

Supervised Visitations & Safe Child Exchanges During COVID-19
The South Dakota Network Against Family Violence & Sexual Assault
Fact Sheet 3/25/20

Examples of Supervised Visitation Centers Suspending Services:

- 1) **Green House 17:** Non-profit organization committed to ending intimate partner abuse in families and the community. Located in: Rural Fayette County, Kentucky

Website link: <https://greenhouse17.org/safe-exchange-and-visitation/>

*Kentucky has 198 cases as of today while South Dakota only has 41 (3/25/20)

Their usual services: Supervised Visitation & Monitored Exchange

Supervised visitation is visitation between a non-custodial parent and one or more children in a safe, secure environment to enhance building positive parent-child relationships. Visits take place at our facility and are observed and documented by a Visitation Monitor. Monitored exchange is the supervision of the exchange of children from one parent to the other. Parents do not come into contact with one another during the process. Following the exchange, the visiting parent leaves to spend time with his or her children unsupervised.

***Exchange and visitation services have been temporarily suspended during response to the COVID-19 public health emergency**

They provide a disclaimer on their page and provide an informational form that concerned individuals can fill out to receive more direct responses to their particular situation.

- 2) **Family Pathways:** Located in North Branch, Minnesota.

Website: <https://www.familypathways.org/about-us/covid-19-response/>

***Offers Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchanges- Suspended until further notice**

Also provided a disclaimer on their website with general information regarding their closure of services.

Conversation with the Executive Director (3/26/20): They are following all state guidelines and had to layoff a majority of their non essential workers (including visitation staff)- Did have the ability to chose between furlough (pay benefits & have a guaranteed job) or laid off. They provided generic messaging regarding closures due to COVID-19 due to the ever changing information. If this continues past May 1st they would consider virtual visitations- However, rural areas they serve are a large concern about available resources when utilizing technology.

Email address: loriq@familypathways.org is available to answer any question and engage in collaboration during this time.

Example of Visitation Remaining Open:

- 1) California Visitation Center is **remaining open until further notice**

Website: <http://www.cafamilyvisitation.com/>

Our Response to COVID-19 To all of our valued clients,
The safety and overall well-being of our monitors, children, and parents are always our top priority. With this in mind, we have been closely watching the rapidly-changing situation around COVID-19 (commonly referred to as Coronavirus) and are prepared for all possible scenarios, with the goal of continuing to safely serve you. **Our center will remain open** as long as it is sensible to do so. We will continue to closely monitor the situation under the guidance of the CDC (Center for Disease Control), and the County of San Diego and will be making the necessary decisions as they present themselves.
Thank you for your business and understanding.
California Family Visitation

Virtual Visitation Examples:

1) Family Services in New York:

Website <https://www.cfs-nyc.com/virtual-visitations>

For situations where in person parent/child is either determined to be inappropriate or is not logistically possible due to other barriers, **CFS provides supervised virtual visitation**. This includes supervising parental access through video calling on HIPAA compliant platforms such as Zoom, and also through supervised telephone calls. CFS is also available to monitor email, text or written communication between a parent and children. As with most CFS services, this can be utilized as a stand-alone service or as a compliment to other already utilized programs.

CFS COVID-19 Response

Due to the unique challenges and health risks posed by the Coronavirus pandemic, we are making our **Virtual Visitation service available to all of our client families**. This initiative aims to allow for continuity between parents seeking to stay connected with their children. This online form of visitation enables a risk free way for parents and children to interact safely. As always, the safety and security of our client families and staff are our top priority. We are continuing to monitor the new developments of the crisis and are committed to providing the best service possible to our community during this difficult time.

2) Colorado: The application that we chose to use for our virtual visitations is Zoom Meetings. Within this program, our Case Managers are able to be the "host" of the visitation.

Adjustments made to ensure a level of safety:

- Turned off Screen Sharing•
- Turned off the Chat function
- Turned on the control for the "host" - AKA visit supervisor - to put either party on hold during the visit. This allows them to temporarily remove either the child or the visiting party from the call to have a private conversation
- Turned off any sharing of call-in phone numbers or computer information

- The child is free to indicate when they are ready to end the call at any point as our standard 2-hour visitation slot is a long time for younger children to handle online. When it is time to end the call, the supervisor will End the Meeting for All which prevents any conversation to continue unsupervised."

