

Benefits of Virtual Platforms

- Virtual meetings may increase openness over time since the family is in their home and may find it a more comfortable environment as opposed to an office building or clinical space.
- Virtual services can increase access by removing barriers, such as lack of child care, transportation, and schedule conflicts. However, providers should ensure that families have access to the appropriate types of technology that will allow virtual services to be most beneficial (i.e., headphones, a camera, & high-speed internet). Agencies should be willing to provide these items to families who need them.
- Virtual services provide more variety in methods of participation. For example, those who feel less comfortable participating verbally may engage through reactions or the chat feature. The chat feature can also be used to chat with the facilitator privately while in a group setting.
- Breakout rooms can be used for one-on-one conversation should someone want to leave the group setting and speak privately.
 - For groups, a co-facilitator can be helpful, as they can monitor the chat and separate participants into a breakout room for private conversations as needed.

Tips for Initial Engagement

- Use initial interactions to listen to the family about who they are, what they have been through, and what supports are most important to them.
- Families need private spaces to engage in meaningful discussions and to have honest conversations about their feelings. Providers should assess a family member's privacy and review rules around confidentiality prior to any meeting to ensure they will be able to speak freely. Some families will benefit from hearing that the virtual session is not being recorded.
- Providers should be prepared before the first session to give tutorials to families who are unfamiliar with the meeting platform and need help using tech features.
- Phone calls may be needed before the family is comfortable meeting on camera, especially since on-camera services may involve looking into their home.
 - During the tutorial, the provider can guide families regarding features that may help them feel more comfortable engaging on video, such as using a virtual background or blurring their background so their home is not visible.

Rapport Building in Virtual Spaces to Build Trust

- Ask participants when and where they are most likely to have the least distractions to participate in virtual services. A service offered after 5:00pm might help to accommodate work schedules but may interfere with dinner time.
- Set guidelines with participants on the best ways to use the virtual space. For example, do participants want to use the chat feature, the reactions, and do they prefer everyone be on camera?
- Consider hybrid models that allow for the flexibility that virtual services offer, but still allows for the benefits of in-person rapport building. For example, staff can meet with participants or drop off care packages to them prior to a virtual service starting or agree to meet at least once in person before starting virtual sessions.
- Consider smaller cohorts or groups for virtual services. This allows for more intimate and meaningful conversations.
- Asking participants to turn on their cameras if they feel comfortable is a helpful practice to help build trust within groups and between the participant or facilitator, to ensure the right person is in the room, and to ensure that participants are in a private space where they can have confidential and engaged conversations.