Parents as Teachers®

Supporting Families During a Public Health Crisis: Model Guidance for Virtual Service Delivery

Parents as Teachers National Center (PATNC) is establishing practices that can be put into place in the event of a widespread outbreak of COVID-19 (Coronavirus). This includes ways to minimize exposure, and the implementation of social distancing strategies—as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

PATNC has been exploring the delivery of personal visits through a live video conferencing platform for some time. Being presented with the COVID-19 public health crisis has prompted us to put these learnings into action.

Using interactive video conferencing (IVC) technology, Parents as Teachers affiliates will be able to continue service to families with minimal disruption. Affiliates may use this method of service delivery effective immediately with special permission from PATNC (see below for guidance). Utilization of this service delivery can continue throughout the health crisis in the community. PATNC is finalizing broader guidance on using virtual personal visits to support families in other situations; this additional guidance will be available at a later date.

Only virtual personal visits done through interactive video conferencing (IVC) will be counted towards the PAT Essential Requirement for visit frequency.

How does PAT define virtual personal visits?

We recognize that this public health crisis may necessitate virtual personal visits for a limited period of time.

Virtual personal visits are visits with families through an **interactive video conferencing** (IVC) platform that allows there to be two-way, real-time communication between the home visitor and parent(s), guardians, or primary caregivers and their child(ren). These visits are delivered using a device—preferably a computer (laptop) or tablet—and a secure video conferencing platform such as Zoom or Adobe Connect. Each virtual personal visit will contain the same components as an on-ground visit; the method of delivery is the only difference.

The purpose of the virtual personal visit is to continue to deliver the PAT model with all three areas of emphasis: development-centered parenting, parent-child interaction, and family well-being. Visits should continue to be planned and documented using PAT model guidance and records.

Virtual personal visits are not telephone calls. Checking in with families by phone is encouraged, but it will not count as a PAT personal visit.

We recognize that this public health crisis is an unprecedented situation, and we will be taking this into consideration as we assess model fidelity this year.

Considerations for utilizing virtual services during the COVID-19 health crisis

Affiliates can consider using virtual personal visits to support families if:

> There are diagnosed cases or an outbreak of COVID-19 (Coronavirus) in your state or if your local health department declares a state of emergency. Follow the https://www.cdc.gov/ CDC website to monitor the developments.

> Families in the communities you serve or affiliate staff have recently returned from international travel, or have recently traveled to an identified area of outbreak.

> Family members being served by the affiliate are exhibiting symptoms or have been in contact with anyone diagnosed with COVID-19.

> Affiliate staff are exhibiting symptoms or have been in contact with anyone diagnosed with COVID-19.

> An affiliate staff member has underlying health conditions that require taking greater precautions for health and safety.

What are the technology requirements/recommendations?

The following technology recommendations are designed to help minimize disruptions and facilitate a high level of engagement with the family during the visit. While technology is not perfect and disruptions will occur, setting up optimal conditions at the beginning of virtual service delivery will minimize problems. Some things to consider include:

> **Privacy and security.** We strongly recommend that virtual visits use a secure video conferencing platform such as Zoom or Adobe Connect. Platforms such as Skype and FaceTime are not secure. If your affiliate must comply with HIPAA regulations, you must utilize a HIPAA-compliant video conferencing platform.

> **Please note:** Each affiliate is responsible for determining the security and HIPAA-compliance of the video conferencing platform it chooses to utilize.

> **Devices.** Virtual visits will require that parent educators and families have access to a device that can support the video conferencing platform selected. For an optimal experience, parent educators and families will use a computer (laptop) or tablet during virtual visits. If a computer or tablet is unavailable, a smart phone may be used to access the video conferencing platform. The devices used during virtual visits will need to have a working camera, microphone, and speakers in order for everyone to engage fully in the visits. It is recommended that parent educators and families test their devices to ensure all pieces are working before a visit.

> **Connectivity.** Having a reliable internet connection is a crucial piece of having a successful virtual visit with a family. If the family or parent educator has a shaky connection, not even the best application will be able to deliver quality video.

