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**CHECKLISTS FOR CHECKING IN WITH YOUR CHILD, YOUNG ADULT, AND  
PARENT CLIENTS DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS**

March 31, 2020

**I. Introduction**

During the COVID-19 public health pandemic, the Juvenile Courts are closed for any but emergency matters, and DCF is challenged with providing necessary assistance to families while protecting the health of its workers. CAFL lawyers face our own challenges of navigating this unprecedented kind of practice, continuing to zealously represent clients, and keeping ourselves and our families safe. The following checklists are designed to help CAFL lawyers help their clients, to assess what the client needs, whether they are children, young adults, or parent clients. Each checklist has special considerations for each group of clients. Because we represent members of families, who often do not exist wholly separately from each other, and can be aligned, the lists may be used together. The young adult checklist is written for clients 17-22 and addresses the obligation of DCF to develop a transition plan for youth before they turn 18.

These checklists are not uniform, they are working drafts. We want to get them out to you right away to use to talk with your clients, to find out what they need in this difficult time. We hope that you look at the checklists, adapt them to work for you and your clients, give us your feedback on where they work, and tell us what you do to make them work better or differently.

Parts of each checklist addresses CAFL lawyers finding resources for clients. In general, we recommend a vigorous motion practice to make sure that DCF is doing its job to provide support, assistance, and help to our clients. However, DCF is overburdened, and the most recent Juvenile Court Standing Order 3-20 and its predecessor made it clear that the Court will not hear any but emergency motions. (See Standing Order 3-20 at: <https://www.mass.gov/juvenile-court-rules/juvenile-court-standing-order-3-20-court-operations-under-the-exigent>). The checklists provide resources and suggestions for lawyers to help their clients during this difficult time. Where there are strategic reasons to be heard, lawyers will need a strong argument to get before the Court. CAFL has a Standing Order Practice Advisory that includes tips on what and how to argue to get your motion heard.

Please let us know if you have tried to file a motion but were denied by the clerk's office or were refused a hearing on a motion under the Juvenile Court Standing Order. We are collecting this data to inform strategic litigation and to assist us in developing additional practice tools. CAFL staff attorneys please contact Supervising Attorney Cheryl Ludwig at [cludwig@publiccounsel.net](mailto:cludwig@publiccounsel.net). CAFL private panel attorneys please contact CAFL Trial Panel Support Attorney Lisa Augusto at [laugusto@publiccounsel.net](mailto:laugusto@publiccounsel.net).

**Resources:** Along with the checklists, the CAFL COVID-19 website has links to resources, all court Standing Orders, information from DCF, webinars approved for credit and much more at: <https://www.publiccounsel.net/cafl/cafl-news/covid-19-news-and-resources/>. The website is updated constantly. The CPCS Social Service Advocates Page is also updated regularly with resources for you and your clients: <https://www.publiccounsel.net/soc/social-services-resources-covid-19/>. CAFL practice advisories on the Standing Orders, model motions, and other tools will be available to staff on the network and to private attorneys on Sharefile (you will receive an email with a link to Sharefile today).

## II. Child Client Check-in Checklist

Adapted from [Emergency Plan for Transition Age Youth in CA Foster Care, Youth Law Center 2020](#)

A public health crisis is overwhelming and stressful for adults; it can be even more so for children. Now, perhaps more than ever, attorneys for children must ensure that their clients feel safe, stable, and cared for. This guide addresses some considerations for lawyers representing children in substitute care during COVID-19, and suggests resources for meeting their emergent needs. It is intended to be a starting point for children's lawyers to assess a client's current situation, and needs in the coming weeks to months, to inform their advocacy.

### Health

What does the child know about COVID-19? What questions do they have?

Most children have heard *something* about COVID-19. Trusted adults play an important role in helping children to make sense of what they have seen and heard. Not talking about it can make children worry *more*. Invite your client to contact you when they have questions about COVID-19 and its ripple effects, and make sure that they know how to reach you. Make time to talk. Don't force it though.

The CDC has created guidance to help adults talk with children about COVID-19, protecting themselves, and preventing its spread. Many other organizations have created similar resources. See [NACC COVID-19 Resource Hub, Talking to Youth About COVID-19](#).

How is the child's physical health?

Know the [symptoms](#) of COVID-19. Make sure the child and/or their caregiver is addressing any symptoms and questions with the child's health care provider as needed.

