

Video Conferencing 101

Guidance for early interventionists on using video conference for home visits (and other purposes) during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Whether referred to as tele-intervention, tele-health, tele-practice, tele-therapy, tele-EI, or other labels, using video conferencing to deliver IDEA Part C early intervention (EI) home visiting services is not a new idea; many EI programs across the country have been doing so successfully for many years. In addition, video conferencing has been used for many years by EI programs for team meetings, coaching, supervision, professional development activities, individualized planning meetings, family-to-family support, and other purposes. DO NOT DELAY: the US Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation have both recently announced that compliance with HIPAA, IDEA, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act are not barriers to using video conferencing (see below). So, whether or not your program has been using video conferencing, because of the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, **ALL** EI programs should be using video conferencing and relate technologies in order to continue providing EI services and supports to families. The purpose of this document is to suggest key topics to be addressed and provide information and resources to assist in planning how to use video conferencing for home visiting.

Examples of How Video Conferencing is Being Used in Early Childhood

- Home visitors use video conferencing to deliver home visits and enable co-visits. These visits might not replace face-to-face visits, but supplement them to enable more frequent contact, enable co-visits or consultation/coaching sessions, etc.
- Coaches, TA specialists, PD specialists, and consultants use video conferencing to deliver professional development, technical assistance, and coaching activities.
- Teams use video conferencing for meetings. Such use reduces travel time and costs, enables team members to attend from a distance, enables teams to meet more frequently, enables families to attend, etc.
- Supervisors use video conferencing to observe services over a distance, host or participate in organizational meetings, and to provide reflective supervision.
- Teachers use video to enable children who are homebound to virtually attend classrooms.
- Families use video conferencing to connect/network with other families for the purposes of family support.

Recent Announcements from U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Education

- Questions and Answers on Providing Services to Children with Disabilities during The Coronavirus Disease 2019 Outbreak March 2020: <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/files/ga-covid-19-03-12-2020.pdf>
- Notification of Enforcement Discretion for telehealth remote communications during the COVID-19 nationwide public health emergency: <https://www.hhs.gov/hipaa/for-professionals/special-topics/emergency-preparedness/notification-enforcement-discretion-telehealth/index.html>
- March 21, 2020 Supplemental Fact Sheet Addressing the Risk of COVID-19 in Preschool, Elementary and Secondary Schools While Serving Children with Disabilities: https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/frontpage/faq/rr/policyguidance/Supple%20Fact%20Sheet%203.21.20%20FINA%20L.pdf?utm_content=&utm_medium=email&utm_name=&utm_source=govdelivery&utm_term=

General Tips for Video Conferencing:

Video conferences will be more successful when everyone on the call knows how to participate and is prepared. When you are just learning how to participate in video conferences, spend some time experimenting and practicing. Schedule video conferences with your friends, family members, or colleagues to practice the technical, environmental, and interactional skills needed for successful video conferences. And you can always start a meeting by yourself to practice all of the elements in the tables that follow.

Technical Considerations
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Participate from a location where there is adequate bandwidth. Whenever possible, use an Ethernet connection and turn off Wi-Fi. When using Wi-Fi, set up as close as you can to the base station.</p>
<p><input type="checkbox"/> When video conferencing, turn off other computer applications that may be running in the background, including email and browsers, in order to devote all available bandwidth and computer processing power to the video conference. For very important, formal meetings, one way to be sure that applications are not running in the background is to restart your computer.</p>
<p><input type="checkbox"/> You can produce and receive good quality, feedback-free audio using your computer’s built in microphone and speakers. If you do use external speakers, make sure they are not projecting into your microphone. Some users prefer using either a headset with a built-in microphone or a combination microphone/speaker that is designed to eliminate echoing during video conferences.</p>
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Set up any external devices, e.g., webcams, headsets, microphones, speakers, <u>well before</u> the video conference is scheduled to begin. Often, it’s not enough to simply plug them in – you may need to use the control panel on a PC, the system preferences on a Mac, or the settings in the video conferencing application’s controls to select the microphone and speakers you will be using and make adjustments.</p>
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes your computer’s built-in webcam will work fine, but other times it is best to use an external webcam, for instance when you need flexibility in where you position it or when you need a wide-angle lens to include a number of people sitting at a table.</p>
<p><input type="checkbox"/> When conferencing from a phone or tablet, keep in mind that you may not be able to access all of the features that are available on a laptop or desktop computer, e.g., screen sharing, recording.</p>
Environmental Considerations
<p>Be sure to learn how to make adjustments for a variety of elements, including:</p>
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Privacy: Conference from a room with a door that you can close rather than in a cubicle or public area.</p>
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Lighting: Figure out how to adjust the room’s lighting so that your face isn’t darkened in shadows but at the same time isn’t overexposed. If your web cam is centered above your monitor (as it often should be) the light emanating from your monitor is likely not going to be able to effectively light your face; you may need to use lamps off to the sides or diffused natural lighting from a window or overhead light to adequately light your image. Avoid having bright lamps or sunlit windows in back of you.</p>
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Sound: Participate in a location that is quiet and as free as possible from adjacent noise, preferably in a room with a closed door. If you are not getting good enough results using your computer’s built-in microphone and speakers, consider using a headset with a built-in microphone or a combination microphone/speaker that is designed to eliminate echoing during. If you use external speakers, position</p>