Factors to consider when providing virtual personal visits

Several factors will contribute to an engaging virtual service experience:

> **Confidentiality.** Parent educators should conduct virtual visits in a location that is private. Families will want to consider who else may be able to overhear the virtual visit, and what they feel comfortable with. Confidentiality is an additional reason why video conferencing software needs to be secure.

> **Lighting.** When conducting the virtual visit, pay attention to windows or other bright lights that might influence the ability of the parent educator and the family to clearly see each other's faces during the visit.

> **Noise level.** Microphones on computers and tablets pick up various levels of background sound. For optimal engagement, reduce distractions such as pets, notifications from phones, other programs on the computer, or televisions.

> **Background.** Choose a background that is not overly distracting, and that is sensitive to the family.

It can be helpful for parent educators to test their virtual visit environment prior to their first visit to determine what changes might need to be made before meeting with the family.

Technical support – Programs may find that they will need to provide occasional technical support to families. It can be helpful to identify a staff person who can fill this role.

Role of the parent educator: Engagement

Parent educators will find that during a personal visit their role is the same, whether they are implementing the visit in person or through a virtual platform. However, parent educators may need to draw on different skill sets or focus more heavily on different skills in a virtual visit.

Orienting families to the experience

Virtual delivery of personal visits will be new to both the parent educators and the families that they are serving. It is important to prepare the family (e.g., via a phone call) for their first virtual visit. It is also important to have a conversation at the beginning of the first virtual visit to discuss the transition to virtual service delivery—how the visits will remain the same, and what might be different. After the first virtual visit, and continuing throughout virtual service delivery, be sure to reflect with families on what is working and what is challenging, just as would happen in on-ground visits. Time during reflective supervision should be spent addressing challenges and successes.

Coaching

During virtual visits, parent educators will find that they need to rely heavily on their coaching skills, as they are not physically in the same room with the family. It can be beneficial to the home visitor to have similar items available in his/her environment as the family has in theirs, such as books, blocks, or toys that might be referenced during the visit. These will support parent educators as they coach the family through portions of the visit, such as parent-child interaction. Most parent-child activities can be supported by items found in the family's home. Choose activity pages accordingly.

Documenting virtual visits

For affiliates using PAT Penelope, we will add an option for "Virtual visit" to the Visit Location field on the Personal Visit Record. This will help affiliates track personal visits delivered both in person and through a virtual platform. Select that option for any visits delivered via interactive video conferencing (IVC). We will recommend that other data systems add this option as well.

Notifying PATNC if you intend to deliver virtual personal visits

Please notify Parents as Teachers National Center by completing this survey if you intend to deliver virtual personal visits. You will be required to:

> Provide your affiliate name, state, city, company ID, and number of model certified parent educators and supervisors who carry a caseload.

> Have all parent educators and supervisors watch the training on how to deliver PAT personal visits using interactive video conferencing (IVC).

> Add to the safety section of your policy manual regarding how to respond to communicable disease outbreaks, such as establishing a relationship with your local public health department for ongoing communication.

> Update emergency plans to ensure they are in place before an outbreak occurs.

> Review this brief and updated emergency policies during a staff meeting.

Other components of service delivery

There are many other decisions that will need to be made by affiliates in communities affected by the current COVID-19 outbreak. These include, but are not limited to, policies and procedures as they relate to state and federal workplace laws and public health recommendations.

It is important to follow your community and organization public health recommendations as they pertain to gathering families for group connections. **Group connections may also be done virtually, with the same considerations as outlined for personal visits.**

Public health recommendations may also influence decisions regarding supervision, staff meetings, community gatherings, and communications. The CDC provides guidelines on infectious disease outbreak plans (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fspecific-groups%2Fguidance-business-response.html).

Prevention

Encourage all staff to take everyday prevention actions (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/index.html).

PATNC is still investigating the broader use of virtual personal visits, and at this time, the guidance on virtual personal visits is specific to the COVID-19 (Coronavirus).

If you have any questions about this guidance, please reach out to customerservice@parentsasteachers.org. We will be updating this guidance and posting it periodically with frequently asked questions in the Model Implementation Workspace in O.L.I.V.E.R.