If the child has a health condition that places them at [higher risk](#) for severe illness, make sure there is a plan in place to help the child stay healthy.

Is the child expressing or demonstrating a need for mental health support?

Look out for indicators that the child may need additional help. The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry [suggests](#) that children who have experienced serious illness or loss are particularly vulnerable to prolonged or intense reactions to graphic news reports or images of illness or death, and may need extra support and attention. Further, children who are preoccupied with questions or concerns about COVID-19 should be evaluated by a qualified mental health professional. Other indicators include ongoing sleep disturbances, intrusive thoughts/worries, recurring fears about illness or death, and reluctance to leave parents or go to school.

*Consistent with the child's direction*, make sure that appropriate referrals are made.

Brainstorm ideas for social contacts and coping mechanisms. Help develop a stress management plan with clear actions and important contacts for the child. You can find an example at <https://parentandteen.com/teen-stress-management-plan/>.

Does the child have any health conditions that will require attention during the crisis?

Many regular medical services are being postponed or handled differently. Make sure there is a plan for the child to access necessary treatment.

Make sure the child has enough of their prescription medication/refills to last at least the next month.

Is the child continuing to receive necessary services (e.g. therapy, early intervention, etc.)?

If the child is missing in-person appointments because of COVID-19, ask if the provider can transition the service to phone or videoconferencing. If that is an option, make sure the child has access to the tools they need to participate.

Make sure there is a plan to protect the child's confidentiality/privilege, if applicable.

To the extent the child needs to go out into the community, make sure they have a safe and sanitary mode of transportation that allows for social distancing.

Does the caregiver have sufficient necessities for the child (e.g. formula, diapers, wipes, etc. for a baby)?

## **Placement**

If the child's caregiver works, what is the childcare plan?

Is there potential for loss of the caregiver's income that might result in a disrupted placement (e.g. where the child is in the custody of a third party)?

Connect the caregiver to resources that may help to promote placement stability for the child. Family Resource Centers continue to serve the community during COVID-19. Some centers remain open for walk-in services; others are not physically open but are teleworking. See <https://www.frcma.org> for more information.

Is there potential for illness within the home – the child, the caregiver, or someone else – to result in a disrupted placement?

Help to brainstorm a “plan B” to minimize disruptions for the child. Be proactive to the extent possible, e.g. is another kinship resource willing and ready to care for the child if needed?

If the child is placed in a congregate care setting, what measures are being taken to protect the health and safety of the program residents and staff?

EOHHS has issued [guidance](#) for congregate care programs. Check if the placement is actually following public health recommendations.

There may be pros and cons to various protective measures, e.g. restrictions on visitors may protect medically fragile children, but may also preclude family time. Help develop a plan for alternative family contact, e.g. virtual visits so the child can remain connected with their parents, siblings, and other important people during COVID-19. Challenge adverse decisions with program staff, DCF, and through motion practice as needed.

Consistent with the client’s direction, explore whether an alternative placement would be more conducive to the child’s health and safety.

The ABA has developed a [practice tool](#) to assist with advocacy to protect children in detention and congregate care facilities from the spread of COVID-19.

## **School**

Is the child’s school offering online instruction?

Make sure the child and caregiver are receiving information from the child’s school. If the child and/or caregiver has limited English proficiency, make sure they are receiving information in the correct language.

Make sure the school-age child/their caregiver knows how to access and utilize distance learning tools and resources. The child/their caregiver should communicate with the school about any issues with completing schoolwork or attending online class.

Make sure the child has access to the tools they need to participate. School districts that have moved to distance learning may offer laptops to children so that they can continue learning. If a child does not have a computer, advise them/their caretaker/their DCF worker to call the school district and ask if one can be provided. Also ask about a wireless hotspot if the student does not have internet installed in their home. If the school will not provide a laptop, ask DCF to buy one for the child.

Certain internet providers are offering expanded internet service. See [CAFL Training's Tools for Remote Communication](#) for more information.

[One Can Help](#) continues to accept requests for financial assistance during this time.

The ABA has created a [practice tool](#) about at-home education and learning resources for foster youth during COVID-19, to assist attorneys in advocating for their child clients' continued education and to support foster parents.

Does the child receive special education services?

The impact of school closings has a disproportionate impact on children receiving special education, as they need the in-person services they are receiving in their specialized schools and classrooms. If your client is facing barriers to their education, contact the [EdLaw Project](#) for assistance.

Does the child receive supplemental tutoring or support?