Information Sharing Prior to Start of Call:

- Before the virtual visitations are permitted to begin for any family, we require both parties to complete a virtual orientation. During this time we speak with each party to go over how the visitations will operate, provide safety guidance, and determine the space in the home where the visitations will occur. This way we can be sure that no identifying characteristics are in the frame. We do not allow our children or the visiting party to move about the house during the visitations to ensure that the environment is controlled. Additionally, we do not allow any persons not involved in the visitation into the screen during the visit and encourage the child or the non-visiting party to wear headphones during the call.
- Both parties join the visitation via a link sent to their email which prevents them from gaining any contact information from either party. The child joins 10 minutes before the visitation is set to begin so that the non-visiting parent can get them set-up and the supervisor can make sure the child feels comfortable and prepared for the visit. If everything is ready to go, the link is sent to the visiting party and we observe and document the visitation as normal with the supervisor always visible, but on mute unless they need to address something. If either party needs to speak to the supervisor directly, or if the supervisor needs to provide a redirection, the "on hold" function is used to allow for a private conversation.

3) **Illinois:** Utilize **Skype** for SPT on occasion. Interestingly, we have a case right now, though it is **suspended**.

Previous online Visitation Policies:

- We have done it two ways. Usually, we have the child in the room with us and the parent is present through Skype. We invite the parent and it is through our Skype account and at our location. These parents have always been out of town.
- We've decided we are going to use a phone rather than a laptop if the child is too young to stay put for a little bit.
- We have also done Skype with all three of us on the video call. We initiated the calls so seeing the **location of the teenager isn't an issue**. If there is a young child, the residential parent would have to be very involved. In those cases, we would have to really assess for appropriateness. I would think that most often, *we wouldn't do it*. If residential parent could be that involved, perhaps they could do it without us.
- Staff is using county equipment in all instances, so IP address etc. of residential parent and child should be unavailable to the nonresidential parent.

Resources (Suggestions) for Parents: Article regarding child custody during COVID-19

- Suggests parents to get an emergency temporary protection order

- Additionally here are some suggestions in place of visitation

URL to article: <https://www.nolo.com/legal-encyclopedia/how-to-handle-child-custody-and-visitiation-during-the-covid-19-outbreak.html>

If your ex has flouted social distancing rules or works in a high-risk environment, and you're worried about your vulnerable or immunocompromised child getting COVID-19, speak with your child's pediatrician for advice. You can ask your ex to modify your custody schedule on a temporary basis, and propose alternatives such as:

- postponing in-person visits for a period of time (depending on what your child's doctor says)
- scheduling daily phone calls and/or "virtual visits" using FaceTime or Zoom
- having your ex come by in-person to say hello, but keep a safe distance from your child if your child's doctor thinks this is safe (some family members are visiting vulnerable relatives through windows while talking on the phone) and/or
- sending letters, postcards, and text messages.

Side Note:

<https://www.masslegalhelp.org/health-mental-health/covid-19>

If courts shut down example of Massachusetts Emergency Protection Order

Example policy for child custody: This is *NOT* in place in South Dakota rather what other states have been doing to combat this issue.

4) State of Texas released a Child Custody Visitation Issue (more specifically addresses custody)

As a result, on March 17th, 2020 The Texas Supreme Court issued a "**Second Emergency Order Regarding the Covid-19 State of Disaster**" which addressed this specific issue as it pertains to Standard Possession Orders and states:

"1. This order applies to and clarifies possession schedules in Suits Affecting the Parent–Child Relationship. For purposes of determining a person's right to possession of and access to a child under a court-ordered possession schedule, the original published school schedule shall control in all instances. Possession and access shall not be affected by the school's closure that arises from an epidemic or pandemic, including what is commonly referred to as the COVID19 pandemic.

2. Nothing herein prevents parties from altering a possession schedule by agreement if allowed by their court order(s), or courts from modifying their orders.

3. This Order is effective as of March 13, 2020, and expires May 8, 2020, unless extended by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court."

For your convenience, you can download the actual Order here: [**THE SUPREME COURT OF TEXAS SECOND EMERGENCY ORDER REGARDING THE COVID-19 STATE OF DIS-ASTER**](#)