

## FAQ's for Parents Regarding Family Contact

Family contact is the time children/youth spend with their parent, guardian, Indian custodian, siblings, or extended family members in the least restrictive, least intrusive environment possible, keeping families in contact is a priority for OCS, and learning to navigate in this uncertain time is challenging. Family contact should be flexible and creative to allow for meaningful and frequent family contact to occur. The following are some FAQs regarding during the pandemic and how OCS is working to help keep children, families, and staff safe and healthy. **OCS is following Public Health and CDC guidelines on how to proceed in this uncertain time.**

### **Q. What is OCS doing to ensure that face-to-face family contacts can safely resume?**

Since the Governor has declared a plan to Re-open Alaska Responsibly, OCS is proceeding cautiously and beginning to resume limited face to face contacts. OCS is prioritizing face to face contacts between parents and children ages 0-3 and their siblings. OCS is pre-screening all individuals before entering the OCS office buildings, only one family unit is allowed in the OCS lobby at a time, all participants use face coverings, and lobbies and state vehicles are regularly sanitized.

### **Q. I went to the OCS office and couldn't get in. Why?**

OCS doors are locked to help control the number of people coming in and out of the office. You can access the office by making an appointment with your caseworker. If you are coming to OCS without an appointment, OCS will screen you for COVID-19 symptoms before being allowed to enter.

### **Q. I have a slight fever, but otherwise feel fine. Will I be allowed to have family contact with my children?**

All family contact participants are having their temperature taken or verified by the family contact supervisor. OCS staff are equipped with thermometers to take temperature readings. Your temperature and each participant must be 99.2 or below to be allowed to participate in the visit. Children's temperature will be taken before they are transported for a visit.

### **Q. I want my friend/mother/uncle to come to the family contact so they can see my child as well.**

Due to universal precautions and social distancing family friends are not able to participate in family contact sessions. If extended family members want to join in the family contact, this would need to be discussed with your OCS caseworker before the contact to give time for OCS to complete the required screening. Other options could be explored, such as having a phone or virtual call.

### **Q. Do I have to wear a face covering during the family contact? What if everyone feels fine and screens negative for COVID-19 symptoms?**

Yes. Everyone over the age of two will have to wear face coverings for the entire time of the family contact. Individuals who have trouble breathing, and children under two will not be required to wear a face covering.

### **Q. I don't have a face covering. Will OCS provide one? Will I be able to keep it?**

Yes, OCS can supply a face covering for you that will not have to be returned. However, future family contacts are dependent on OCS supplies. If OCS has to supply a new face covering to every parent before every family contact, the supplies will not last as long.

### **Q. I live with my boyfriend, and he's sick, but I feel fine can the family contact still take place?**

If you or anyone in your household have experienced any of the potential COVID-19 symptoms in the past 14 days, the family contact will need to be rescheduled. Symptoms include fever, cough, chills, repeated shaking with chills, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, or new loss of taste or smell. If you or someone in your household has symptoms unrelated to COVID-19 then the family contact can most likely occur.

### **Q. The foster parent for my children is elderly and does not want to supervise the family contact. What do I do?**

Talk to your caseworker about other options for supervised contact. You can help identify family members or friends who would be willing to supervise or provide transportation for family contacts.

**Q. My child is on a trial home visit with me, and I want them to be able to visit with their other parent. I think that should be my decision. What do I do?**

OCS still has custody during a trial home visit. Talk with your caseworker to see if you can come up with safe visitation ideas.

**Q. I was late for the family contact by a few minutes, but it was already canceled. Why?**

Only one family unit is allowed in the OCS lobby at a time, and there is limited availability for family contact rooms. If you are late to your visit, another family may have been scheduled during that time, or someone that had shown up to the office unscheduled may have entered. Please call ahead if you are running late so OCS can make proper arrangements.

**Q. I don't have a computer or phone, so electronic family contact doesn't work for me. Can OCS provide a computer or a phone?**

OCS is working on a case by case basis to provide parents with a device that can be used for virtual contacts with their children. Reach out to your OCS caseworker to see if this can be an option for you.

**Q. While I understand why OCS is concerned, I still think they are being unreasonable with their family contact plan. What should I do?**

Talk to your caseworker first about your concerns. If they are unable to assist, you can also talk to a supervisor, GAL, or your attorney to voice your concerns.

**Q. OCS has canceled the family contact or told me the family contact couldn't take place because of a lack of transportation. I know OCS has cars. What is the problem?**

There may be many reasons for the lack of transportation options. OCS is prioritizing family contact for children 0-3 and their siblings, additional sanitation time for state vehicles, limited staff availability to transport children for family contact. You can help by identifying family members or friends that may be able to assist with transportation for contacts.

**Q. What can I do to help make sure my family contact occurs as planned?**

Wear a face covering to your family contact. If you don't have a face covering, OCS will supply you with one. Show up to your family contact on time or inform OCS if you are running late. With limits to one family unit in the lobby and sanitation of rooms, late arrivals can have an impact on other family contacts as well as your own. Do not show up for your family contact if you are sick. Cooperate with the pre-screening questions, procedures, and allow for your temperature to be taken if required.

**Q. Can I do anything to help increase my family contacts?**

Help identify family members or friends who would be willing to supervise or provide transportation for family contacts. In-person family contact is preferred, however, other contacts may be telephonic, virtual, electronic, or written. Discuss with your caseworker if you have any concerns about your family contact, or if you have ideas for ways to have family contact safely.

**Q. How is OCS working to make sure family contact is meaningful?**

By allowing for more flexibility in types and frequency of family contacts and having realistic expectations. OCS knows that virtual contacts will not replace in person. OCS is providing tools to staff, resource families, birth families, and youth on ways to make the most of virtual contacts. Providing access to resource families and birth families to make sure they have the resources to maintain family contact and providing tools to resource families and birth families on how to maintain confidentiality and safety during family contacts.