



## Knowledge bite

### Using Skype for direct work with children

Due to the increasing concerns regarding the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, Cafcass is looking ahead to promote the use of Skype and other forms of video conferencing as a medium for completing interviews with parents and direct work sessions with children and young people. Cafcass is now routinely asking families to identify their preferred available video conferencing application at the WTFH stage in order to reduce the need for face to face contact. Below is some useful guidance for FCAs to consider when deciding whether a Skype or other video conferencing session is an appropriate pathway.

#### What would be required to set up a Skype direct work session?

To use Skype with children and young people, you need to confirm that an appropriate parent, family member or professional (school) can access and download Skype or Skype for Business. It is essential that the Skype session can be connected through a secure Wi-fi connection to minimise the risk of slow connectivity or losing the connection altogether.

Guidance on setting up an external Skype call, and further information on how to use Skype, can be accessed from the IT pages or by clicking the following links:

- [Schedule a Meeting with an External Contact](#)
- [Joining a Meeting with an External Contact - Cafcass Staff](#)
- [Participating in a Video Call with Cafcass - External Contact or Service User](#)
- [End your Meeting](#)



**Top tip:** If this is the first time that you're using Skype for a meeting it is advisable that you do a trial session with a colleague to make sure your audio settings are correct. If you are having problems with your settings contact Littlefish for assistance.

#### What other forms of video conferencing are available?

Cafcass is also looking to accommodate the use of applications such as FaceTime, WhatsApp and Zoom. By the time cases reach the WAFH stage, and as public law cases progress, we should have identified and recorded the family's preferred video conferencing option.

If you are using video applications with children under the age of 16 years it is essential that you record parental consent to use the application in the contact log or case plan.


If you are unsure how to download or set up the family's preferred video application, you can contact the duty IT trainer for assistance (click [here](#) for details).




**Top tip:** Make sure the family can connect their video app through Wi-fi to avoid expensive use of mobile data and unreliable connectivity.

## When can Skype be used for a direct work session?


The overarching principle for FCAs is to consider the unique case factors and record a defensible decision as to why Skype would be safe and appropriate.

 **Top tip:** Consider seeking situational supervision with a PS or SM if you are unsure about the suitability of Skype.


Using Skype can save valuable travelling time, therefore you are encouraged to invest additional time in planning, preparing and setting up your Skype session.

 **Top tip:** Evidence your planning in the case plan to demonstrate how you have prepared the child/ren for the session.


If the parents and/or child are resistant or concerned about a Skype session, this is unlikely to be the best option and an alternative arrangement should be considered.

 **Top tip:** Make sure you inform both parents of your direct work plan and you record their agreement.


Feedback from the FJYPB tells us some children may not feel comfortable using Skype with someone they haven't met, therefore ensure the child is fully included in the decision-making process.

 **Top tip:** Consider speaking to the child/ren by phone in the first instance to introduce yourself and build rapport. This may also inform your views on the child's capacity to engage in a Skype-based session.


Consider the age of the child and the likelihood of them being able to engage effectively in a skype based meeting.

 **Top tip:** Younger children may still be able to engage with a Skype call if they have the appropriate support from a safe parent, family member or school teacher.


If there are significant concerns regarding the child being influenced or manipulated by one or both parents, consider how a Skype session may impact on obtaining their ascertainable wishes and feelings.

 **Top tip:** Consider accessing the CIAF guidance on assessing children's and young people's wishes and feelings and the FJYPB top tips.

Are there known safeguarding risks or is the child likely to recall traumatic memories in any way? If so, **then it may not be appropriate** to proceed with a remote interview. If you do proceed (for example if the court orders it) then please familiarise yourself with [this knowledge bite on trauma-informed practice](#) and seek situational supervision with a PS to agree how you will mitigate any distress that might arise during the session.


 **Top tip:** Be mindful that the absence of tears or visible distress does not indicate the absence of trauma.

Children with communication difficulties may struggle to use Skype, therefore this should be checked with a parent before considering using Skype.

 **Top tip:** Don't assume children with disabilities can't use Skype and consider reviewing the FJYPB top tips on working with children with disabilities/autism.

## Once you're on a Skype session...



- When completing a video call from home, you should create a neutral space/background and avoid having pets or other people present during the call.
  -  **Top tip:** Try and avoid having personal effects on view as this can be intrusive for the child and also exposing for you.
- Check that the young person can hear and see you alright. Check a few basic details with the young person first to ensure you can understand each other.
- Confirm with the young person that they feel comfortable where they are. Ask if anyone else is present and confirm with them that they feel able to talk openly and honestly about what they want to happen.
- You can still offer the young person the opportunity to complete direct work sheets or the direct work apps however explain that you will input the information due to the session being Skype based. Remember to share any completed direct work with the young person before ending the session to make sure they agree with what you have written.
- To complete direct work on Skype, you can use the share screen facility (click the blue circle with the TV and arrow symbol then select share my desktop or share window). If you do share your desktop, make sure all other screens/documents are closed as you may inadvertently share sensitive data.
- Always be mindful of the child's non-verbal communication whilst you're on the Skype call. For example, does the child appear to be distracted by someone else in the room? Is the child's body language congruent with their responses?
- If at anytime during the session you are concerned about the effectiveness of the Skype session, or the child's ability to engage, consider ending the session and exploring an alternative option.
- In some cases it might be appropriate to send the child some direct work sheets ahead of the direct work session for them to look at and complete at home or whilst you are online. If this is the case, make sure there is a safe and appropriate parent to assist in returning the direct work sheets to you.
- Allow some time at the end of the session for a quick debrief (with the adult supporting the child) to make sure the child is settled and happy for the session to close.