For Parents Involved with OCS: Frequently Asked Questions During the COVID-19 Crisis

What is the OCS response to COVID-19?

During this public health emergency, OCS Staff is limiting in-person contact with clients and others as much as possible. Only high priority situations require in-person contact. Examples of high priority situations include:

- Responding to reports of harm that are a priority level 1 or 2 as well as Provider Investigations.
- Emergency removals and activities related to emergency placements (including safety evaluation of homes or fingerprinting for emergency licensing).
- Emergencies in foster homes or with a foster child.
- Child transports to critical appointments.

Additional steps OCS is taking to limit the spread of the COVID-19 Virus include:

- Requiring staff to conduct non-high priority business by video conference,
- Using Skype and telephone contact as much as possible, and
- Practicing social distancing and universal health precautions when in-person contact is required.

Many OCS staff are telecommuting for work duties when possible. All staff in the office are being reminded to wash their hands frequently, use a face mask when around the public, and ensuring public spaces are sanitized regularly.

All public entry to OCS offices will be by appointment only. All OCS offices must provide pre-screening over the telephone before all appointments in the office.

Any OCS staff who are showing signs of illness or not feeling well will be asked to go home.

Will an OCS Specialist come into our home?

Caseworkers should be completing their monthly caseworker visits through Facetime, Skype, Zoom, telephone, or another electronic method. An OCS Staff should only be coming into your home if there has been a report of suspected abuse or neglect of a child in the house. OCS staff must first use the screening question below before in-person contact. They will also be required to use any available Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) or PPE Safety Alternates before having in-person contact.
Screening Question

I have screened myself, and now I need to ask you:

In the past few days have you or anyone in your household felt unwell, especially with respiratory symptoms (cough, fever, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing) or loss of taste or smell or gastrointestinal/digestive issues?

If my child is in foster care, how will I have contact with my child, and how can I know how they are doing?

The current public health crisis has been hard for everyone in Alaska, but we know it is especially hard for you. Please know, OCS is doing everything in its ability to ensure safety for your children in care. Resource Families are asked to provide family contact via Skype, Zoom, or other video technology. Resource Families have also been encouraged to allow liberal phone contact for children with their families. If this is not what you are experiencing, please contact your OCS Specialist or their supervisor via phone or email. You may also contact your OCS Specialist or the child’s Guardian ad litem with any questions about the health or other areas of concern for your child.

Tips for making the most out of your virtual visits:

- Birth to 1 year old: read, sing, talk about simple concepts such as colors, shapes, play “Peek a boo” “Head and shoulders knees and toes,” ask your baby questions and wait for them to respond, use eye contact as much as able to do so
- 1-5 year olds: read, sing, play go fish with a deck of cards, play tapes and sing along to nursery rhyme songs, use a song you can move/dance to such as I’m a little teapot, going on a bear hunt, establish eye contact if possible, have both the caregiver and parent read the same book together to your child, learn about a new animal, play “Simon Says,” have a tea party together
- Elementary school-age: read, dance virtually, help with homework, share a family story, play a game such as a card game, checkers, do the same art/craft such as making pinwheels with paper, paper airplanes, charades, bingo, write a letter together for a family member/sibling, write a story
- Middle/high school age: play a dance/workout routine if possible together, play a mutual game such as word games, bingo, apples to apples, write a shared letter to a family member/sibling, tell a family story, learn origami, play “Would you Rather,” write a story or journaling together

What do I do if my child is sick? Does Medicaid cover testing of a child for COVID-19? Can a parent or foster parent get a child tested?

If a child is ill or you have concerns call the office of the child’s Primary Care Provider with any questions. The child’s Primary Care Provider will guide you if the child should come to the provider’s office, emergency room, or monitor the child from home.

Updated 4-13-20
If a medical professional determines that it is medically necessary to have a child tested, Medicaid will cover the cost for the test. If your child lives in a foster care setting, you will be notified that the child is being tested.

What can I do to keep working toward reunification with my child?

It is important to continue to maintain contact with your children and work with OCS on your case plan goals. Though it may be frustrating having visitation with your child virtually, it’s needed to keep our community safe and slow the spread of COVID-19. Please continue to work with the service providers you are involved with. If you are unsure of what to do, reach out to the service provider to discuss how they are providing virtual case management. If you miss any important appointments, please let your OCS Specialist know. Remember, stay positive, and as a community, we’ll get through this together.