Ask if the provider can transition the service to telephone or videoconferencing. If that is an option, make sure the child has access to the tools they need to participate.

Does the child receive free or reduced-price meals at school?

Many school districts are offering packaged breakfast and lunch pickup spots. See the [MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education COVID-19 Information and Resources](#) webpage and [Project Bread's School Closure Meal Information](#) webpage for more information.

Some school districts are handing out homework packets with packaged meals.

### **Staying connected**

Is there a plan for family time?

The Children's Bureau issued a great [information memorandum](#) on the importance of family time in February.

Consistent with the child's direction, brainstorm ways to maintain in-person family time to the maximum extent possible to minimize the ongoing trauma of family separation and protect and preserve parent-child and sibling bonds. This is particularly important for younger children; virtual visits are not an appropriate substitute for in-person visits between them and their parents.

Where virtual visits are an appropriate alternative (or supplement) to in-person contact, make sure the child has access to the tools they need to participate, e.g. phone, computer, internet.

Does the child have the ability/a plan to stay in touch with classmates, friends, and other social supports? Do they have someone to talk to regularly?

Make sure the child has sufficient access to a phone, a computer, and internet to meet their needs during COVID-19.

Is the child staying in touch with other important people?

Make sure the child/their caregiver knows how to reach other important people during this time – you, their DCF worker, etc. Help compile a list of important contacts as needed.

What is the child doing to stay busy?

It is important to maintain a routine to combat the negative effects of social isolation, e.g. waking up at the same time as usual, exercise, getting outside, hobbies, etc.

### **More information**

As stated above, this guide is intended to be a starting point for lawyers representing children during COVID-19; it is by no means exhaustive. For additional ideas and resources, see the [National Association of Counsel for Children's COVID-19 Resource Hub](#) and the [American Bar Association's Resources for Children's Lawyers During a National Emergency](#).

### **III. Young Adult Client Check-in Checklist**

During the COVID-19 crisis, with courts and resources shut down and attention elsewhere, representing young adults can be even more difficult than in the best of times. This uncertain and unsettling time creates additional stress and anxiety for already vulnerable emerging adult clients. The current health crisis is scary for everyone. It can be much scarier for young people involved with DCF and without family support systems to turn to in a time of crisis. See "Beyond the Food Pantry: COVID-19 Response for Students Who are Homeless or With Experience in Foster Care," Barbara Duffield, Marissa Meyers, Jennifer Pokempner, Jillian Sitjar, March 17, 2020 at [https://jlc.org/sites/default/files/attachments/2020-03/BTFP\\_COVID19\\_FosterCare\\_Homeless\\_Students\\_FINAL.pdf](https://jlc.org/sites/default/files/attachments/2020-03/BTFP_COVID19_FosterCare_Homeless_Students_FINAL.pdf)

Under these circumstances, it is crucial to check in with your young adult clients frequently and regularly to provide emotional support and reliable information. *Id.* You should consider setting up a schedule of (virtual) regular appointments with your client to provide certainty and make sure you know what is going on with your client. (See [CAFL Training's Tools for Remote Communication](#) on the COVID-19 website for options).

#### **1. Preparation for Talking with Your Young Adult Client**

Before talking with your client it may be helpful to review the case file to help structure your conversation. For example, you may want to look at the following documents to see what services and assistance was in place for the young adult before the pandemic: the Permanency Plan and Report, the Action Plan and any Foster Care Review Report, the Voluntary Placement Agreement for those over age 18, any IEP or 504 plan. If the client is a parent, you will want to review the Parent Client Checklist as well. You will want to know:

- what specifically tailored services, assistance, and support did they need (and hopefully receive) before the COVID-19 crisis, for example:
  - with whom they had contact with before (family, friends, mentor, etc.)
  - placement and/or housing
  - mental health support, for example therapy
  - physical health support for any physical condition, including medication
  - educational support, for example IEP or 504 plan or tutoring
  - if the young adult has an ongoing criminal matter, what is the status
  - if the young adult has an ongoing immigration case (for example, Petition for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status), what is the status
  - if the young adult is a parent, what services did they receive to parent or be reunified if they do not have custody (See Parent Client Checklist)

Talking with your client about COVID-19 itself can be challenging, particularly for those living with anxiety. Here are a few starting tips for when you talk with the client (*See* the links below for the sources);

