





West Virginia Infant/Toddler
Mental Health Association
Supporting the social and emotional well-being of children


www.nurturingwvbabies.org


Supporting West Virginia Home Visitors

Considerations for returning to in-person visits with children and families


 **You mean a lot:** Home visitors are in a unique position to see firsthand the power of face-to-face connection. You may be feeling that some of these connections transitioned well during virtual visits, while others did not. Keep in mind everyone has experienced this time differently and refocus on working together to strengthen positive outcomes. Don't be discouraged if it takes a visit or two to completely reconnect again. Relationships can be repaired.

 **Modeling is important:** By modeling appropriate physical distance and behavior during a home visit (even if the family doesn't feel it is necessary), you are sharing strategies with the family of how they can appropriately interact with others. This may give the family the skills and confidence they need to keep their families healthy or reinforce the need to put such practices in place. Don't expect that children will have a concept of what 6 feet looks like. One idea is to bring a piece of string that helps children measure different things being six feet apart. Make a guessing game out of how far the couch is from the table.

 **Be kind to yourself!** Treat yourself kindly and practice good self-care. It is common to feel stress during this time, just as our families may be feeling overwhelmed. Do at least one thing each day that makes you happy! Check in with yourself and reflect on how you are feeling. Don't be afraid to ask for help from those around you. Continue (or re-engage) with reflective supervision/practices. It is critical that you have a space where you can explore your thoughts and feelings regarding the work of supporting children and families. When you feel heard and supported you can do the same for your families.

 **Be honest and direct:** Make it simple when talking with children about keeping space between each other. Talk about coronavirus as a germ, but don't make it scary or cause alarm. "We're keeping our germs to ourselves right now to keep everyone healthy." Encourage children to be part of the solution: "We can all work together to stop coronavirus." For younger children, you can share books and coloring pages that talk about the virus in an age-appropriate way. Even though these times can feel very different, emphasize what has stayed the same: "Even though I can't hug you today, you are special to me whether you are near or far. I'm excited to see you." Here are a few suggestions for materials that you can share with children:

- [Hello, I'm a Virus! Book for Young Children](#)
- [Birdie and the Virus story and song](#)
- [Georgie and the Giant Germ Coloring Pages](#)

 **Emotions big and small:** Children may be experiencing a range of emotions right now, just as adults are. Encourage children to talk about these emotions and offer reassurance that all these feelings are okay. It can be helpful to name these emotions: "I see that you are feeling unhappy that I can't give you a hug. Let's ask mommy to give you a hug." During this time of uncertainty, children may be feeling bigger emotions. Encourage children and families to have a plan of what to safely do with these bigger emotions. For example, when bigger emotions start to take over, go for a walk, get creative with an art project or music, or take deep breaths together. Having a familiar, cozy spot with books or stuffed animals that the child can choose to go to when needing space can also be helpful. Routines and predictability can be very reassuring to children. As much as possible, stick to a consistent routine.