- Remember to keep in contact with your assigned OCS Specialist via email, phone or text and to provide them with updates on your progress. Please allow your OCS Specialist 24 hours to return your call/email. If you are unable to reach the OCS Specialist after 24 hours, you can call the main office number, and request to speak to their supervisor.
- Contact your current service providers and see what they can do to continue to work with you over the phone or through video.
- If you are referred for services during this time, please respond promptly to service providers trying to set up phone calls, or “video” interviews with you.
- If you do get sick, please stay inside and take care of yourself. Notify your OCS Specialist as soon as you can that that you were ill.
- If you are required to participate in substance abuse testing, communicate any transportation or other issues with your OCS Specialist. Some testing facilities are closed, and some have altered their hours and procedures.
- Keep a written journal of all of your electronic contacts with your children and everything you are doing to work on your case plan. This should include dates, times, how long the contact lasted, and what was discussed. Share this journal with your caseworker.
- Please attend all court hearings and maintain contact with your attorney. Do not be afraid to contact the attorney to express your concerns.

What if I don’t have access to a smart phone or computer?

If you do not have access to a phone, smart phone, or a computer for virtual or telephonic visits with your child, please call your caseworker about the possibility of setting up an appointment at the OCS office to have your virtual family contact.

- Contact GCI to opt into a lifeline phone program. [https://www.gci.com/mobile/lifeline](https://www.gci.com/mobile/lifeline)
- Or call 1-800-800-4800.
- Discuss other options with your OCS Specialist.
- Contact the Service Array unit with OCS for additional assistance at 1-855-603-8637 or email at ocsservicearray@alaska.gov.

Will there be a delay in my child returning home?

OCS encourages all parents to continue to engage in all court hearings and case plan activities. OCS, providers, and others strive to have your child returned home as soon as safely possible. If there are questions about specific case-related information, please contact your assigned OCS Specialist.
What assistance can OCS provide if childcare is an issue with the closure of schools?

OCS can work with parents to find alternative or temporary providers when needed. The Office of Children’s Services Childcare team is available at 465-5648 or ocschildcare@alaska.gov, to answer questions and to assist in locating potential childcare options.

**Other useful links:**

- Alaska CARELINE: Mental health emergency counseling [http://dhss.alaska.gov/dbh/Documents/Prevention/docs/Careline-Brochure-General.pdf](http://dhss.alaska.gov/dbh/Documents/Prevention/docs/Careline-Brochure-General.pdf) or 1-877-266-4357
- Beacon Hill (Safe Families for Children Alaska): Safe Families Helpline is open [mailto:info@beaconhillak.com](mailto:info@beaconhillak.com) or 907-277-0925, 24 hours a day
- Anchorage Community Mental Health: Crisis line and appointments available [https://acmh.com/](https://acmh.com/) or 907-563-3200, 24 hours a day
- Recover Alaska: Substance abuse treatment/information [mailto:info@recoveralaska.org](mailto:info@recoveralaska.org) or 907-249-6674
- AWAIC (Abused Women’s Aid in Crisis): crisis and support line at [http://www.awaic.org/](http://www.awaic.org/) or 907-272-0100
- RCPC (Resource Center for Parents and Children): [https://www.rcpcfairbanks.org/](https://www.rcpcfairbanks.org/) or 907-465-9099
- Tundra Women’s Coalition (Bethel): [http://tundrapeace.org/](http://tundrapeace.org/) or Crisis Line 1-800-478-7799

**National Hotlines:**

- NAMI (National Alliance for Mental Health) HelpLine  
  - 800-950-6264, 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. (EST), Monday-Friday
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline  
  - 800-273-8255 or Chat with Lifeline
- National Parent Helpline: Parents and caregivers needing emotional support and links to resources  
  - 855-4APARENT, 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. (PST), Monday to Friday
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s (SAMHSA’s)  
  - Disaster Distress Helpline: 1-800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746, TTY 1-800-846-851
- Postpartum Support International: The PSI HelpLine is a toll-free telephone number anyone can call to  
  - PSI HelpLine at 1-800-944-4773(4PPD) or text 503-894-9453
- Crisis Text Line: Crisis Text Line is a global not-for-profit organization providing free, confidential crisis intervention via SMS message. The organization’s services are available 24 hours a day, every day.  
  - Text HOME to 741741

Updated 4-13-20
• Childhelp: They help child abuse victims, parents, concerned individuals
  o 800-4-A-CHILD (800.422.4453)
• Darkness to Light: They help children and adults needing local information or resources about sexual abuse
  o 866-FOR-LIGHT (866.367.5444)
• National Domestic Violence Hotline Phone: They help children, parents, friends, offenders
  o 800-799-SAFE (800-799-7233), TTY: 800-787-3224, Video Phone Only for Deaf Callers: 206-518-9361