



**Message from County of Orange Social Services Agency
Children and Family Services Division Director, Anne Bloxom**

June 22, 2020

Dear Parents and Caregivers,

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all of us in many ways. For parents, one of the most significant impacts has been that for the safety of your child and the community as a whole, you may have not been able to see your child in person. We know that you love your child and not being able to see them has been very difficult not only for you, but for them as well. We understand your desire to visit with your child and want to help you accomplish that as quickly and safely as possible.

As caregivers, we also understand these have been challenging times as you have worked to maintain the safety and well-being of the children in your care. We appreciate the support you have provided our children and families especially in the area of visitation. We know many of you have facilitated virtual and/or in person visits already and we cannot thank you enough for continuing to provide children and their parents with an opportunity to maintain a connection and be comforted by each other in this way.

Following the State's recent approval of the Orange County variance to safely re-open certain businesses, the Social Services Agency (SSA) is pleased to announce that this week we are opening some of our offices to the public with limited functionality from Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Our press release is linked [here](#) for your review.

This week we will also begin to schedule limited visitations **by appointment only**. This includes visitation taking place at Orangewood Children and Family Center. Initial in-person visitations will be limited to court ordered visits which are to be supervised or monitored by an SSA social worker. In these specific instances, the assigned social worker or visitation coach will contact you as parents and caregivers soon to begin the scheduling process. To minimize traffic at our facilities, we ask that appointments be made for all visits. We will not have the ability to accept walk in appointments during this first phase of re-opening.

As visitations are being scheduled, SSA will continue to explore ways for parents and children to visit in person while taking precautions to keep everyone healthy.

When the assigned social worker or visitation coach calls to schedule a visit, he or she will ask all parties some simple health screening questions that can tell us if extra precautions are needed. Questions may include:

- How do you feel? Have you been sick or had a fever or other symptoms (a checklist of symptoms will be reviewed)
- Have you recently been exposed to someone who tested positive for COVID 19?
- Have you or someone in your household tested positive for COVID-19?

It is important that you answer these questions honestly. If you or the children have been sick or exposed to someone, you will still get to visit, but you may need to wait a few days and continue to have visits virtually.

Once the visitation is scheduled, we ask caregivers whenever possible, to transport children to visits in an effort to minimize exposure and transmission.

Parents, if you have a visit in-person at an SSA office, the social workers and/or visitation coaches will also ask you for your cooperation with the following:

- Your temperature will be taken
- We ask that you wash your hands or use hand sanitizer
- We understand you will want to hug your children, however we ask that you minimize physical contact during your visits
- We remind you to properly wear a face mask/cloth face covering
 - Exceptions to this are:
 - Children under the age of 2;
 - Anyone who has trouble breathing, or who is unconscious, incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the cloth face-covering without assistance; or
 - Persons with a medical or mental health condition or development disability that prevents wearing a cloth face-covering

If you don't have a face mask/cloth face covering, your social worker can provide one.

Once you enter the visitation area, you can expect the visitation rooms to look different. We are taking extra care to provide enhanced cleanings in our space for your visits; chairs and seating will be spaced apart to maintain physical distancing, and we will be sanitizing each visitation area after every visit--all this to help keep you and your family safe.

In this first phase of re-opening, visits will be an hour at a time due to our limited space and as a way to limit exposure for you and your child. We understand this may not feel like enough time, and we know how valuable this time with your child is to you. We will continue to provide virtual visitations in addition to in-person visits so that you can share as much time together as possible.

We recommend parents and caregivers take some time to talk to your child before the visit to let them know how different things may be. There are a number of age appropriate resources to help parents and caregivers have these conversations with children. Here are links to a few of them:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/talking-with-children.html>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OPsY-jLqaXM>

PBS for Parents:

<https://www.pbs.org/parents/thrive/how-to-talk-to-your-kids-about-coronavirus>

National Geographic:

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/family/in-the-news/coronavirus/talking-to-your-kids-about-coronavirus/>

Your assigned social worker will have access to these materials, if you are interested in receiving these resources. Parents, be prepared for mixed emotions you and your child may feel when you see each other again. Your child may seem more emotional – or on the other hand may appear to be more detached. You might be feeling nervous. All of these feelings are okay. This is a very unique and challenging time and together, we can work through it.

If you do not feel comfortable with in person visits, please let us know and we can continue with virtual visits. We know that the risk of catching the virus might be scary or cause anxiety, or, you may have elderly parents or relatives you want to protect from the spread of illness. We will help your child understand your choice, we will respect your decision and let your child know that you are protecting them by making this decision.

We are incredibly sorry you have experienced such a long physical separation, and we understand that virtual visits cannot replace seeing your child in person. I am hopeful that with your cooperation to follow the precautions discussed today, you will soon be able to visit with your child more regularly in person.

As SSA implements its phased approach to re-open our offices, we may need to make operational adjustments over time. Changes will be shared with you as appropriate and necessary.

Again, please keep in mind initial visitations at SSA will be limited to those court ordered visits to be monitored or supervised by an SSA social worker. For visitations where the caregiver is responsible for monitoring or supervising, you may need to find an alternate location. As appropriate, SSA may also help facilitate and support visits out in the community, following the safety guidelines as previously mentioned.

In the meantime, if you have any questions related to visitation, please contact your assigned social worker.

Thank you for your flexibility and cooperation as we work through our phased in approach. Please stay safe and be well.