- manage your own anxieties before talking with the client, young adults will read your face, your tone, and your gestures, and you do not want to escalate their anxiety or transfer any of yours
- acknowledge that the uncertainty and changing nature of the situation adds to their already difficult life circumstances (if applicable): their placements may change or be even more unstable
- acknowledge that social isolation is difficult, especially for young adults

Two resources for how to talk with children and young adults about the pandemic can be found at: 1) [https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/product\\_thumbnail/PEP20-01-01-006-Thumbnail.jpg](https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/product_thumbnail/PEP20-01-01-006-Thumbnail.jpg); 2) [https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/talking-to-children-about-covid-19-\(coronavirus\)-a-parent-resource](https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/talking-to-children-about-covid-19-(coronavirus)-a-parent-resource). There is also a webinar and resources available for talking with young adults about engaging in mental health services, which may be of use during this anxiety provoking and increasing time: <https://www.umassmed.edu/TransitionsACR/about-us/recent-activities/2020/02/watch-our-latest-webinar/>.

## **2. Talking with the Young Adult Client age 17 - 22**

Below are some questions to address with your young adult client. If the young adult does not know the answer to one of the questions, you will likely need to find out the answer for them, and then make a decision with the client about what advocacy you may need to provide to get the client what they need.

### **A. Young Adults under Age 18 involved with DCF**

- how are they doing, how are they managing the situation
- what worries them, and what might help them cope with and/or manage their worries
- how is their health, do they have any symptoms and do they need medical care
- what questions do they have about the crisis that you may be able to answer or direct them to a resource who might
- do they have access to remote communication such as FaceTime, Zoom, etc. so that they can stay in touch with you, DCF, family, friends, and school
- are they still able to connect with the people they connected with before, how has that changed; can it be done safely in-person, or remotely

**NOTE:** Time with kin and family is crucial for all young adults, perhaps even more so that they are socially isolated during this crisis. One resource from the federal government's Children's Bureau discusses in detail the importance of family time, and can be found here: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/im2002>.

- has their social worker changed (due to quarantine, illness, turnover)
- has their housing and/or placement, changed due to the crisis and is their housing safe, stable, and secure

**NOTE:** If the young adult is in congregate care, given the current risks, if they wish to leave, counsel should advocate for them to leave placement, perhaps return home, or go live with relatives, friends, etc. The young adult may also be forced to leave a foster home due to the foster parent's health concerns or status. DCF may pay young adult support payments to help with rent and other living expenses pursuant to 110 C.M.R. 23.06 and the DCF Permanency Planning Policy, at pg. 57, [https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2018/01/16/Permanency%20Planning%20Policy.pdf?\\_ga=2.138871862.46626157.1585336398-966823749.1584995532](https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2018/01/16/Permanency%20Planning%20Policy.pdf?_ga=2.138871862.46626157.1585336398-966823749.1584995532). There is new state guidance for congregate care on the EOHHS website- <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/residential-congregate-care-and-shelter-providers-march-22-2020-coronavirus-update>

- what of their services (above) has changed, been suspended, or ended
- have their needs changed and how (for example do they need housing and/or food now that school has closed or their caretaker is sick)
- what new services, assistance, and/or supports do they need during this time

- if their school is shut down and is using remote learning tools:
  - do they have access to the necessary tools to engage in remote learning
  - did the school provide them with a laptop and internet access (if not, DCF should do so)
  - do they have the support they need to engage in learning (IEP, 504 support)
  - do they need food assistance and if so does the school still provide breakfast and lunch
  
- if they were living at school and school is suspended can they stay in the dorm and be on the meal plan, is that available at their school

**NOTE:** If you have specific questions on how to access educational support for your client, you can contact the EdLaw Project. Their staff is currently remote but actively working and regularly checking their intake phone and email, at 617 910 5829 and [edlawproject@publiccounsel.net](mailto:edlawproject@publiccounsel.net).

- for those 17 years or older has DCF discussed their transition plan with them, discussed continuing in DCF care, or what they will need if they leave DCF at age 18.
  
- if they are involved in a delinquency case, are they able to be in touch with their lawyer, do they know what is going on in the case, when is the next court date now that courts are shut down .

