

How to Use Technology When Engaging with the Family:

Technology is a way for people to connect and can be a critical tool for building relationships. For young people, having a cellphone or access to the internet can be a key way to maintain normalcy as they transition into a new home temporarily or permanently. When keeping communication open with the young person's family, technology can also make it hard to navigate and maintain boundaries. The following resource provides tips on how technology can be safely used as a tool to engage families.

Step 1: Check your potential bias

If you are feeling some hesitation about communication with the family, it's important to reflect on where this hesitation might come from. Does your hesitation arise from a real concern for safety, or are you concerned because the family's background and situation differs from your own? Please visit our [Compassionate Caregiving in Texas](#) page to learn more.

Step 2: Identify what you are comfortable with as a caregiver

As the case continues, you may learn information about the family that makes you hesitate to share personal details about you and your family. While your hesitation is understandable, it's best to keep in mind that maintaining a positive relationship with the family is in the best interest of the child in your care in almost all cases.

- If you are having concerns about safety and sharing your contact information with the family, talk to the case manager or caseworker involved in the case. They may have specific suggestions on how to communicate with the family.
- It is OK to take things slowly at first as you and the young person's family get to learn more about each other.
- Some people prefer to start with in-person interactions and then move to emails or other types of communication outside of visit times.
- You can take the initiative to make opportunities to get to know the family. If the case requires supervised visits, you can ask the case worker if you can take that on so that you can meet with the family.
- Before sharing videos or photos, be mindful of what you are comfortable sharing.
 - Sometimes photos can provide people with personal identifiable information.
 - Keep this in mind when out in the community as well.

Step 3: Find out what the parents are comfortable with

- Typically, families are more scared than we are. Take things in steps as you build trust with each other.
- Ask parents about their preferences on:
 - How to communicate via phone, email, etc.
 - Preferred times or days to schedule communication digitally.
- Set boundaries that make you feel comfortable but that still accomplish the goal of parent and family interaction.

Step 4: Make a plan and communicate openly with everyone

- Make sure the family and you are on the same page about the plan.
- Make sure you speak with the children about it. Establish clear expectations and maintain open communication with the children about safety and what information can or cannot be shared.
- Consider also keeping the professionals involved in the case updated. While it is not required to disclose every interaction you have with the family, it may help everyone involved in the case support the family better if they at least know that you are speaking directly to the family.

IF YOU HAVE SPECIFIC CONCERNS RELATED TO TECHNOLOGY, HERE ARE SOME STRATEGIES OTHER CAREGIVERS HAVE SUCCESSFULLY TRIED:

- Create an email account just for family interaction. You can set up a Gmail account in minutes, which also has other great communication tools like Google Chat (texting) and Google Meet (video conferencing).
- Useful apps:
 - Tiny beans- this is like a private Facebook and can be used to share pictures securely.
 - Google Voice- this can be used on the computer and by phone. Can be integrated into an existing Gmail account.