

Providing Early Intervention (EI) from a Distance

Covid-19 has brought many changes to our lives, including a suspension of home visits. Families should be assured that providing services that meet family needs is a key priority, and Nebraska is finding alternative ways to provide services to families via phone calls and video conferencing. These alternate methods allow providers, services coordinators and families to stay connected even though we cannot meet face to face i.e. connecting with each other on a “*virtual home visit*”.

Videoconferencing (VC) is defined as the provision of support to families via video technology. We are fortunate that the early intervention (EI) model promoted throughout Nebraska easily adapts to videoconferencing; meaning that a “virtual” home visit should not look all that different than a traditional home visit. Regardless of “format”, providers and services coordinators will continue to focus their efforts on building the capacity of adults to support their child in natural learning activities *between* visits using a collaborative and supportive approach. In the sections below, we highlight the “goodness of fit” between the principles of Routines-Based Early Intervention (RBEI) and videoconferencing as they relate to home visits. We also offer tips and strategies for using technology and provide an array of scenarios using VC to support families.

Routines-Based Early Intervention (RBEI) and VC

While there are a variety of delivery models for early intervention, Nebraska promotes Routines-Based Early Intervention (RBEI); a method of providing supports to infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families that focuses on children’s functioning within everyday activities (routines) and meeting families’ needs. Services are provided within natural environments (homes, childcare, community settings) using a strength-based approach that focuses on parent-child interaction. RBEI has three primary evidence-based components: (1) Routines-Based Interview (RBI), (2) Functional Outcomes, and (3) Quality Routines Based Home Visits. The following table shows the “fit” between the guiding principles of RBEI as they relate to home visits and the demands of VC. They match up well.

Principles of RBEI in Home Visits	Videoconferencing Application
<p>Infants and toddlers learn best through participation in familiar routines with familiar people. ALL families, with necessary supports, can enhance their child’s learning and development.</p>	<p>Infants and toddlers stay in their natural environments with familiar people. The focus of the VC is with adults, and the capacity and competence of adults are built through effective use of technology.</p>
<p>The EI process must be dynamic; child and family needs, interests and skills change. The IFSP and home visits must reflect that fluidity.</p>	<p>Major life changes are happening right now for many families. Videoconferencing provides an alternative to traditional visits as families adapt to new home routines and demands.</p>
<p>Family priorities and needs are best met by a primary service provider who brings in other services and supports as needed, assuring outcomes, resources and supports are</p>	<p>A videoconferencing format lends itself well to a service delivery model promoting one team member as the primary coach for the family, acting as the liaison to and the agent of the EI</p>

<p>compatible with family life.</p> <p>IFSP outcomes must be functional (real life) and based on (1) the child’s participation within a routine or everyday activity and (2) family or caregiver needs and priorities.</p> <p>Providers and services coordinators engage <i>with adults</i> during the HV to develop their capacity to enhance their child’s development between home visits.</p> <p>Ongoing child and family assessment occurs anytime there is a need to identify change in family life, resources, concerns, child strengths, needs or effectiveness of interventions.</p> <p>A quality home visit emphasizes a strength-based approach for infusing meaningful parent engagement in everyday life and promoting responsive and effective parent-child (PC) interactions within natural routines and activities.</p>	<p>program and other team members.</p> <p>Videoconferencing lends itself well to review of and a focus on child participation and functioning within routines based upon family priorities through discussion and/or observation.</p> <p>Used intentionally, VC offers an effective method for providers and services coordinators and families to develop a collaborative plan for use between visits.</p> <p>Videoconferencing allows for on-going assessment data collection activities needed to support changes to EI service delivery.</p> <p>With proper planning and flexibility, providers and services coordinators can build on child and family strengths, needs, priorities and interests as the primary way of strengthening family function and PC interactions during and as a result of virtual visits.</p>
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Tips and Strategies When Using Technology

A good videoconference looks very similar to a traditional home visit with some differences—the first, and most obvious difference, being the use of technology. To engage successfully, both providers and families need to understand the technology, learn how to use it, and feel comfortable troubleshooting when things go wrong. Familiarizing yourself with technology will go a long way to reducing your anxiety. Below are some tips to help you and families get ready.