**NOTE:** Some DCF offices are taking the position that they will provide a VPA to any young adult turning 18 during this crisis, and reassess later. All of the requirements of the VPA may not be workable, for example the requirement of 20 hours employment or school per week. It is important to negotiate the terms of a VPA with DCF so that the young adult can meet the requirements. They may not be able to work or go to school during the crisis. If the young adult does not enter into a VPA, DCF is required by law and its own policy to provide a young adult with a transition plan personalized at the direction of the child or young adult age 17 and 9 months to age 22. See [DCF Permanency Planning Policy](#), Trial Court Rule 4(c); M.G.L. c. 119 § 29B(c).

### **1. Young adults 18 – 22 in DCF continued responsibility**

This group of young adults have signed on with DCF after age 18, and signed a Voluntary Placement Agreement with specific requirements that they must meet in order to get help from DCF. In addition to the relevant questions above, you will want to know:

- are the requirements of the VPA unworkable in this situation, for example have they been laid off or is school suspended
  
- what additional supports, services, and/or assistance do they need as a result of the crisis

- if they are involved in a criminal case, are they able to be in touch with their lawyer, do they know what is going on in the case, when is the next court date now that courts are shut down

**NOTE:** Some young adults will want to leave DCF care during this crisis and before age 22. Counsel should discuss the pros and cons of leaving, specific to the client's needs and wishes. If the young adult chooses to leave, counsel should make sure that DCF provides a transition plan in consultation with the young adult, advise them that counsel will be available to help them if they want to come back and get services, support, and assistance from DCF. Counsel should give them the information of how to reach counsel and tell them to use it if needed. (CPCS will pay counsel to advocate for a young adult seeking to return to DCF. Counsel should contact the CAFL Trial Support Unit if this happens).

## 2. Young adults 18 – 22 Who left DCF and want to return

As resources become scarce, including employment and supports, this may be a time when a former young adult client wants help from DCF. If a young adult client of yours who left DCF contacts you, you should negotiate with DCF and advocate to get the client the support and services they need. You should advocate for them to get access to programs and funds that could assist them in meeting emergency needs, including housing. (See note above re getting paid for your work). You will want to find out:

- contact information from the young adult so that you can stay in touch
- what were their needs were before leaving DCF (look at your old client file)
- did DCF provide them with a transition plan and follow through with any services set out in the transition plan
- ask the client what their needs are now (See those set out above in Sections 1 and 2)
- negotiate a VPA with DCF that works for the client (see Note above; for more on this process, *See* the DCF Permanency Planning Policy, pg. 56)

## IV. Parent Client Check-in Checklist

### • Financial Assistance

- If your client is employed:
  - Working from home
    - Do they have all the technology they need?

- One Can Help can be used for gift certificates for things like computers, printers, etc. Apply here: <https://onecanhelp.org/court-professionals/>
- Going out to work
  - If they are not in an essential position, your client's employer should not be making workers come in.
    - List of jobs considered "essential": <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-essential-services>
    - FAQ on essential positions: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-essential-services-faqs>
  - Is your client's employer providing appropriate protections, such as paid sick time, hand sanitizer, etc.?
  - If your client has children in the home, do they have childcare?
    - DCF-involved families are one of the exceptions to the state daycare closures, as are workers in various emergency fields.
    - List of daycares that are open:
      - [https://eeclead.force.com/resource/1584817665000/EEC\\_EmergencyProviderList](https://eeclead.force.com/resource/1584817665000/EEC_EmergencyProviderList)
- If your client is unemployed:
  - Help your client apply for unemployment, if they are not already on it.
    - There's a guide here, with COVID-19 specific information: <https://www.mass.gov/alerts/important-unemployment-information#undefined>
    - Also an unofficial step-by-step guide here: [http://ufcw328.org/filing-for-unemployment-due-to-covid-19-a-step-by-step-resource-for-workers-in-massachusetts-rhode-island-connecticut-links-included/?fbclid=IwAR2DNfMfMjQI9FucLFuwBMd8pKfCBT4QMZBCrLcuEm7\\_ro6512jkJmZQY2E](http://ufcw328.org/filing-for-unemployment-due-to-covid-19-a-step-by-step-resource-for-workers-in-massachusetts-rhode-island-connecticut-links-included/?fbclid=IwAR2DNfMfMjQI9FucLFuwBMd8pKfCBT4QMZBCrLcuEm7_ro6512jkJmZQY2E)
  - Help your client apply for DTA benefits, if they are not already receiving them
    - DTA has closed its physical offices, but it's supposed to be possible to apply online through their website or mobile app: <https://www.mass.gov/orgs/departments-of-transitional-assistance>
  - Tell your client about relief available for those in specialized fields
    - For bartenders:
      - <https://www.usbgfoundation.org/beap>
    - For restaurant workers:
      - [https://www.thegreghillfoundation.org/donations/restaurant-strongfund/?fbclid=IwAR1lz2Rh68szx4ZETIMjbVABUhd0j0kKZFt1npKkgiY5hv\\_waKlxHaaQck](https://www.thegreghillfoundation.org/donations/restaurant-strongfund/?fbclid=IwAR1lz2Rh68szx4ZETIMjbVABUhd0j0kKZFt1npKkgiY5hv_waKlxHaaQck)

