

# Remote and In-Person Service Delivery: Documenting Methods, Settings, and Natural Environments

*An Early Support for Infants and Toddlers (ESIT) Guidance Document*

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Washington State Department of  
**CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES**

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## Purpose

The purpose of this guidance is to clarify and update procedures for documenting remote and in-person service delivery methods and natural and non-natural environment service settings during the COVID-19.

## Definitions

In order to document services accurately, it is important to understand how the ESIT Data Management System (DMS) distinguishes between service *settings* and service delivery *methods*.

## Setting

The service setting is the *location* where the caregiver and child are when they participate in services. That setting is deemed either a natural or non-natural environment. For example, a provider might participate in a videoconference session from a non-natural environment, like a clinic, but if the family participates in that session from their home, the service is considered to have taken place in a natural environment setting.

Some examples of settings include:

- Family home
- Community park
- ESIT Provider Agency (PA) office or clinic

## Method

A method is a service delivery *modality* and may take place in a variety of natural and non-natural environment settings. Some examples of methods include:

- Videoconference calls
- In-person visits
- Emails
- Pre-recorded video
- Phone calls

See the table below for more explanation of how methods and settings intersect.

General Term	Definition	Methods Included in Term	Service Settings Dropdown
Home Visit	Services provided in the family home	In-person service delivery	Home
Clinic Visit	Services provided in a professional setting	In-person service delivery	Other
Park or playground visits	Services provided at a natural environment in the family's community	In-person service delivery	Community
Face-to-face Visit	In-person or remote, synchronous services where provider and family can see one another and communicate in real time	In-person visit, videoconference	Home, Community, Other Wherever caregiver is while accessing service
Telepractice	Remote, synchronous services provided through audio <i>and</i> video equipment permitting real-time, interactive communication	Face-to-face videoconference, interactive webinar	Home, Community, Other Wherever caregiver is while accessing service
Non-video Communication	Remote services provided via voice or written text without a video component	Telephone, text messaging, email, mail, facsimile, conference call	Home, Community, Other Wherever caregiver is while accessing service
Pre-recorded, Store and Forward	Remote, asynchronous <i>supplemental</i> services provided through pre-recorded audio and/or video that do not support real-time, interactive communication	Pre-recorded video, webinar, podcast	Home, Community, Other Wherever caregiver is while accessing service

## Documenting Methods, Settings and Natural Environments in the DMS

All anticipated settings and methods of service delivery, along with details on whether those services will be provided in natural or non-natural environments, must be documented in the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP).

### Documenting Setting on the IFSP

In the Setting dropdown, choose from Home, Community or Other.

- Choose the Setting where the family will be when services are provided. If multiple natural environment settings are anticipated (e.g. in the family home and in a

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community park) choose the setting in which services will most often occur. A change of settings from one natural environment to another (e.g. from home visits to park visits) *does not* require an IFSP Review and can be updated during the next IFSP Review or Annual Update.

- If multiple settings are anticipated and *any of those is a non-natural environment*, select Other in the Setting dropdown. A change of settings from a natural environment to a non-natural environment (e.g. from home visits to clinic visits) or a change in settings from a non-natural environment back to natural environment (e.g. clinic visits to home visits) *does* require a full IFSP Review.

## Documenting Method on the IFSP and in the Child Record

In the Methods text box of the IFSP, write all anticipated methods of service delivery. A change of method (e.g. from home visits to virtual visits) from what is written on the IFSP *does not* require an IFSP Review and can be updated during the next IFSP Review or Annual Update.

## In-Person Services During ESIT Stage 3 of Reentry to In-Person Services

If an ESIT PA is in Stage 3 of Reentry and, due to extenuating circumstances, the family *will not be offered, a minimum of once-a-month in-person services by at least one member of the service delivery team*, document the justification and the plan for returning to in-person services in the child's record. Provide Prior Written Notice (PWN) to the family and write an explanation in the Other Section of the PWN form.

If, during Stage 3 of Reentry to In-Person Services, the family is offered at least once-a-month in-person services, but declines all in-person services, document the offer in the child's record.

For more information on virtual vs. in-person requirements and decision making during the COVID-19 pandemic, please see [the ESIT Multi-Stage Framework for Reentry to In-Person Services](#) on the [ESIT COVID-19 Updates webpage](#).

## Natural Environments

In some situations, the IFSP team may determine that one or more of a child's IFSP outcomes cannot be met by providing services in a natural setting. This should be an exception for an individual child, not a common practice.

During the Washington State Public Health Emergency, public health and infection control measures may be used as a temporary justification for non-natural environments, when in-person services are required to address the needs of the child and no safe natural environment options are available. Check the [WA Governor's COVID-19 webpage](#) for updates.

