

DSS Policy and Procedure Guide

Division 03: Child Welfare

Chapter 04: Ongoing Case Management/Practice

Item 036: Use of Skype for Visitation Purposes

Suggested changes send to: [DSS PSOA Mailbox](#)

Issued: **April 26, 2013**

References: NA

New

Replaces Issue: NA

Policy

Department of Social Services Child Welfare staff shall assess the usefulness of Skype to facilitate visitation between dependent children, their siblings, parents and guardians and other persons that play an important role in the child's life. Skype may also be used to help establish relationships or maintain contact between children and those persons that are part of the child's life as permanent connections. Skype may be used to facilitate visitation in situations in which the parties are separated by distance, making in-person visitation difficult to achieve. Skype shall not be used in place of in-person visitation in situations in which distance is not a barrier to in-person, face-to-face visitation.

Purpose

To inform Child Welfare staff of the policies, procedures and staff expectations for using Skype for visitation purposes and of the procedure for securely maintaining Skype related equipment such as laptops and webcams.

Overview

Skype is a software application that allows users to participate in video conferencing. Skype is a useful tool to allow dependent children to maintain contact with parents or relatives when the parties are separated by distance, such as cases in which the child is placed out-of-state through the Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children (ICPC) and when a child has family members or other significant persons in their lives that reside outside California or the United States. The Juvenile Court may order the use of Skype to facilitate court ordered visitation in such cases.

Procedure

Case Managing Social Worker Responsibilities

The Juvenile Court may order 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 visitation is not possible. When the case managing social worker (CM SW) receives the court orders after a court hearing, the CM SW shall:

- Review the minute orders for information regarding the type of visitation the court has ordered.

- If the visitation is to include persons who reside outside the United States, contact the Immigration Liaison regarding Skype visitation with persons outside the United States to inform the Liaison of the visitation order, the parties ordered to have visitation by Skype, the details of the visitation order (including any visitation restrictions) and contact information for each participant involved in the visitation.
 - Contact the child's care provider to inform the provider of the court order and to advise the provider that the Immigration Liaison will be arranging the visit and assisting with setting up the use of Skype for the visits.
- Determine whether Skype visitation may occur in the placement home or if the visit shall occur at a DSS office.
- Arrange supervision for the visit. The CM SW, the care provider or other approved third-party, including the Liaison, may supervise the visit.
- For visits that occur in the DSS office, the CM SW shall ensure that an appropriate setting for the visit and all required equipment has been arranged prior to the scheduled visitation.
- If the visit does not require the assistance of the Immigration Liaison, the CM SW shall contact the child's care provider and all visit participants to ask if they have access to a computer, or mobile device with a microphone and speakers, a webcam and internet service to participate in the visitation.
 - The CM SW shall email the Skype website address and the instructions for using Skype to all participants.
 - Prior to the visit, the CM SW shall ensure that all arrangements are in place for the visit to occur.
 - The CM SW shall enter the visitation narratives in CWS/CMS within 24 hours of the visit.

Immigration Liaison's Responsibilities

- Upon notification by the CM SW that a visit using Skype is to occur, the Liaison shall contact the child's care provider and all other visit participants to ask if they have access to a computer, or mobile device with a microphone and speakers, a webcam and internet service to participate in the visitation.
- The Liaison shall email the Skype website address and the instructions for using Skype to all participants.
- Prior to the visit, the Liaison shall ensure that all arrangements are in place for the visit to occur.
- If the Liaison supervises the visit, the Liaison shall enter the visitation narratives in CWS/CMS within 24 hours of the visit.

Maintaining the Security of Skype Equipment

- Skype equipment shall be kept in a designated, secure location for the equipment to be stored. The storage location shall be kept locked with access limited to authorized staff.
- Skype equipment includes:
 - Laptop
 - Air Card
 - Web Camera
- A check-out log shall be kept by a designated Program Manager's (PM) secretary in each DSS building location in which equipment is stored.
- Staff will be provided a user login ID & password for the assigned computer they check out.
- Staff must check out all equipment by signing their name and the date and time the equipment is removed from storage. The staff returning the equipment shall do so immediately after the visit concludes by signing their name and the date and time of the return.
- The designated PM's secretary in each building shall be responsible for securely maintaining the equipment and for ensuring that the use of all equipment follows policy guidelines.

Setting Up a Skype Account

- Make sure there is an internet connection.
- Connect to internet by plugging in the Air Card and clicking on the VZAccess Manager icon
- Click on Connect WWAN. Computer "Status" should say connected.
- Use the Skype logo on your desk top to get to Skype
- Select create an account
- Enter your information using your county email address and phone number to set up the account.
- Create a Skype user name. Please remember this account is used for county business, ensure the user name you provide is appropriate.
- Do not use personal photos on your account as this is used for county business.
- You will get an email confirming your account and will then be able to log into your account.

Instructions for Using Skype

- The Skype web address is emailed to a prospective client/user in advance, when the meeting is scheduled.
 - For international use of Skype the address is: <http://www.skype.com/intl/es-es/home>
- The program link then opens up the webpage for download.
- Once downloaded, program language can be changed to the primary language of the client/user.
- The client/user creates their account with a specific user name and password.
- The Program Icon is automatically added to the computer desktop.
- The program icon then opens up the Skype program.
- During the client's first Skype session, the Skype program invites the user to alert and search current Outlook contacts to make them aware of the user's new Skype account. The program identifies current Skype users already in the user's Outlook account.
- In order to make a Skype connection the other person has to accept your Skype invitation and add you as a contact. Search for contact by email or name, email is most accurate, if contact has a common name. The contact info will appear if the user has set up Skype account. Invitation is sent when the visit is scheduled, if this is a continuous visit you can verify date and time of next session before session runs out
- When a contact is identified there are clear green icons to choose from to allow for contact.
- The Skype program sends an alert once one of the user's contacts is online.
- The following screen appears when dialing.
- Video contact will occur when connected.
- The screen allows for editing of the size of the video screen and for volume of the speakers and microphone.
- The Skype program allows for video conferencing sessions of up to 10 persons (contacts).