them in a way they will not project into your microphone and always adjust the volume to avoid creating an echo (this happens when your microphone picks up the sound projected from your speakers).

- Perspective:** Adjust your webcam so that it is about eye level and maintain your posture parallel to the webcam; avoid slouching, being partially off-screen, or broadcasting a skewed or distorted perspective in which you are looking up or down.
- Background:** Participate in a location that is free as possible from distracting or unwanted backgrounds.

Interactional Considerations

- Pay attention to eye contact. Position the video conferencing application's window on your display so that the images of the other people in the conference are centered just below your web cam; that way when you are looking at them, it will give more of an appearance that you are establishing eye contact. Experiment with toggling back and forth between speaker and gallery view to achieve the look you want. Important: when speaking, spend most of the time looking directly into your web cam, but occasionally glance at the images of the people with whom you are talking. Practice alternating your gaze naturally and fluidly between the camera on your web cam and the faces of others.
- Be intentional about your non-verbal communication. Use eye gaze, nods, gestures, and facial expressions to let the folks on the other end know you're listening. Avoid rapid movements to minimize blurred images.
- Be sensitive to turn-taking during conversations. Some situations call for waiting a bit longer between turns than you would in a face-to-face conversation. When there are more than two people on a call, it may be useful to designate a facilitator and/or establish ground rules for speaking. For very large video conferences, a facilitator might mute and unmute participants to avoid constant interruptions.
- If you need to mute your audio and/or video, announce that you need to step away for a moment. If someone is speaking, announce it in the chat box.
- Do. Not. Multitask. Unless it is with everyone's understanding and in service of the call.

Tips for Meeting Hosts, Facilitators, and Coaches

- Practice. Practice. Practice. And then practice.
- Use an agenda in a way similar to what you would use in a face-to-face meeting.
- Establish ground rules that may be useful to the group. Topics that might need to be covered include:
 - Optimizing settings for good-enough quality video and audio
 - Muting audio and/or video
 - Avoiding multitasking
 - Turn-taking
 - Interruptions
 - Using the chat box
 - Recording
 - Screen sharing
 - Other?
- For some meetings, consider giving another participant co-hosting privileges.
- Remind the participants of whichever environmental, technical, and interactional considerations are key to the success of the meeting.
- Alter the view, from gallery/speaker view to document and screen sharing throughout the meeting to support the conversation at hand. To maximize the interactional power of video, avoid keeping the images of people thumbnail size for too long. Avoid sharing any one document or screen longer than needed.
- Always announce/ask permission before recording a session.
- If you are hosting a recurring meeting, consider sending a copy of this document to everyone.

