

Supporting Families during the COVID-19 Public Health Crisis: Model Guidance for Virtual Service Delivery

Parents as Teachers National Center (PATNC) is establishing practices that can be put into place during closures and other preventative measures that are being enacted in order to mitigate the spread 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 live video conferencing platforms for some time. Being presented with the COVID-19 public health crisis has prompted us to put these learnings into action.

Please note: Throughout this brief, the term *virtual* (in “virtual service delivery” “virtual personal visits”) refers **both** to services delivered through interactive video conferencing technology and phone calls.

Using either interactive video conferencing (IVC) technology or telephone, Parents as Teachers affiliates will be able to continue

services to families with minimal disruption. Affiliates may use these methods of service delivery effective immediately (see below for guidance) and may continue to use these methods throughout the health crisis. We recognize that this public health crisis may necessitate virtual service delivery for a limited period of time.

PATNC is finalizing broader guidance on using virtual service delivery to support families in other situations; this additional guidance will be available at a later date.

Virtual personal visits (IVC and telecommunication) will be counted towards the PAT Essential Requirement for personal visit frequency.

Delivering a virtual personal visit

Virtual personal visits include visits with families through an **interactive video conferencing (IVC)** platform that allows there to be two-way, real-time, audio-visual 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.

Virtual personal visits also include **telecommunication visits—visits completed via audio phone calls.**

Regardless of which type of virtual personal visit is delivered, the purpose of the virtual personal visit is to continue to support families through the delivery of the PAT model with all three areas of emphasis: development-centered parenting, parent-child interaction, and family well-being. All virtual visits should continue to be planned and documented using PAT model guidance and records.

However, there remain some key differences between IVC virtual personal visits and telecommunication personal visits. Since IVC personal visits include video, parent educators will still be able to integrate an observational component into their visits.

Telecommunication personal visits, which don't include video, must still include: the three areas of emphasis, the delivery of substantial information, and reflection in order to count as a personal visit.

We recognize that the current health crisis is likely to have a significant impact on service delivery and may contribute to PAT affiliates not meeting one or more of the PAT Essential Requirements (ERs). We want you and your staff to be able to focus on the needs of the families you work with during this difficult time. Therefore, PATNC will adjust how we determine model affiliate status this year. An additional TA Brief will be released shortly outlining the details.

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 CDC website (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>) 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 for IVC personal visits?

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

- > **Privacy and security.** We strongly recommend that IVC 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.** IVC 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 IVC 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 IVC 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 IVC personal visits

Several factors will contribute to an engaging IVC visit experience:

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

Family engagement and virtual personal visits

Parent educators will find that, whether they are delivering a visit in person or virtually, their role during a personal visit remains the same. 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

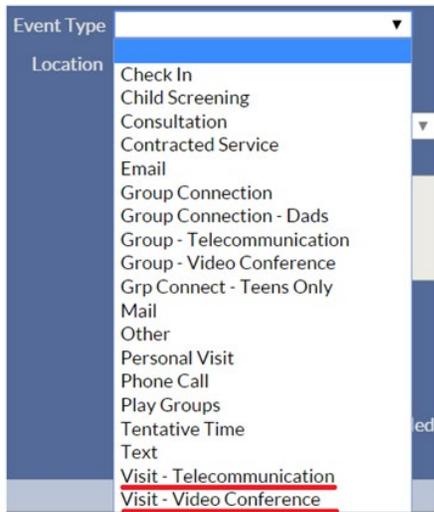
During virtual personal visits, parent educators will find that they need to rely heavily on their coaching skills, as they are not physically in the same room with the family. It can be beneficial to the home visitor to have similar items available in his/her environment as the family has in theirs, 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 have added the options of “Visit – Video Conference” and “Visit – Telecommunication” to the Event Type field

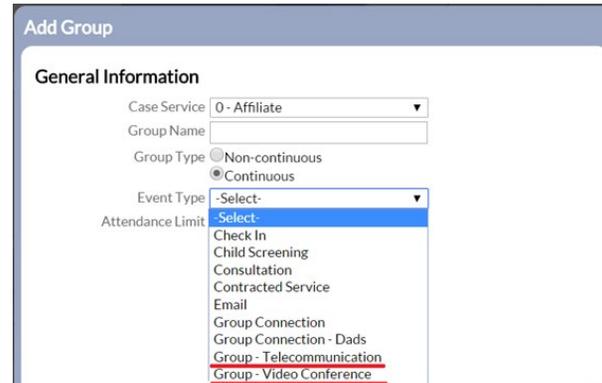
when booking a personal visit in Penelope. This will help affiliates track personal visits and group connections delivered in person, through a video conferencing platform, and by telephone. We will recommend that other data systems add these options as well.

Select the option of “Visit – Video Conference” when booking any virtual personal visits delivered via interactive video conferencing (IVC). Select the option of “Visit – Telecommunication” when booking any virtual personal visits delivered via telecommunication.



Similarly, we have added the options of “Group – Video Conference” and “Group – Telecommunication” to the Event Type field when booking a virtual group in Penelope.

Select the option of “Group – Video Conference” when creating a virtual group delivered via interactive video conferencing (IVC). Select the option of “Group – Telecommunication” when creating a virtual group delivered via telecommunication.



Notifying PATNC if you intend to deliver virtual personal visits

Please notify PATNC 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 webinars on how to deliver PAT personal visits using interactive video conferencing (IVC) or telephone.

- > 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 virtual 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 and screenings may also be done virtually, with the same considerations as outlined for personal visits. Additional guidance is currently in development.**

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>).

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) health crisis.

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, along with frequently asked questions in the Model Implementation Workspace in O.L.I.V.E.R.