



As with all parenting work, the first and most vital step of this process will be **establishing a relationship** with the parent. Doing this remotely can present new challenges (please see document ‘Connecting with families at a distance’ for some reminders of core skills).

Particularly for families that you have not met before or don’t know well, much of your early contact will consist of **active listening**. By asking open questions (please see ‘Guided Discussion’ box overleaf), using affirmations, summaries and reflections, this allows you to:

- + ensure that parents feel listened to and understood
- + establish trust and a collaborative relationship
- + build up a picture of family dynamics, existing parenting strategies and where parents feel challenges lie

This process can take many contacts to establish, even when doing so face-to-face, let alone with the complexities of contact through phone or video, amidst a time of anxiety and uncertainty. Recognise that this process is essential and is in itself, a valuable intervention. You will be offering parents a sense of **containment**, by listening to their feelings, helping them process these and reflecting them back in a more manageable form. This will hopefully allow them in turn to offer containment to their children and will form a foundation for your work together going forward.

Through this process of engagement, you will get a sense of what parents hope to change and can support them in **setting realistic, achievable goals**. Although parents might have hopes to address major aspects of their parenting and their children’s behaviour, your collaborative relationship can scaffold them to recognise what the small steps towards these changes might be.

Particularly under the current circumstances, the core aim that you might be hoping to achieve with parents would be for them to experience positive time with their child. This will be all the more challenging when families will be juggling multiple, unprecedented demands, and initially might focus on helping them to find the moments rather than minutes, that they feel they can connect in positive play.

As would be the case if you were working with the family face to face, you will play a key role in **modelling desired behaviours**. For example:

- + Set clear **boundaries** regarding the nature of your contacts including how and when you can be contacted out with pre-arranged times.
- + Use lots of specific, genuine **praise**, both for the steps that parents are describing they are taking, as well as for any positives they relay regarding their children.
- + Model appropriate **endings**, with a summary of what you have covered in your contact as well as a goal for the parent to take away and work on before you next speak.

Guided Discussion

Prior to a call it can be helpful to identify key learning points you want to try to bring out, and structure your questions accordingly. Below are just some examples of the kind of open questions you could be using during your guided discussions:

- + “what has gone well since we last spoke?”
- + “what are the tools you have in your toolbox?”
- + “what could you try next time?”
- + “How could you say/do that?” (encourage parents to role play the strategy over the phone)
- + “How do you think they would/do feel if you tried that?”
- + “How do you think you would feel trying that?”
- + “What are you going to try/practice before we next speak?”