Provider staffing levels, provider convenience, and family preference are *not* acceptable justifications for services in non-natural environment settings.

If any service is planned to take place in a non-natural environment:

- Document the justification (developed by the IFSP team, including the parent) in the

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Setting Explanation text box.

- Document the plan for returning all services to natural settings in the Plan text box. See the Example Documentation at the end of the guidance.

For more information on natural environments requirements, see the [ESIT Natural Environments Practice Guide](#).

## Service Scenarios

### Change of method

Amin enrolled in ESIT services in mid-2021 with a plan for virtual-only services. Now that the whole family is vaccinated, Amin's family would like to move to in-person home visits. However, only virtual services are listed on Amin's IFSP. The next time the team holds an IFSP Review, the Methods text box is updated to include "home visits and videoconferences."

### Change of setting, natural environments

Rosa's special educator has been visiting her home weekly since she enrolled four months ago. Rosa's family notices that Rosa is becoming more social and they would like to have visits at a local playground or library, where she might meet some other toddlers. The next time the team holds an IFSP Review, the Settings dropdown is changed to Community.

### Change of method and setting, non-natural environment

Jules participates in weekly in-person physical therapy home visits. However, Jules' grandmother, who is medically fragile, has recently moved into the family home. The local health department currently rates their community COVID levels as "high" and the IFSP team has determined that continuing home visits presents a COVID risk to Jules' grandmother. It is wintertime and because of high risk in the community, most indoor community spaces are determined to be unsafe. The team explores every alternative location and decides the only option is to temporarily move to weekly virtual visits to focus on parent coaching, with monthly in-person visits in the ESIT PA office to provide hands-on therapy and ongoing assessment.

The team completes a full IFSP Review and notes the changes in the Settings and Methods drop down and text boxes in the DMS. They agree on, and enter, a justification for the use of non-natural environments and a plan for return to natural environments when community COVID-19 levels are rated as low and a natural environment for in-person visits in the community can be found.

## Example Documentation

See the screen shot below for example documentation.

The screenshot shows a form for configuring a service. The 'Part C Service' is set to 'Physical Therapy'. Under 'Outcomes Supported', 'Movement Outcome' is checked and 'Communication' is not. The 'Planned Start Date' is 6/21/2021 and the 'Planned End Date' is 12/20/2021. The 'Intensity' is set to 'Individual', '45 minutes', '1 times each', and 'Week'. The 'Methods' field contains 'Video-conference, text messaging, in-person'. The 'Setting' is 'Other' and 'Clinic'. The 'Explanation of why outcome cannot be achieved in a natural environment' field contains the text: 'Jules' IFPS team has determined that while community COVID risk is high, home visits present a significant health risk to Jules' grandmother. Because of high risk in the community, indoor community spaces are determined to be unsafe.' The 'Plan for moving service(s) and/or support(s) into natural environments' field contains the text: 'Weekly virtual PT to focus on parent coaching. Monthly in-person PT in the ESIT PA office to provide hands-on therapy and ongoing assessment. Services will return to a natural environment when community COVID levels are rated as low and a natural environment for in-person visits in the community can be found.' At the bottom right are 'OK' and 'Cancel' buttons.

Part C Service: Physical Therapy

Outcomes Supported (Assign the service to one or more outcomes)

- Movement Outcome
- Communication

Planned Start Date: 6/21/2021    Planned End Date: 12/20/2021

Intensity: Individual    45 minutes    1 times each    Week

Methods: Video-conference, text messaging, in-person

Setting: Other    Other: Clinic

Explanation of why outcome cannot be achieved in a natural environment

Jules' IFPS team has determined that while community COVID risk is high, home visits present a significant health risk to Jules' grandmother. Because of high risk in the community, indoor community spaces are determined to be unsafe.

Plan for moving service(s) and/or support(s) into natural environments

Weekly virtual PT to focus on parent coaching. Monthly in-person PT in the ESIT PA office to provide hands-on therapy and ongoing assessment. Services will return to a natural environment when community COVID levels are rated as low and a natural environment for in-person visits in the community can be found.

OK    Cancel

If you have questions, please contact your regional DCYF ESIT Technical Assistance Specialist.

## Resources

- ESIT Multi-Stage Framework for Reentry to In-Person Services soon to be posted on [ESIT COVID-19 Updates webpage](#)
- [ESIT COVID-19 Updates webpage](#)
- [Natural Environments Practice Guide](#)
- WA Office of the Governor [COVID-19 Webpage](#) with links latest news and policy updates