



# THE INSTITUTE FOR CHILD WELFARE INNOVATION

## The Institute's Top Ten Tips for Family Search and Engagement During the Pandemic... AND BEYOND!

1. **Still Meet "Face to Face."** When you reach a family member by phone, immediately try sending them a zoom link to meet by video, and share your screen to review the genogram with them. This can also be a great way to review paperwork!
2. **Know Your Audience.** When engaging with family virtually, remember to make sure that you know who all is potentially part of the conversation. Don't start discussing sensitive topics with a family member via Zoom without verifying that the person is comfortable with anyone else who might be in the room hearing. Suggest that the family member use headphones perhaps. Respect the family member enough to ask what would make them comfortable and don't assume!
3. **Make Letters Exciting.** When sending letters to family members, use brightly colored paper and envelopes to make them stand out. Include a self-addressed, stamped, return envelope to make it easy for the family to respond.
4. **Meet the Family Where They're At... Virtually.** Have accounts set up on as many platforms as possible (Zoom, facebook Messenger, Snapchat, Microsoft Teams, Google Duo, What's App., etc.), to accommodate virtual engagement in many different ways.
5. **Text, Text, Text.** Many people dislike talking on the phone in general. Use text messages to communicate with family members, send pictures, and even transmit documents. One specifically useful tip is to send a picture of your business card to the family to let them know who you are and establish legitimacy.
6. **Make the Most of Facebook.** Did you know that you can make face to face calls via facebook messenger? Sometimes family members won't pick up a phone call but will answer a ringing messenger app. Also, when utilizing facebook to search, create a professional account specifically for family finding. Set up your account banner to say something like, "You have a relative in foster care. Call me!"
7. **Keep Parents Updated.** COVID has created barriers for parents in terms of their service requirements, but also in their ability to have regular visits with their kids. Create a plan for keeping them regularly updated on their children if they can't visit as often. One example is to provide current photos of the children to them on a weekly basis.

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8. **Forge Partnerships Online.** Many people are using their time at home during the pandemic to clean out storage areas, and dispose of old but good quality items. Facebook, for instance, may be a great place to find community groups where you can obtain furniture, clothing, and other items.
9. **Thorough Virtual Walkthroughs!** When assessing a home for safety virtually, prompt the family member to point the camera at every wall, every floor, every ceiling, every closet and maybe every kitchen drawer! This process can be a bit of a grind, so remind the family member of the importance of being thorough, commiserate, and use levity. If there's a child in the home maybe they would love to give mom a break and show you their room themselves!
10. **Don't Assume Everyone is Tech Savvy.** The pandemic has forced many of us to learn to engage with each other more using technology, but this isn't the case for everyone. For family members who aren't able to connect with you through Zoom or something similar, ask if they have a loved one or neighbor whose phone or computer they could borrow. Suggest safe ways of meeting in person based on their comfort level. Get creative!

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