

GAL Guide to Investigating During the Covid-19 Pandemic

To keep in person/at home meetings to a minimum during the Covid-19 Pandemic, we have developed this guide. A few things to keep in mind:

- **Home visits should not be conducted during the period of March 15-April 12, 2020, unless imperative to the case.** Your health and safety, and the health and safety of the families we serve is priority number one. If you are not feeling well, do not conduct a home visit.
- **If you do feel it is necessary to conduct a home visit, screen the family prior to your visit.** We are advising all GALs to ask the following screening questions prior to attending any emergency home visits during this time:
 1. *Do you have a fever OR signs/symptoms of lower respiratory infection cough/shortness of breath)? If the person answers “yes,” ask if the sign/symptoms are more than normal or what the person usually experiences. If so, then the answer is considered “yes.”*
 2. *Have you had close contact with a laboratory-confirmed coronavirus patient within the last 14 days?*
 3. *Have you recently traveled to/from China, Iran, Italy, Japan or South Korea?*
 4. *Have you been on a cruise in the past 14 days?*
- **GALs are not emergency responders.** Any emergency issues raised by the families we serve should be referred to the police and/or the Department of Child Services. **To be clear, if you have reason to believe abuse or neglect against a child(ren) is occurring, you must report that to the DCS hotline by calling: 1-800-800-5556.**
- **Keep in contact with your Kids’ Voice staff attorney to get the most updated information about continuances and Court closings.** Many court hearings are being continued, which means you will likely have more time to complete your GAL investigation. Also, follow [Kids’ Voice’s Facebook Page](#) for updates on our services and links to resources for families.
- **Don’t take a break from investigating.** Emails and Phone Calls are still great ways to get updates from families and conduct interviews of collateral sources. Get those items out of the way now, that way home visits will be all that is left once we are back to normal. Remember that email should really only be used for logistics (scheduling the visits) or for getting specific information (lists of doctors, references, etc.) and should not be used regularly to get substantive updates.
- **These are unique times.** The best practice in GAL investigations will continue to be home visits, so these tips below should only be utilized during unique circumstances, so

that our work can continue when face-to-face meetings are not possible. These are not things GALs should necessarily do during normal circumstances.

Conducting a “Virtual” Home Visit

- **Photographs:** Before beginning the visit, ask the families to send you photos of the home including all rooms and photos of the yard. Then you can refer to those photos during your interview. See below for tips on how to receive photographs from parties other than email or snail mail.
- **Meeting Virtually:** Technology can be used so that you can see and hear the person you are interviewing and give you the capability of a virtual tour of the home. Some of this technology has free trials available, and some have limitations on what non-paying users can do. Review that information prior to having your meeting so your interview does not get cut short unexpectedly. Here are some examples of technology that can be used:
 - a. [Zoom](#) – This can be used to conduct video conference calls or non-video conference calls and includes a chat feature.
 - b. [FaceTime](#) – This is video-calling and requires the parties to both have Apple products, i.e. iPhone, iPad, etc.
 - c. [Legaler](#) – This can be used to conduct video conference calls and is a secure, encrypted platform.
 - d. [Skype](#) – This can be used to chat with one or more people, including video, and files can be transferred through the platform as well.
- **Do NOT record meetings.** You should do as you would during a typical home visit and take notes if needed, or jot down things after the interview is over. Anything that is recorded, and any notes you take, are part of your GAL file and subject to review by the parties and their attorneys.
- **You don’t necessarily know who is participating.** It will be difficult, if not impossible, to know for sure who all is present in a home when you are not there physically. Be mindful of that especially if you are discussing sensitive issues (i.e. domestic violence with a survivor) or child abuse is reported to you. As always, if abuse is reported to you by a child survivor, you should not ask further questions as those interviews should be conducted by forensically trained professionals.
- **Try to maintain YOUR privacy.** It is likely you will be conducting these visits from your own home, so please be sure to be in a space that does not contain personal information about yourself and avoid having your family or household members involvement in the meetings. You can always mute yourself and/or turn off the video access to you, so that you can just see them.
- **Home Tour Tips:** Treat this like an in-person home visit. You still want to be sure you see all parts of the home during your virtual tour.

- Check online to see how many rooms the home has per its most recent listing, or according to the apartment complex' website, if applicable. [Realtor](#) and/or [Zillow](#) are both good for this and sometimes even include photographs.
 - Have whoever is leading the tour start at the beginning of the house.
 - The children we serve have grown up with video chatting, and especially for school-aged children, you could have the child(ren) lead you on the virtual tour of the home.
 - If you have concerns about specific rooms (i.e. basements) or safety concerns about the home (i.e. baby gates), ask the parties to show you what safety measures they are taking.
 - You may ask people to show you where smoke detectors are located, and where guns and other weapons are stored.
- **Staying in Touch:** It can be tempting to give families and children you serve your personal contact information, especially if you are used to giving them your office phone and you will be working from home during the pandemic. Instead, you might consider setting of one of these options so that you can still maintain telephone contact with the parties:
 - a. [Google Voice](#) – This provides you with a free number, can be used from your phone via an App you download, allows phone calls, voicemails and texting including video/photos. You can connect your existing Gmail account to a Google Voice line, or create a new email, i.e. *johnnytheGAL@gmail.com*
 - b. [Dingtone](#) – This is also an App and provides free calling and texting app that uses encrypted data connection to transmit phone calls, messages, and photos and videos.