- For domestic workers:
      - [https://domesticworkers.org/coronavirus-care-fund?fbclid=IwAR3L7kY2kt0HeaJFVRkpGRvU28eEmOeqX84VYS8kob0iVkJbItNsgqY\\_dxA&emci=9fc5162b-5969-ea11-a94c-00155d03b5dd&emdi=18b213ab-5f69-ea11-a94c-00155d03b5dd&ceid=4526762](https://domesticworkers.org/coronavirus-care-fund?fbclid=IwAR3L7kY2kt0HeaJFVRkpGRvU28eEmOeqX84VYS8kob0iVkJbItNsgqY_dxA&emci=9fc5162b-5969-ea11-a94c-00155d03b5dd&emdi=18b213ab-5f69-ea11-a94c-00155d03b5dd&ceid=4526762)
  - Tell your client about food pantries and local resources
    - Website with info about school lunch replacement programs and a hotline with info about local food resources:
      - <http://www.projectbread.org/news-and-events/news/covid-19-hunger-food.html>
    - List of Boston-area resources:
      - <https://www.brighamandwomensfaulkner.org/about-bwfh/community-health-and-wellness/boston-food-resources>
  - Find out if any of the kids receive SSI or SSDI payments for which your client is not the rep payee. Consider trying to get your client made the rep payee of kids in DCF custody if they are not already—they need those funds to prepare for reunification, now more than ever.
    - More information: <https://www.ssa.gov/payee/>
    - There is a model letter requesting that DCF change the rep payee back to the parent as well as a sample motion. Like all motions, it may be difficult to get it heard, but you can try filing it and arguing that it is an emergency which should be decided on the pleadings or heard by phone/videoconference. Email [cafltraining@publiccounsel.net](mailto:cafltraining@publiccounsel.net) for a copy of the model motion. (We will also put it on Sharefile)
- **Housing and the home**
  - Rent
    - Public Housing Authorities are suspending evictions, as are some landlords voluntarily. Here's an article about it:
      - <https://www.curbed.com/2020/3/18/21185666/coronavirus-foreclosure-eviction-moratorium-trump-hud>
    - National Grid is stopping disconnections; other utility companies may be doing the same.
      - <https://www.nationalgridus.com/MA-Home/covid-19>
    - State website on basic rental assistance programs, including Section 8, etc.:
      - <https://www.mass.gov/rental-assistance-programs>
    - If your client has a housing court case, or one in the works, review the Housing Court standing order with them. Only emergency matters are currently being heard.
      - <https://www.mass.gov/law-library/massachusetts-housing-court-standing-orders>

- Safety
    - Social distancing:
      - Discuss the safety information with your client if they are interested (to be helpful, not in a shaming or lecturing manner).
      - Massachusetts Public Health Advisory:
        - <https://www.mass.gov/news/dph-public-health-advisory-stay-at-home-advisory-for-individuals-over-70-and-for-those-with>
      - CDC and WHO info for the public:
        - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>
        - <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>
    - Other:
      - Make sure your client has medical insurance. The Mass Health website has a COVID-related FAQ. Benefits will not be cut off during this time, and the health connector is open.
        - <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/masshealth-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-applicants-and-members>
      - DV
        - Being stuck at home all day can exacerbate domestic violence. If this is an issue in the case, delicately inquire about it if possible.
        - National DV hotline:
          - <https://www.thehotline.org/help/>
- **Services**
  - Therapy
    - If your client is in therapy, encourage them to reach out to their clinician about telehealth options. These options should work with a smartphone. If your client doesn't have access to one, try One Can Help (link above).
    - Make sure to encourage your client to document their attempts to reach out to their clinician.
  - Substance use recovery
    - If your client is in AA or a similar group, provide them with info about virtual recovery groups:
      - National hotline: <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline>
      - AA: [https://www.aa.org/pages/en\\_US/options-for-meeting-online](https://www.aa.org/pages/en_US/options-for-meeting-online)
    - If your client was involved in treatment that has shut down due to the pandemic, try to get documentation of the closure to show to DCF.
  - Parenting aides and other misc. aides
    - If your client is working with a parenting aide, or other aide such as a life coach, parent partner, in-home therapist, etc., encourage them to

communicate with the service provider to see if there's any way to continue meeting virtually.

