

Access for Parents and Children in Ontario

IMPORTANT NOTICE

To: Judges, Family Lawyers and all APCO Clients
From: Access for Parents and Children in Ontario (“APCO”)
Date: April 25, 2020
Re: Changes to APCO Service Delivery Model During COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve and impact service delivery across Ontario. Social distancing to manage the spread of COVID-19 has made it impossible to provide in-person supervision of both visits and exchanges. On March 15, 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Access for Parents and Children in Ontario (APCO) temporarily suspended all face-to-face meetings, intake appointments, and site-based operations.

In order to assist in maintaining parent-child relationships during the crisis APCO has developed a Virtual Supervision Access Model for the continuity of services during this pandemic. APCO’s Executive Director and the Board of Directors have taken the time to develop thoughtful and industry-leading procedures, in order to be able to provide our services remotely in a virtual environment and resume off-site operation as safely as possible.

Our new approach called “**VIRTUAL SUPERVISED ACCESS**” provides parents and children the ability to connect with each other via electronic means such as a smartphone, tablet, or laptop.

WHEN: Effective May 1, 2020, APCO’s head office will be open to our clients and professionals for questions and applications for the new service.

HOW: By phone (416) 577- 0838, email (apco@kinark.on.ca) and video conferencing (link will only be sent to those clients who apply and become eligible for service). A detailed description of the service and protocol will also be posted on our website.

At present, this program is being launched as a temporary solution that will only be used in response to extreme cases/situations such as the current pandemic. Our objective is to introduce this model to diminish the gap in services so that parents and children can maintain or commence contact.

SERVICE DETAILS

Virtual Supervised Access is not a one-size fits all model. Our program will start with the minimum amount of time for younger children being 10 minutes and, gradually increased length of access time up to 30 minutes. The length of Virtual Supervised Access in each individual case will be based on parties’ Court Order, Consent or Letter of Agreement.

The following table outlines our Supervised Virtual Access plan process:

Age	Frequency	Length of Supervised Visit
6 months – 5 Years	Weekly or Bi-weekly	10 minutes
5 Years – 10 Years	Weekly or Bi-weekly	20 minutes
10 Years and up	Weekly or Bi-weekly	30 minutes

Our goal is to offer service that is child-focused, age-appropriate, case-appropriate, and accessible. Although the above schedule is our preferred plan, this program will not limit clients who need supervised access for longer or shorter periods of time than what has been specified above. The duration for each phase/age-group may be adjusted based on what the Courts deem appropriate on a case by case basis (e.g. infants may need to remain on video conferencing less than 10 minutes or individuals with different abilities may prefer to stay in the same phase/stage for longer/shorter periods of time).

Days and Time of Operation for Virtual Access:

Site Locations	Days of Operation	Hours of Operation
Albion Site	Tuesdays	(11a.m. – 3:00p.m.)
Centenary Site	Wednesdays	(11a.m. – 3:00p.m.)
Danforth Site	Thursdays	(11a.m. – 3:00p.m.)
Falstaff Site	Saturdays	(10a.m. – 5:00p.m.)
O’Connor Site	Sundays	(10a.m. – 5:00p.m.)
Seneca Site		

APCO will provide Virtual Supervised Access through video conferencing where all parties involved may join the visit from the comfort of their homes via video conferencing.

INTERPRETER SERVICES:

APCO will continue to cover the cost of an Interpreter, where needed, and will accommodate requests for observing visits by lawyers and investigators working with the Office of the Children’s Lawyer.

PROGRAM COMMENCEMENT:

Virtual Supervised Access services will commence on May 1, 2020; services will be scheduled by appointment only. Once APCO receives a letter of agreement or Court Order specifying Virtual Access, our Intake Supervisor will reach out to clients directly with our appointment date and virtual access information package. In situations where APCO is unable to accommodate certain requests due to lack of resources or a waiting list, families will be given the option to begin telephone access or have 5 minutes of virtual visitation until the specific slot of their choice becomes available.

FEES:

At this time, there will be no additional fees for families who are already enrolled with APCO in our regular Supervised Access program. New families who require financial assistance will be provided the same courtesy as with our regular programming.

We at APCO feel that service continuity and maintaining connection between parents and children during this pandemic is of utmost importance; it is our hope that you will support us in this venture.

Thank you!

Fahima Dashti,
 Executive Director,
 Access for Parents and Children in Ontario