that is really helping the child learn something?

The FSP can use the pauses in the interaction to sustain it. There are many options to consider.

**When there is a pause in the interaction ...**

- Do I name the potential pause to normalize the silence?
  - *“I’m going to be quiet while you play or take care of your child. While you do that, I’ll notice all the wonderful things happening between the two of you.”*
- Do I share observations of the parent’s actions that are influencing the child’s development?
- Do I name the name the skills the child is learning?
- Do I share information about what skills are coming next?
- Do I wonder (aloud) what the child’s reaction might be if the materials are used in a different way?
- Do I connect the interaction to any areas of concern, any challenging routines or behaviors?
- Do I use the child’s voice to share his perspective?
- Do I remain quiet to allow space for the family to speak?