



Tennessee Department of Children's Services **Protocol for the Use of Skype Technology**

1. Purpose:

To inform Department of Children's Services (DCS) staff of the federal guidelines, statewide procedures, and expectations for using Skype technology.

2. Overview:

DCS staff has an increasing need to conduct "Virtual' Face-to-Face" meetings with youth and families. Weather and other circumstances often prevent case workers and families from being able to travel and attend these meetings in person. Skype is a Microsoft product that enables communication and virtual collaboration from a number of devices such as phones, computers, and televisions. Skype is only to be used for supplemental face-to-face visits, and will not replace physical face-to-face visits.

3. Federal guidelines:

Section 422(b) (17) of the Social Security Act does not recognize videoconferencing or similar forms of technology as meeting the requirements for face-to-face visits between caseworker and child. Skype, as a tool, can therefore only be used to supplement visitation requirements that are outlined in the [Visitation Protocol](#), not to replace any of the requirements.

4. Statewide Procedures:

Examples of supplemental visitation requirements include, but are not limited to:

- a) Child and Family Team Meeting (CFTM) participation with an incarcerated parent or parent residing out of state;
- b) Requests for information from families, case members, or providers;
- c) Updates regarding regular case management activities;
- d) Participation in services (family therapy, visitation) when the parent cannot travel long distances; consideration should be given to the child's age and circumstances;
- e) Collateral/Witness contacts;
- f) Parent participation in medication management appointments when travel is not feasible or possible;
- g) Supplemental parent/child visits beyond those required in the protocol;
- h) Supplemental contacts where an out of state provider has responsibility for the monthly face to face contact.

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N/A

Subject: Protocol for the use of Skype Technology

Examples of other work related activities that Skype could be used for:

- Usage for meetings between Alternative Work Space staff and Supervisors

- Case conferencing between staff and supervisor

- Usage by Family Support Worker and Foster Parent Support staff to communicate with foster parents in crisis situations

- Supplemental visits between staff and child if regular face-to-face has been met

- DCS Attorney consults

- One-on-one training/mentoring activities

- Staying connected while mobile

5. Skype cannot be used to replace any existing policy requirements.

Note: For specific case related questions on the appropriateness of using Skype, DCS staff is to consult with the Regional Investigations Director (RID), Regional Administrator (RA) or JJ Statewide Directors for approval.

6. **Expectations:**

Staff Responsibilities:

In certain instances, the court may order the use of Skype or it may be appropriate to consider the use of Skype to allow a child to maintain contact with family members or other significant persons in situations in which regular in-person visitations are not possible. It is expected that the case manager:

- a) Determine whether the Skype visitation may occur in the placement home or if the visit should occur at the DCS office.

- b) Ensure there is supervision for the visit if needed. DCS staff, a provider, or other approved thirdparty (non-custodial caregiver, Foster Parent) may supervise the visit.

- c) For visits that occur in the DCS office, staff ensures that an appropriate setting for the visit and all required equipment has been arranged prior to the scheduled visitation.

- d) For Skype visits outside the DCS office, staff:
 - Email the Skype website address and the instructions for using Skype to all participants;

- Prior to the visit, ensure that all arrangements are in place for the visit to occur; and
- Enter dictation regarding the visitation into TFACTs. Refer to DCS Policy [14.16 Child Protective Services Case File Organization, Documentation and Disposition](#).

Effective Date:

Supplemental to:

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Subject: Protocol for the use of Skype Technology

7. Maintaining the Security of the Skype Account:

Staff is to use only **Skype for Business** software installed by DCS Office of Information Technology (OIT) staff.

8. Supplemental Information:

[How to Schedule a Skype Meeting](#)

[How to Join a Skype Meeting as a Guest on PC](#)

[How to Join a Skype Meeting as a Guest on Apple Devices](#)

[How to Join a Skype Meeting as a Guest on Android Devices](#)

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