- Document the communication.
- Classes
  - If your client is attending a parenting class or other class which has been closed due to the limitations on in-person meetings, try to document the closure.
  - There are many online parenting courses out there. If your client is interested in trying one, send DCF the info first to make sure they'll get "credit."
- Continuing in-person services:
  - Some services may be continuing in person. If so, find out if it is safe for your client to continue attending. Is social distancing observed while at the service? Does your client need to use public transit to get there? If your client cannot safely continue the service, it should be treated as though it is cancelled.
- With your client's permission, contact DCF and inform them of which services your client will be continuing and which services have been interrupted due to the global pandemic; inform DCF that your expectation is that your client will not be held responsible for interrupted services.
  - Communicate with DCF following your local practice; some may email the social worker, some may go through the attorney, some may find it easiest to help your client draft an email to send.
- **DCF**
  - Communication
    - Ask your client if they have heard from their ongoing worker. If they have heard by email, ask them to forward the email to you. Try to get a sense of how reachable the ongoing worker is.
    - Talk to your client about reaching out to their ongoing worker, preferably by email so it can be documented, about expectations for visits, phone calls, communication, services, etc.
    - Find out what expectations DCF has set for your client re:
      - Visits, or substitutes for visits
      - Monthly social worker meetings
      - Continuing with services
      - Future scheduled meetings, such as case reviews, etc.
  - Visits/family time
    - Check on any communication from DCF re the plan for parent/child visits and sibling visits.
    - Ask your client what they want for visits. Do they want to try for in-person visits, or are they too worried about the risk? Do they feel video contact would be meaningful, or would they prefer phone contact?

Remember to be client-directed in your advocacy, including informal advocacy.

- Brainstorm with your client. Are the kids placed with family who might be able to supervise visits? What technology does your client have access to? Do they have a smartphone? Do they know how to use various video-calling apps? What do they think the kids would be able to handle in terms of video calls, etc.? Maybe the kids would enjoy playing an online game or educational activity together?
- Approach DCF with the ideas you have brainstormed with your client and ask for a response. Keep following up, and document it if DCF ignores you or does not provide meaningful visits.
  - If you find it helpful, consider referring to the recent federal memorandum on the importance of family time. You can find it here: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/im2002>
  - A model motion for visits is forthcoming.
- Check on upcoming administrative meetings, such as: FCRs, case reviews, 6-week reviews, treatment meetings, etc. Have they been rescheduled or cancelled? If so, make sure your client knows. If they are call-in/virtual meetings, make sure your client has all the technological details figured out before the meeting. Make a plan for how you and your client can communicate privately during the meeting (e.g. by text, or by calling in together from the same room if you are both comfortable with that).
- Be honest with your client that there has been a coordinated attempt to figure out what DCF's policies for the period of the pandemic are, but so far DCF has not announced any centralized policies; there is a lot we don't know. Assure your client that you will update them when you hear more.
- If your client was close to reunification, ask DCF if they would consider reunifying now, so that the child and parent won't be separated during this time.
- **Misc.**
  - Make sure that your client knows how to get in touch with you. Clearly communicate expectations for how/when you will respond to messages while working from home.
  - Explain the Juvenile Court standing orders to your client, and what they mean in terms of their case. Tell your client any new court dates, or assure them that you will contact them with new dates as soon as you have them.
  - Clients will often have questions about how this situation affects the timetable of their case, which you may not be able to answer. Avoid false assurances if possible.
  - Prepare in case you may need your client to sign an affidavit or form. Ask them if they have access to a printer, stamps, envelopes, a scanner or scanning smartphone app, etc. Get an email set up for your client if they do not have one.

- If your client has children in the home, check on their school situation. Is the school doing online teaching, and if so are they providing technology? Were the kids reliant on school lunches?
  - Check the website of the relevant school department. Project Bread, linked above, also has a tool for finding school lunch replacements:  
<http://www.projectbread.org/news-and-events/news/covid-19-hunger-food.html>