



Friends,

What a crazy couple of weeks it has been! We are in the middle of a public health crisis that isn't like anything we've experienced; even my medical training couldn't have easily predicted this moment. It requires us to both be calm but also decisive, knowing that we must balance so many important things: health, safety, well-being - not just of the body but also of the mind and spirit - and hope. And these must be considered for all those we serve - children, parents, resource families, and our own staff and partner agencies, as well as our communities in general.

The public health instruction right now is that we need as many people as possible being "still", meaning staying home and not interacting with a lot of other people. This is why leaders asked group sizes to stay below 10 and why in some other states there are very restrictive bans on moving around in the community. Keeping people still for a little while slows down the spread of the virus and that's really important so that health care facilities are able to serve those who actually need medical care. So, I'm asking our staff, and you, to "be still".

Practically here is what that looks like. For the next 2 weeks, visits between child welfare staff and resource families will move to video as a 1st choice, if at all possible, and by phone if video isn't an option. We have sent instructions out so our staff can help trouble-shoot with families who do not currently have video visit capability, and have attached a copy of the tech instructions to this email. Team meetings will also be conducted through video or conference call. I'm asking our staff to check in with you more frequently, since we know this is a very stressful time for families and we want to know how you are doing and what you need. Also please contact your resource worker if your child care is impacted by COVID-19 so they can provide information on how DHS can support you during this time. Child Welfare staff will continue to make face to face visits to conduct investigations or for other emergent purposes.

Also, for the same period of time, visits between parents and children, or between siblings, will occur by video, or that isn't possible, by phone. We will be working closely with judges and families to troubleshoot concerns they may have. I do not make this decision easily, as my heart is very heavy for natural families who for a variety of reasons find themselves under separate roofs today. Any one of us could be in that same position. Right now hospitals are faced with limiting access to family members, and those who are traveling are finding it harder to return home. But, if we will stay focused on responding as a whole community to this virus, all this disruption will not last very long, and we will have kept many people safe and healthy. We will continue to monitor the public health recommendations and evaluating these measures.

As resource parents you also have a heavy responsibility, both to care for the children in your home, and to limit your own interactions with others. I am asking you to stay home as much as you can, steeply minimize who comes in your home including your own friends and extended family, and if you need to go out for work or necessities, that you take every reasonable precaution. I am also asking that if it is appropriate, that

you make extra opportunities for children and their siblings and parents to be in contact by video or phone, and that you are thoughtful in how you communicate these changes with the children you are serving. It is an anxious time for everyone, and we should each work hard to relieve the anxiety of those who are in our lives. Our clinical and resource family team has assembled some information that may help you talk with children about this change in visits - it is attached to this email.

Finally, we are increasing the availability of the Foster Care and Adoption Support Center. It will be manned from 8 am to 10 pm Monday through Friday and 1 pm to 5 pm on Saturday and Sunday. The number for the support center is **1-800-376-9729**. The support center staff will:

- Answer questions concerning DHS protocol and practices during the COVID-19 response
- Connect you to information about general needs, questions and concerns
- Assist in making contact with staff if you are having trouble reaching your resource specialist or your child(ren)'s specialist.

Thank you for your service to kids and families. Please continue to let us know how we can support you.

Deb

Deborah Shropshire, M.D.
Director, Child Welfare Services

- [Pausing Face to Face Contact Response - approved.pdf](#)
- [Video Conference How-To - approved.pdf](#)