

July 14, 2020

Dear Foster Parents,

Happy Summer to everyone! As part of the Department of Children and Families' summer plans, we will begin increasing in-person parent child visits this week. As your Social Workers may have discussed with you, the Department began its preparations several weeks ago to assure that we have the proper Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) as well as cleaning protocols and supplies to keep everyone safe and healthy.

Attached, you will find guidance to help you and the children in your care prepare for in-person visits. Importantly, the guidance aligns with the Commonwealth's reopening guidelines and the most up-to-date public health metrics from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). You will note the guidance refers to Family Time rather than parent child visits. This is a permanent change we recently made to normalize visits and to better reflect their purpose.

DCF is fortunate to have a top-notch medical director in Dr. Linda Sagor. She and her team of DCF nurses worked with our policy team to write and review the guidance so that it incorporates the latest public health recommendations. We are also very proud that Dr. Sagor was selected by the Administration of Children and Families (ACF) to present Massachusetts' implementation plan for safe in-person contacts at a recent webinar for U.S. child welfare agencies.

Much of that content is in the Family Time Guidance, which expands on the following:

- Pre-visit screening
- PPE for staff, children and families
- Maintaining distance when possible
- Bringing food
- Enhanced cleaning procedures

At this time, and for the foreseeable future, all Family Time will take place outdoors either at an area office or at a local park or recreational setting. The in-person visits will be implemented in phases and we will continue to use videoconferencing to complement in-person family time as we have been. You will be notified in advance when an in-person Family Time is scheduled for the children in your care or when it may be canceled due to inclement weather.

Recently, I had the opportunity to answer questions from foster parents from all five regions at webinars held with your foster parent liaisons. I am grateful to our partners at the Massachusetts Association for Foster Families (MAFF) for arranging the webinars and for the opportunity to have these conversations. At the end of this e-mail is a link to the recording of the forum for your region, which is also posted on FosterMA Connect. Be on the lookout for notification of follow-up webinars in the future.

As we take this next step together, it is normal to feel some nervousness or concern. Please bear in mind, this guidance is a framework. There will be decisions made on a case-by-case basis and members of our medical team will be available to address case-specific concerns. You should contact your Family Resource Worker, their supervisor, or the Family Resource manager at your office if you have any questions.

We are so grateful for the lengths you have gone to support our kids and the Department during these uncertain and unprecedented times. I hope this information provides you with reassurance that the Department's decisions are grounded in the health and safety of our kids, families, and staff.

With appreciation,

Linda Spears, DCF Commissioner