Tips for Early Intervention Home Visitors

- Practice using your video conferencing platform by yourself, with colleagues, family, and friends to get comfortable using all the controls and features and the technical and environmental considerations discussed in the sections above.
- Consider how you may need to adapt the evidence-based model or framework you use to deliver face-to-face visits to visits that you'll be delivering via video conferencing
- Before your first video conference with a family, you might want to have a phone call to talk about the video conferencing platform you'll be using and making sure that the family has the resources they will need: a device, bandwidth, and other equipment that may be useful, e.g., a way to stabilize the device. You can also use this time to plan the agenda for the first call.
- During the first call, before jumping in to the agenda of the home visit, if the family is not familiar with the video conferencing platform you are using, offer an orientation to the features and controls. Then spend some time making suggestions to each other to make sure you both can see and hear each other well enough; both you and the family should continue to make such suggestions to each other to make sure you both can see and hear what needs to be seen and heard.
- Pay particularly close attention to the interactional considerations discussed in the section above.
- During the pandemic it may be a good idea to check in with the family about, in general, how they are doing, if they have what they need, etc.
- Think about what materials you may want to have on hand in case you want to share information with the family. For example, a physical therapist might have a life-sized doll on hand to demonstrate positioning suggestions.
- Remind families they are welcome to record sessions (requires the use of a laptop or desktop computer).
- Consider recording selected visits or parts of visits to share with a coach, colleague, or supervisor for reflective support. Always ask the family for permission before recording a session and let them know your purpose for recording it.
- You may be able to be more flexible in how you schedule visits than you could when you were driving from home to home. For instance, you may be able to schedule visits so you can be present during particular family routines and activities that the family would like to focus on.
- At the end of the visit, after making plans for the next visit and what might happen between visits, evaluate how the visit went. One strategy is to ask the family to share their thoughts on two questions: "What did you like about the visit that we want to continue doing next visit?" and "What might we try doing differently next visit?"
- Consider sharing a copy of this document with families.

Some Illustrations of Video Conferencing in Early Childhood:

Illustrations of using video conferencing for early intervention home visits and team meetings:

<http://ddc.ohio.gov/video-ei-series>

- Using Video and Video Conferencing to Enable Team Meetings over Distances
- Using FaceTime to Enhance Team Collaboration
- A Virtual Home Visit with Liam's Family
- A Virtual Co-Visit with Straton's Family

Illustrations of using video conferencing for coaching:

<https://www.cdd.unm.edu/ecln/FIT/fit-focus-video-library.html>

- Using Video Technology to Enhance Coaching In Early Intervention

Illustration of using video conferencing to enable early intervention team meetings:

<https://vimeo.com/398369975/52ba0d803f>

- Using Technology to Enable Early Intervention Team Meetings

Illustrations of using video conferencing to virtually include children in preschool classrooms:

- Ruairi Goes To Preschool:

http://www.cde.state.co.us/resultsmatter/RMVideoSeries_PracticesHereAndThere.htm#top

- Collaborating to Support Aiden:

http://www.cde.state.co.us/resultsmatter/RMVideoSeries_PracticesHereAndThere.htm#top

- Getty's Window To Inclusion: The Chance To Be Just Like Any Other Kid:

<http://draccess.org/videolibrary/>

- Getty's Door To Inclusion: <http://draccess.org/videolibrary/>

Some Training Resources:

- National Center for Hearing Assessment and Management from Utah State University: <https://infanthearing.org/ti101/providers/index.html>
- Getting Started with Telehealth (Live Video Visits) for Early Intervention Providers - Tips & Tricks: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qG73FCcoGOw&feature=youtu.be>

Zoom Support:

Because so many programs are using Zoom as their video conferencing platform, here are some Zoom-specific resources, including resources specific to the use of Zoom during COVID-19.

- To learn how to use Zoom, visit their Support Center: <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us>
- For problems, contact Zoom’s Technical Support: <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/201362003-Zoom-Technical-Support>
- Watch Recorded Training Sessions: <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/217214286-Watch-Recorded-Training-Sessions>
- ZOOM: Support during the COVID-19 pandemic This site is here to help you most effectively use Zoom as we all navigate the coronavirus pandemic: <https://zoom.us/docs/en-us/covid19.html>
- K-12 School Verification Form: Zoom is temporarily lifting the 40-minute time limit on free Basic accounts for schools affected by the Coronavirus. Here’s how to get access for your school: https://zoom.us/docs/ent/school-verification.html?fbclid=IwAR3hgjxZOIEwbWsA6_77ca5jxFTuVYqTowM-k9dVtSCod1oSkNJd72EG-4

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