Basic Requirements

- Videoconferencing requires families to have an internet connection and a device for communicating via video such as a smart phone, a tablet or a laptop.
- Choose the technology you want to use for the videoconference visit. Providers/SC can use Zoom, Skype, FaceTime, google hangout or other methods of connecting families via video and audio. These platforms allow for both the provider/SC and family to be on camera.
- Consider a phone call, email or text exchange with the family in advance of the first visit to prepare them. You may wish to ask the family to complete (or review with the family) the [Home Capacity for Videoconferencing Checklist](#) to find out about the technology capacity in their home.
- Provide the family with information about the technology you plan to use. It may need to be installed on the family’s computer or they may need to create a username and password.

- Conduct a test session. Consider doing the test session during nap time or other quiet time. Discuss limiting other devices using the internet during your session, using a wired connection which will be more stable than a wireless connection, and the importance of bright light.
- Rural or remote areas may not have enough internet strength. In such cases, you may need to use the phone.

Step 1: Videoconference Set-Up

- ✓ Communicate with the family via email, text or phone several days before the session to (1) confirm the appointment, (2) discuss ideas for the agenda, and (3) identify who will be at the session for both the provider and the family; if siblings are present, what will be the plan for them? Make sure you have each other's phone in case of issues.
- ✓ Consider sharing the [Family Videoconference Preparation Checklist](#) with the family. It offers specific steps to help the family ensure an optimal environment while they are videoconferencing with you.
- ✓ Set up your computer or laptop.
- ✓ Ensure you're connected to the internet.
- ✓ Be familiar with your technology (Zoom, Skype, FaceTime etc.).
- ✓ Attend to your clothing (solid, dark colors).
- ✓ Adjust lighting, turn your phone to vibrate, evaluate your microphone (arrange headset or adjust volume on computer audio) and adjust your computer camera.
- ✓ Place a sign on your door to limit people from entering your room and close the door.
- ✓ IF you have trouble with the internet, call the family, restart the session and verify a wired connection.

Getting a Session Started

- ❖ Follow same procedures you used during the test session.
- ❖ Greet the family and ask if they can see and hear you on a scale of 1-5, 5 being great and 1 being poor.
- ❖ If there are problems, close the session and start over.
- ❖ Share your impressions and tell family specifically how to adjust their equipment
- ❖ Make sure everyone has a cell phone handy in case there is a need to talk through troubleshooting issues

Videoconference Home Visit Scenarios

Note: Some providers and services coordinators will recognize components of the Getting Ready Approach in the following scenarios. The intent is to represent examples of any home visit across Nebraska with the integration of technology. Therefore, not all components of the Getting Ready Approach are illustrated but rather implied.

Wrap Up

There are many resources available to support your efforts. In addition to “helpful hints”, many of these resources contain video clips of virtual home visits. Remember that the service delivery models portrayed in the videos may be different than the RBEI model used in Nebraska or use different terminology than Nebraska.

1. Early Childhood Intervention Tele-Practice. On the DEC Early Intervention Community of Practice website, Dathan Rush (The Family, Infant, and Preschool Program FIPP) has a video on how to use tele-intervention (TI) during this time of social distancing. (Note: TI and VC are similar formats).
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kWtJgGpuc4&feature=youtu.be>
2. Tele-Intervention and the Routines-based Model. Robin McWilliam.
https://naturalenvironments.blogspot.com/2020/03/tele-intervention-and-routines-based.html?spref=fb&fbclid=IwAR2RudAOnzjCpMSyXIRFCxlx9CwvYeA0UV5hOSRfY_Y6PnTdNOgtCM8PLs
3. Video Conferencing 101: Guidance for EI on using videoconferencing for home visits. This handout provides examples of how video conferencing might be used, general tips regarding technology, environment, and interactions with others. Prepared by Larry Edelman.
https://ectacenter.org/~pdfs/topics/disaster/Video_Conferencing_101.pdf
4. Tele-Intervention and Distance Learning Resources - Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center; includes resources from professional organizations.
<https://ectacenter.org/topics/disaster/tele-intervention.asp>
5. Tips for Families: Receiving EI Services Through the Phone, Tablet or Computer. Checklist for families to use when getting ready for VC. Early Childhood Personnel Center.
[https://ecpcta.org/covid-19-resources/.](https://ecpcta.org/covid-19-resources/)